

A Case Study of U.S. Students' Social Network Development during Academic Year Study Abroad in Japan

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Abstract

This article examines three American college students' social network development during study abroad (SA) in Japan. Although previous studies reported the significance of SA social networks in L2 acquisition, studies on SA students who participated in year-long programs in Japan as well as in countries where their languages are less commonly taught in the United States are still limited. This study collected data from questionnaires and post-SA interviews and employed the individual network of practice to construct SA students' social networks. The findings suggest that the social groups' rules and locals' willingness to communicate with SA students in English facilitated SA students' participation in social groups. The findings also revealed American SA students' dilemmas in using English with locals and issues of a SA student's mental health for social network development. Based on the findings, the article discusses pedagogical implications for home institutions and future research suggestions. (147)

Keywords: Study Abroad, Social Network Development, Japanese Learning

Introduction

Many study abroad (SA) students also wish to get to know locals and make friends before their study abroad experience. Close relationships with local populations can provide more opportunities for SA students to interact in the target language (L2) for various purposes as well as to learn conventions in the target culture (C2) and understand the perspectives of local people (Isabelli-Garcia, 2006). Studies have found that there was a connection between dispersion (i.e., numbers of social groups in SA students' social networks), students' L2 gain (Baker-Smemoe et al., 2014), and students' self-perceived L2 gain (Dewey et al., 2012). In addition, Kennedy Terry (2022) reported SA students' social network with native speakers of French was a significant predictor of SA students' sociolinguistic gain in French.

Unfortunately, however, studies have shown that not all SA students can build close relationships with local populations during SA programs (Gautier, 2019; Isabelli-Garcia, 2006). In order to provide appropriate support for SA students to better prepare for their experience and maximize their linguistic and cultural learning, it is crucial to understand what happens when SA students attempt to construct social ties with locals and non-locals. In addition, the English language is now recognized as a “global language,” for international communication contexts. English has also become the official language of instructions in many higher education institutions outside of the United States (Kinging, 2019). This phenomenon may have more effect on American college students who wish to study abroad in the countries whose languages are less commonly taught in the United States.

The current study investigated three American college students' social network development toward the end of their SA experiences by focusing on how differences across

programs, social groups, languages, and individuals influenced students' social network constructions.

Literature Review

Several SA studies pointed out that the design of the SA program and pedagogical intervention may have a positive impact on SA students' L2 use and social network development in the L2 community, as well as their SA cultural and linguistic learning (Davidson, 2010; Dewey et al. 2014; Vande Berg et al., 2009). Dewey et al. (2014) reported that participating in specific SA programs was the most significant predictor of L2 use during SA programs among several variables, including pre-L2 proficiency level and personality. Course requirements and assignments (e.g., talking to native speakers for two hours every day) pushed SA students to seek interaction with native speakers (Dewey et al., 2014). Recent studies also reported that careful housing arrangements with local students by a program director (Hasegawa, 2019) and extracurricular activities hosted by SA programs had a

positive influence on SA students' friendship network development (Hendrickson, 2019).

Most SA students expect living in the country where the L2 is spoken will provide them an “immersion” L2 environment. However, as has been reported in previous research, this is not always the case. For long time, the use of SA students' L1 has been the center of discussion about whether it would be good or bad for the learning of L2 during SA programs. Opponents of SA students' L1 use over L2 may argue that it would inhibit the learning of L2. In fact, some studies (Freed et al., 2004; Segalowitz & Freed, 2004) have reported the negative influence of SA students' L1 use on their L2 learning. Some domestic and SA programs adopted language pledges (i.e., participants of the programs must use L2 only) to enhance students' L2 learning during the programs. However, other studies show that appropriate use of L1 could not only strengthen the ties with other SA students who share the same L1 but also could become a tool to interact and connect with locals in the target community.

Dewey et al. (2013) investigated two semester-long SA programs in Jordan and Egypt and reported that SA students in Jordan who exchanged English tutoring for L2 tutoring perceived it as one of the positive factors that facilitated relationship development. Hasegawa (2019) also reported one student developed a close relationship with one of his Japanese roommates due to “their shared passion for language study” (p. 130).

Students’ mental health has gained more attention in the past few years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and significant effort has been made in education institutions in the U.S. to provide more support for its students. However, it is also true that many people still view mental health issues negatively, especially in other countries, including Japan. Feeling depressed, experiencing anxiety, or having a panic attack is not unusual for SA students (Lucas, 2009; Poyrazli & Mitchell, 2022), but these symptoms are often ignored or misunderstood as a part of culture shock (Lucas 2009). Furthermore, there have been few studies on how SA

students' mental health may affect their social network development.

Research Questions

The current study investigated social network construction by three American college students who participated in two year-long SA programs in Japan. Two research questions guided the current research.

- (1) What are the similarities and differences among three American students' experiences and social networks constructed during one academic year of two SA programs in Japan?
- (2) What elements of the two SA programs, social groups, and individuals influenced the three SA students' social network development with local Japanese speakers?

Study Design

This article reports on examples from a previous study, which initially examined seven undergraduate students' social

network development from a large public research university in the U.S. Midwest.

Participants

Due to space limitation, this paper reports on three of the seven participants in the original study. The three participants, Bobby, Cathy, and Isabelle, were chosen based on the quality and variety of data they provided as well as the similarities in their language proficiency and learning experience before their SA experiences. Regarding the language proficiency and pre-SA learning experience, Segalowitz & Freed (2004) indicated that pre-SA language proficiency may affect “learners’ predispositions to make use of extracurricular communicative opportunities” (p. 195). In addition, most SA participants who learn less-commonly taught languages, such as learners of Chinese, Arabic, Japanese, and Korean among others are expected to be Intermediate level, considering the difficulties of the foreign languages for speakers of English (cf. Foreign Service Institute, 1973) and fewer opportunities

to start learning the languages before entering higher education. Therefore, this article presents findings regarding the three SA students who demonstrated similar pre-SA language proficiency and pre-SA language learning experience to a broader student population who are expected to SA in such countries. After receiving detailed explanations of the procedure of the study, they supplied their written informed consent. All of them were born and raised in the U.S., and their racial backgrounds were Caucasian. They spoke English as their native language and used it as a primary language for daily communication.

Table 1 summarizes the three participants' pre-SA language proficiency and learning experience. The three participants were given pseudonyms. Bobby and Isabelle completed level-3 Japanese language courses, and Cathy completed level-2 Japanese language courses.

Table 1. Information on the participants' pre-SA language proficiency and course completion

Participants (Pseudonym)	Japanese language course completion at the home institution	Pre-SA language proficiency Unofficial OPI	Host University
Bobby	Level-3 Japanese language course	Intermediate-Low	University B
Cathy	Level-2 Japanese language course	Intermediate-Low	University A
Isabelle	Level-3 Japanese	Intermediate-Low	University A

	language course		
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Pre-SA language proficiency was measured with oral interviews in Japanese, which followed the same format and rating criteria as ACTFL's Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) (see <https://www.actfl.org> for more details). The researcher, who twice completed a four-day OPI Workshop hosted by ACTFL, conducted the oral interviews.

Host Institutions

Table 2 presents general information on the two partner universities related to this article. After the initial review of students' applications, the students then had individual interviews with the program director of the Japanese program and the SA program director from the office of international affairs. Based on the interviews, the students received recommendation for their SA host institution in Japan.

Table 2. Information on two partner universities in Japan

Host University	Type of University	Length of SA Program	Student Population		
			Undergraduate students	Graduate students	International students
University A	Liberal arts college	Ten months	2,780	230	300
University B	Private research university	Ten months	39,470	5,950	4,800

University A is a four-year liberal arts college located in the Kanto region. Academic-year exchange students from the home institution usually start with the autumn term and end with the spring term, for a total SA sojourn of 10 months. The university hosted approximately 2,780 undergraduate, 230 graduate, and 300 international students at the time of the data collection. Two participants in the current study attended the university's Japanese language

program. The university also offered Community Service Learning, where both local and international students could engage in service work at facilities for older adults and child-support programs in the city. The university has several different dorms: older dorms have smaller capacities (40 residents or less), and newer dorms have larger capacities (more than 120 residents). Both local Japanese and international students filled out a dorm application before their SA program and listed the three dorms they wished to stay in. One notable feature of dorms at University A is that the rules of the dormitories are “determined through the talk between the student and university sides after a thorough discussion among dorm residents” (quotation from the university website).

University B is a private research university with approximately 39,470 undergraduate, 5,950 graduate, and 4,800 international students. The main campus is located in Tokyo, but there are also several other campuses in the Kanto region. The Japanese language program at the university uses

a semester system, Spring and Fall, and academic-year exchange students from the home institution started their program in a fall semester and ended in the following spring semester, for a total of 10-month abroad. Around 2400 students from about 100 countries were studying at the center at the time of the data collection. In addition to Japanese language courses, international students also took courses on Japanese and Asian cultures, society, politics, and economics, all of which were taught in English. The university had several dorms for both Japanese and international students. However, exchange students (such as the participant in this study) stayed in dorms specifically for exchange students. All dorms are located within walking distance of the campus. A single room in the dorms includes a bed, desk and chair, sink, and closet. Residents shared the kitchen, lounge, shower room, coin washer/dryer, and toilet.

Instruments and Social Network Construction

In addition to participants' interviews, observation of an informant's interaction with people within their social network and interviews with people in the informant's social network are common ways to collect social network data (Milroy, 1987; Hasegawa, 2019). However, these instruments were not employed in the original study because it involved participants who attended five different host universities in different parts of Japan for ten-month SA programs, making observation and interviews with all participants' social networks extremely difficult. Therefore, the following two instruments were employed to assure the reliability of the qualitative data.

Study Abroad Social Interaction Questionnaire (SASIQ)

The Study Abroad Social Interaction Questionnaire (SASIQ) developed by Dewey et al. (2012) was used to ascertain SA students' social networks. Some minor changes were made to adjust to the current study, such as the target language (i.e., Arabic to Japanese) and the periods of the SA programs. The

questionnaire consisted of 15 questions. The first five questions asked about people in the participants' social network (up to 20 persons) and how often the participants interacted with them during SA. It also asked how they met and how close the participants felt with the person on a scale of 1-8 (1 as "Acquaintance" and 8 as "Very Close Friend/Confidant"). The second part consisted of six open-ended questions asking participants' thoughts and opinions on successful and unsuccessful experiences in building personal relationships. The third part of the questionnaire asked participants to categorize the people in their social networks into specific groups, such as clubs and volunteer groups, etc.

The SASIQ was administered once after participants returned to the United States from their SA programs. All three participants completed the questionnaire within three weeks after finishing their SA programs. The major drawback was that this three-week period could have resulted in some memory loss issues, such as not remembering certain

incidents in Japan. However, the SA experiences recalled by SA students after SA programs were “likely to represent those (i.e., experience) that had had lasting effects on them” (Iwasaki, 2011, p. 80). Studies collecting data after SA programs have successfully provided insights on social network developments (Dewey et al., 2013). In addition, to mitigate such limitations and enhance participants’ recollection of their SA experience, follow-up questions regarding the questionnaire were asked during the post-SA interviews in English. In addition, the current study employed data collection (language use logs) during SA programs.

Post-SA Interviews in English

The interviews consisted of semi-structured questions, depending on the participants’ responses (Iwasaki, 2011). The post-SA interviews aimed to gain more detailed accounts of the participants’ social networks and learning experiences during their SA programs. The interviews consisted of twelve semi-structured questions regarding their

overall impressions of the SA experience, struggles in interacting with locals, strategies used to overcome these struggles, and their opinions on how pre-departure SA training can support U.S. students who participate in SA programs in Japan. Interview lengths varied, ranging from approximately forty to ninety minutes.

Construction of Social Network: Individual Network of Practices

The current study employed individual network of practice (INoP) to construct and visualize the participants' social networks based on the data collected. INoP was originally developed to analyze SA learners' L2 academic socialization and examine "social processes that mediate learning" (Zappa-Hollman & Duff, 2015, p. 333). Using INoP for SA students' social network analysis can provide "a fuller depiction of the participant's experience as a whole person than do other approaches that focus on specific and predetermined contexts or outcomes" (Kimura, 2019, p. 90).

A diagram of INoP was constructed based on the data from SASIQ and post-SA English interviews, and it consists of *core*, *nodes*, *social groups* (originally called *clusters*), and *ties*. The *core* represented a participant whose social network was examined. *Nodes* were people with whom the participant (i.e., a *core*) developed personal relationships. SA students' responses from the SASIQ were used to identify nodes. All nodes were categorized into JP-speaking nodes and EN-speaking nodes based on data from the SASIQ and post-SA interviews. If a node is a native speaker of Japanese, such as a local Japanese student, staff, or worker, they were categorized as a JP-Speaking node regardless of how much Japanese or English a SA participant used to communicate with them. If a node is a non-native speaker of neither Japanese nor English (such as a Korean language instructor at a host institution), but a SA student used Japanese for more than 50 % of their communication with that individual, they were categorized as a JP-speaking node. If a node is an L1 English speaker (or they were near-native and felt more comfortable talking in

English than Japanese), they were categorized as an EN-speaking node even when they used Japanese more than English when they spent time in an activity. Figure 1 shows a *core*, represented with the largest oval (1), a Japanese-speaking node represented with ovals with a darker color (2-a), and a non-Japanese speaking node represented with blank white ovals (2-b).



Figure 1. Core and nodes in INoP

All the nodes were categorized into different social groups based on their characteristics (e.g., university, dance club, etc.). These groups are called “clusters” in Zappa-Hollman & Duff (2015), but are called social groups in this article to avoid confusion with the term used in cluster analysis. Groupings and names of social groups are based on the participants’ responses from SASIQ. Figure 2 represents examples of a main social group and two sub-social groups. The main social group (*University*) is represented with a

rectangle with triple lines, and a sub-social group (*Dorm*) is a rectangle with a single line. Another sub-social group (*Roommate*) is connected with a line to indicate the main social group to which it belongs.



Figure 2. Types of social groups

Finally, each node was connected with the core (i.e., a participant in the current study) by a line called *tie*. Eight different ties were used to represent different degrees of the strength of the relationships between the core and the nodes, represented in Figure 3 below. The right-most tie is the strongest (8), and the left-most tie represents the weakest (1). The weights of the strength are based on the participant's responses in SASIQ. These responses were also confirmed with the participants during post-SA interviews in English.

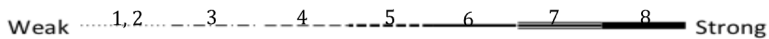


Figure 3. Weights of ties in INoP

The INoP focuses on a participant's (i.e., core) social network development instead of how the social network within a group is constructed. It provides information on the contexts where the SA student constructs social ties, with whom, and how strong each social tie is. Using INoP, the following sections present and discuss findings.

Findings

This section first presents quantitative data from the three SA students' (Cathy, Isabelle, and Bobby)'s Study Abroad Social Interaction Questionnaire (SASIQ). It then presents each participant's INoP diagrams along with qualitative findings from post-SA interviews and SASIQ. Table 3 summarizes the numbers of persons and social groups in three participants' social networks near the end of their SA sojourns.

Table 3. Summary of numbers of persons and social groups

Names	# of main social group	# of sub-social group	# of JP-speaking node (person)	# of EG-speaking nodes (person)
Cathy	1	7	15	5
Isabelle	1	5	6	10
Bobby	1	3	0	18

Although the number of nodes in an INoP was limited to the top 20 contacts, Isabelle and Bobby reported fewer than 20. Cathy reported in a post-SA interview that she could have included a few more ties in her social network, but all these ties were within the university setting. For all the participants, their host universities were the only main social group for developing social networks. Cathy interacted in

seven different sub-social groups in which she developed 15 JP-speaking nodes and five EG-speaking nodes. Isabelle interacted in five sub-social groups in which she developed six JP-speaking nodes and ten EG-speaking nodes. Bobby interacted in three different social groups where he developed social ties with 18 EN-speaking nodes. The following section presents more contextualized findings on who, where, and how the three participants constructed these ties.

Cathy

Cathy, who attended University A, constructed the greatest number of social groups and Japanese nodes among the three participants. Figure 4 represents Cathy's INoP during SA in Japan.

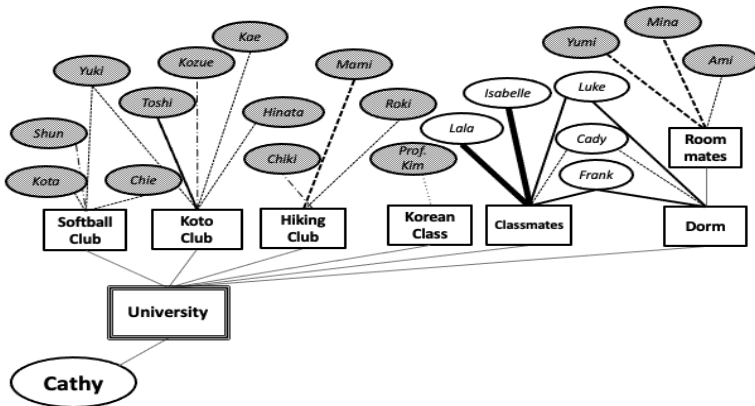


Figure 4: Cathy's INoP

Table 4: Summary of Tie Strength and Interaction Time with each Node from SASIQ

Nodes (JP)	Strength of tie	Time hour/month	Nodes (JP)	Strength of tie	Time hour/month
Isabelle	8	70 (J 60%, E 40%)	Roki	4	10 (J 85%, E 15%)
Lala	8	65 (J 60%, E 40%)	Kae	4	4 (J 10%, E 90%)

Luke	6	50 (J 85%, E 15%)	Hinata	4	4 (J 70%, E 30%)
Frank	6	50 (J 85%, E 15%)	Ami	4	3 (J 70%, E 30%)
Toshi	6	3 (J 75%, E 25%)	Chie	4	2 (J 30%, E 70%)
Cady	5	48 (J 95%, E 5%)	Yuki	4	2 (J 70%, E 30%)
Mami	5	15 (J 50%, E 50%)	Shun	3	1 (J 99%, E 1%)
Kota	5	9 (J 50%, E 50%)	Kozue	3	1 (J 90%, E 10%)
Yumi	5	4 (J 30%, E 70%)	Chiki	3	1 (J 99%, E 1%)
Mina	5	4 (J 80%, E 20%)	Prof. Kim	2	12 (J 80%, E 20%)

The INoP comprises one main social group, *University*, and seven sub-social groups— *Softball Club*, *Koto Club*, *Hiking Club*, *Korean Class*, *Classmates*, *Dorm*, and *Roommates*. Three of the sub-social groups, namely, *Koto*, *Hiking*, and *Softball Clubs*, were the university circles she participated in, and another two sub-social groups were class-related, namely, *Korean Class* and *Classmates* (the intensive Japanese language course). All 20 nodes, except one (Kim, a Korean professor), were students at Cathy's university, and 15 out of the 20 nodes were Japanese.

Table 4 summarizes Cathy's tie strengths and interaction time with each node based on Cathy's responses from SASIQ. The first four nodes (tie strength 8 and 6) are all EG-speaking nodes who took the same intensive Japanese language classes (48-70 hours per month). Cathy also rated Toshi (a JP-speaking node) from the koto club, as tie strength 6. All the other JP-speaking nodes as well as Cady from the intensive language course were rated as 5 to 3. Cathy also included Prof. Kim (tie strength 2), who was the only

non-student in her INoP, for the top 20 persons she interacted with during her SA.

Cathy explained, “spen[ding] hours upon hours together...” in intensive language classes helped her develop the strongest ties with these four EG-speaking nodes. She also mentioned English was a key to developing the strongest ties with Lala and Isabelle: “I think the fact that English was our first language really helped us to feel at ease because you don't have to consider how to say things and can just talk freely” (Cathy’s response from SASIQ). Although they used Japanese more than English in their total interaction, mostly in their language classes, Cathy still felt that English played an important role in strengthening her relationships with Isabelle and Lala. On the other hand, Cathy described her limited Japanese proficiency “not [being] good at interacting in English (with Japanese people)” as obstacles to developing relationships with local Japanese students (Cathy’s response from SASIQ).

Cathy originally attended four circles—*koto* (a Japanese plucked half-tube zither instrument), *shamisen* (a three-stringed traditional Japanese musical instrument), hiking, and softball clubs. Cathy eventually withdrew from the *shamisen* club due to language difficulty, but she continued her participation in other clubs thanks to club members' help that allowed her to “keep (her) running” (Cathy's post-SA interview, August 20). Cathy wanted to quit the *koto* club many times, but the reason she stayed with it was that she had become close to one of the club members, Toshi, and other club members who, she said, “can help me in English” (Cathy's post-SA interview, August 20). Cathy first thought those club members, Hinata and Kae, were often helping her because they might have wanted to practice speaking English with her, but eventually she realized they were responsible for her because of their role as *buchos*, leaders of the club.

Cathy stayed in a university dorm where both Japanese and international students shared a unit. Although Cathy confessed that she had little time to socialize with

students in her dorm due to her busy schedule of extracurricular activities and classes, she developed social ties with three JP-speaking nodes, Yumi, Mina, and Ami, through taking *ofuro* (a Japanese public bath) together and participating in monthly dorm meetings, which are discussed more in Isabelle's section below.

Isabelle

Isabelle attended the same University A as Cathy. Figure 5 represents Isabelle's INoP. Table 7 summarizes data from SASIQ regarding tie strength and interaction time with each node.

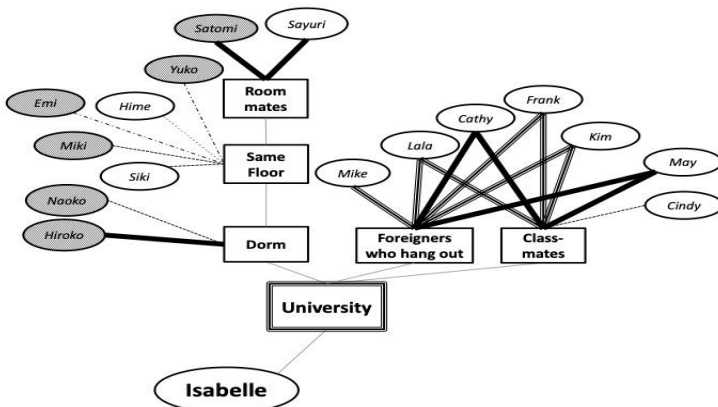


Figure 5: Isabelle's INoP

Table 5: Summary of Tie Strength and Interaction Time with each

Node

Nodes (JP)	Strength of tie	Time (hour)/month	Nodes (JP)	Strength of tie	Time (hour)/month (J %; E %)
Cathy	8	110 (J 64%, E 36%)	Naoko	6	10 (J 30%, E 70%)
Sayuri	8	100 (J 60%, E 40%)	Cindy	4	100 (J 95%, E 5%)
Satomi	8	40 (J 100%)	Siki	4	50 (J 60%, E 40%)
May	8	40 (J 25%, E 75%)	Yuko	3	25 (J 100%)
Hiroko	8	10 (J 20%, E 80%)	Emi	3	25 (J 100%)
Brandon	7	115 (J 87%, E 13%)	Hime	2	20 (J 75%, E 25%)

Kim	7	120 (J 42%, E 58%)			
Lala	7	120 (J 42%, E 58%)			
Mike	7	60 (J 17%, E 83%)			
Miki	6	35 (J 100%)			

Isabelle’s INoP consists of one main social group, *University*, and five sub-social groups— *Dorm*, *Same Floor*, *Roommates*, *Foreigners Who Hang Out*, and *Classmates*. All 16 nodes were students at University A. Six of the 16 nodes were Japanese-speaking nodes from *Dorm*, and the other 10 were English-speaking nodes (international students) from *Dorm*, *Foreigners Who Hang Out*, and *Classmates*, sub-social groups. Isabelle developed strong ties with Cathy and May, as well as other classmates, because, according to Isabelle, “we interacted a lot with each other” (Isabelle’s response from

SASIQ). Isabelle also took the same intensive Japanese language course as Cathy, which “made (her) extremely tired” (Isabelle’s post-SA interview, August 17), but the class’s long hours seemed to contribute to constructing strong social ties.

Isabelle also joined a band club in the beginning of her SA program because she liked playing the guitar. However, Isabelle stopped participating in the club due to language difficulty after attending several music events with club members. Because the band club’s recruitment flyer mentioned that international students were welcome, Isabelle assumed she could get some English help from club members to help her participate in club activities. However, even after she asked club members to provide English translations on the club group chat, no one did. Isabelle mentioned, “I found out later that some of them were fluent in English. They just didn't want to talk to me. I don't know why.” (Isabelle’s post-SA interview, August 17). Eventually, Isabelle stopped attending band club events.

Isabelle also lived in a university dorm, but it was different from Cathy's dorm. Isabelle constructed strong social ties with two roommates, Sayuri (EG-speaking node; tie strength 8) and Satomi (JP-speaking node; tie strength 8). She mentioned that having similar personalities helped her develop strong ties with Hiroko (JP-speaking node; tie strength 8), Cathy, and Satomi (Isabelle's response on SASIQ). Similar to Cathy, the language seemed to play an important role in (not) constructing close ties in Isabelle's INoP. Isabelle moved into the dorm around the same time as Emi (JP-speaking node, tie strength 3), Yuko (JP-speaking node, tie strength 2), and Hime (a Japanese American) (EG-speaking node, tie strength 2); the other three students became good friends, but Isabelle did not. She described, "they are all fluent in Japanese, and when I first got there, I could have small conversations, but I was not as proficient as I was in the end" (Isabelle's response on SASIQ).

School dorms at University A had mandatory monthly dorm meetings. During the meetings, both English

and Japanese were used, and proactive participation was required, such as discussing creating, changing, or abolishing dorm rules and/or casting votes. Isabelle spent a great amount of time with local Japanese students who lived in the same dorm, attending the meetings and hanging out with them. However, Isabelle also expressed frustration that many Japanese students at her university already spoke English well and used English with her: “even when I would speak Japanese to them, they would often answer in English” (Isabelle’s post-SA interview, August 17) or “they would speak a little Japanese but then switch back to English” (Isabelle’s response on SASIQ).

Bobby

Bobby attended University B, but unlike Cathy or Isabelle, he did not build social ties with Japanese locals or JP-speaking nodes during the SA program. Figure 6 represents Bobby’s INoP.

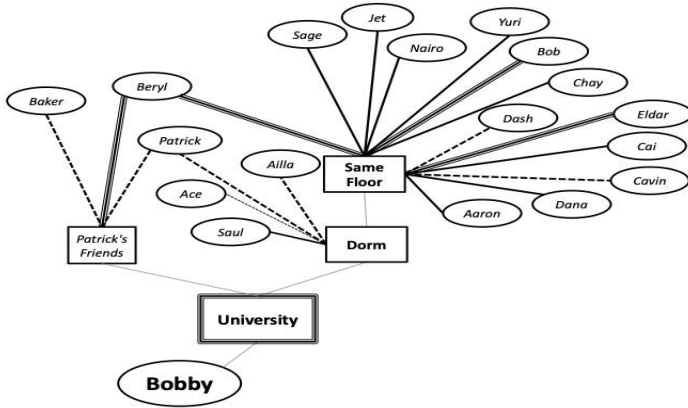


Figure 6: Bobby's INoP

Table 6: Summary of Tie Strength and Interaction Time with each Node

Nodes (JP)	Strength of tie	Time hour/month (J%, E%)	Nodes (JP)	Strength of tie	Time hour/month
Sage	8	80 (J 20%, E 80%)	Chay	6	24 (J 30%, E 70%)
Bob	7	80 (J 40%, E 60%)	Cai	6	24 (J 0%, E 100%)

Beryl	7	24 (J 20%, E 80%)	Ailla	5	24 (J 10%, E 90%)
Elder	7	24 (J 20%, E 80%)	Patrick	5	16 (J 20%, E 80%)
Yuri	6	48 (J 40%, E 60%)	Dash	5	16 (J 10%, E 90%)
Nariro	6	48 (J 30%, E 70%)	Cavin	5	16 (J 0%, E 100%)
Dana	6	24 (J 40%, E 60%)	Ace	4	25 (J 0%, E 100%)
Aaron	6	24 (J 10%, E 90%)	Baker	3	20 (J 30%, E 70%)
Jet	6	24 (J 10%, E 90%)			
Saul	6	24 (J 20%, E 80%)			

Bobby's INoP consisted of one main social group, *University*, and three sub-social groups—*Dorm*, *Same floor*, and *Patrick's friends*. All 18 nodes in Bobby's INoP were international students who lived in the same dorm and spoke English fluently (EG-speaking nodes). During the ten months of his SA experience at the host university, Bobby stayed in a university dorm for international students; his roommate was an international student from China. Despite having the same roommate for nine months, his SASIQ response did not include the roommate. According to Bobby, it was due to “language barriers” (Bobby's post-SA interview, August 17). Their common language was Japanese, but neither was comfortable conversing in Japanese.

Bobby struggled with his language classes. He took several Japanese language courses, which he “didn't like” because the structure of the classes was very different from the language classes at his home institution, and he felt he “did not learn much” (Bobby's post-SA interview, August 17). Bobby started skipping the classes in November. He was

suffering from depression because of receiving lower test scores than he expected despite his effort in studying hard, which demotivated him to attend the classes. He started seeing a school counselor due to his depression, but he said it did not help him much. When the spring semester started, Bobby initially tried to attend all of his language classes, but he started having panic attacks when he was called on in class. Following his psychiatrist's advice, Bobby stopped attending the classes. Outside of the dorm and class, Bobby visited a video game circle with his friend. Bobby hoped he could make some Japanese friends who shared the same hobby as him by participating in the circle. However, most circle members did not seem interested in Bobby and his friend, and only a few talked to them. Bobby also described that because he and his friend did not know the Japanese names of the game characters and the tricks needed to play the games with the club members, they could not participate in playing the games with the Japanese members. Bobby and his

friend did not return to the video game circle after this experience.

Although Bobby did not have much interaction with locals, and his academic experiences were not as good as he wished, he enjoyed his stay in Japan by visiting popular sightseeing locations. He described that going to a Shibuya countdown New Year event with his international friends was the most memorable occasion. He also visited Akihabara several times and enjoyed buying video games and comics that were only sold in Japan, which was his dream since he was twelve years old.

Discussion

Similarities in the INoPs: Host University and Dorm

Although each SA experience was unique and complex, there were a few similarities in the three SA students' INoPs. The first similarity was that the host universities were the only main social groups. University A offered community learning opportunities for international students, but neither Cathy nor Isabelle participated due to “busy” schedules with their

language courses. In the original study (Tobaru, 2019), three other participants (Frank, Emma, and Henry) who had higher language proficiency than Cathy, Isabelle, and Bobby developed social ties with locals outside of the host university. Although it is difficult to conclude from the current study findings, their lower language proficiency may have prevented them from (or made them hesitant to) participating in social groups outside of the host university. The second similarity is that all participants' INoPs included dorms as their sub-social group because SA students spend most of their private time there. Such living environments could increase interactional opportunities with other residents of the dorm. However, as we saw in Bobby's case, such a living environment did not always result in forming social ties with JP-speaking nodes who lived in the same dorm or other social groups. The following section focuses on elements that may have affected SA students' social network ties with JP-speaking nodes.

Differences in Social Networks: Forming Social Ties with JP-speaking Nodes

Dewey et al. (2014) reported that the design of SA programs was “the most outstanding predictor of language use” (p. 62), explaining that the SA program requirements helped even introverted students to use L2 during SA. The current study findings also aligned with Dewey et al. (2014). Isabelle mentioned language difficulties that inhibited forming close social ties with some dormmates, yet her INoP included the dormmates, who were categorized as JP-speaking nodes. The consistent interaction with JP-speaking nodes through monthly dorm meetings seemed to facilitate Isabelle and Cathy’s tie formations, although they were weak, with the JP-speaking nodes. In contrast, Bobby’s dorm had a smaller number of JP-speaking residents than Cathy’s and Isabelle’s dorms did: the only JP-speaking resident were a Japanese student resident assistant and Bobby’s Chinese roommate, whose common language with Bobby was Japanese. There seemed to be no rules in Bobby’s living environment that

pushed Bobby to interact with his Chinese roommate or the Japanese student resident assistant in Japanese. In fact, Bobby mentioned a “language barrier” (Bobby’s post-SA interview, August 17) as a reason why he did not interact with his Chinese roommate. Additionally, Bobby did not include his Chinese roommate (or the Japanese resident assistant) in his SASIQ response despite being roommates for ten months. Previous studies reported the importance of tutors’ and language partners’ willingness to help SA students toward successful intercultural interactions (Surtees, 2018) and social ties formation (Dewey et al., 2014). The current study findings also suggest that local members’ willingness to communicate with SA students seemed to have a positive impact on SA students’ continuous participation in classes and/or club activities. Club leaders’ responsibilities to help SA students and other members’ willingness to help SA students in English seemed to differentiate Cathy’s successful club experiences and Bobby’s and Isabelle’s unsuccessful club experiences. Although Isabelle and Bobby were passionate

about the activities (i.e., music and video games), they felt uncomfortable and unaccepted by the club members and discontinued their participation.

Mental Health during SA

Another important finding in the current study was that a SA student's mental health could negatively affect their interactional opportunities and social ties. Bobby's withdrawal from language classes may have resulted in a fewer number of sub-social groups in his INoP than the other two students. Yet, it was also fortunate that Bobby found a psychiatrist who spoke English and completed his stay until the end of the academic year, which enabled him to visit places in Japan and follow his passion for Japanese culture. Previous studies reported that SA students' mental health issues were not unique, sometimes resulting in their early return to their home countries. (Poyrazli & Mitchell, 2022; Lucas, 2009). Without support in English, Bobby might have returned home in the middle of his SA program.

Pedagogical Implications for Home Institutions

In this section, I focus on pedagogical implications for home institutions to maximize their students' social network developments that benefit their SA learning. First, home institutions should help identify social groups at host institutions (SA programs) that offer multilingual elements for SA students to continue participating in that group. Pre-SA training can invite former SA students to share their experiences, including their struggles. By doing so, prospective SA students can have a good idea of which school club activity to join based not only on their interests and hobbies but also on the culture and structure of each club. Another important topic that home institutions should cover is the appropriate use of English during SA. American SA students may not see the benefit of speaking English with locals. However, as English enjoys a status of "global language" it is difficult for students to avoid using it with locals during SA experience, especially for the learners of less commonly taught languages in the U.S. Knowing how to

communicate appropriately with ELF speakers can increase opportunities to communicate, construct, and maintain social networks with locals and speakers of L2. Locals who are proficient in English are often more “sympathetic and wanted to provide support” for SA students (Baker-Smemoe et al. 2014, p. 478). I am not advocating for the use of English over the L2 during SA. What I argue here is that SA students can use their English appropriately as a tool to gain more access to interactional opportunities with locals instead of avoiding them entirely.

Last but not least, issues of mental health during SA should be taken seriously and addressed in pre-SA training/orientation, especially for year-long SA students. Considering that more and more college students are dealing with mental health concerns, it is important for home institutions to provide necessary information on mental health during SA and to help students make informed decisions before their SA sojourns (Lucas, 2009). Interested

readers should refer to Lucas's study (2009) for more insightful suggestions regarding SA students' mental health.

Limitations and Future Research Suggestions

One limitation in the current study was the lack of objective data on the SA students' social network developments. Observation and interview data with people who consisted of SA students' social network would have added more wholistic pictures of the SA students' social network development. Another limitation was the timing of the data collection. The social network data used in the current study was collected once after the participants returned from their SA programs. Previous studies have shown that SA students' social networks infrequently change throughout one-academic-year SA programs (McManus, 2019). Such data should demonstrate more clearly the processes of developing social networks in Japan, which is crucial to understanding what happens while students are living and learning in Japan. Furthermore, all participants in the current study happened

to be Caucasians who spent most of their lives in the US Midwest before their SA programs in Japan. Previous studies revealed that SA students' race resulted in different interactional opportunities even among students of the same nationality (Talbert & Stewart, 1999; Twombly, 1995). Having participants representing different backgrounds, including race, might have provided a more diverse SA learning experience. Such data is also important in designing pedagogical support to maximize American undergraduate students' SA learning in Japan. In addition, the data on virtual social networks, especially among young people, has become more pervasive. Future research should include how homestay experiences affect SA students' social network development. Investigating the role technology plays in in-person networking and learning strategies can also provide different insights on social networking during SA.

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