

An Intensive English/Culture Camp: its Implications for an Ideal Design

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1. Introduction

It is agreed that the best way to learn a foreign language is to go to the country where it is spoken as a native or at least as an official language. That is why more and more Korean students go abroad for an English immersion program during the summer or winter vacations. These overseas language immersion programs are seen to provide opportunities for students to develop their English language skills in the contexts of authentic English language use, particularly spoken English. The students' main goal is to improve their English skills and experience American culture. In addition to formal classroom learning they are also exposed to

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cultural awareness through a variety of formal and informal activities with native English speakers, which play a key role in stimulating their potentials to upgrade the command of English. One might wonder, then, how a short-term intensive English camp could help nonnative speakers improve their language skills. This project is an attempt to explore this issue of how English immersion camp can meet the needs and expectations of nonnative students. The central purpose of this paper is to report an assessment of a short-term English/Culture program held in the United States.

Now English is not a foreign language any more. It has become the official language of the earth where we live. Thus it is sometime called 'the global language' or 'the world language'. Unfortunately, however, to most Asian students, English has been simply an academic subject or a class. For a long period of time this has been the case in Korea. Korean students spend an enormous amount of time and energy "studying" English, as President Obama perhaps knows, and they find the results have been unsatisfactory in terms of their command of English. Thus, many Korean students go abroad for both long-term and short-term training to narrow the gap between their expectations and reality, since the need for English proficiency is rapidly expanding. According to a recent article in the Korean Times (March, 2008), in recent years there has been an eleven-fold increase in the number of primary and secondary students going overseas to study English. The Education Ministry reported a total of 29,511 students under the age of 19 went overseas to study in 2006, up from 1,562 in 1998. The need for spoken English proficiency in Korea has created a wide-range of overseas short-term English programs in many areas of the English-speaking world. The opportunities to converse with native speakers and to live in an English speaking setting are prime reasons for participating in short-term English programs overseas.

2. The Camp: Setting and Participants

This study is based on the responses of the 29 Korean college students who attended an English/Culture program in the United States in January and February of 2005, 2006, and 2007. It is named “English/Culture camp” since it is a combination of language and culture experience, as will be clear below. At the heart of the program is the belief that foreign language learning can not be successful with instructions of language proper only. This intensive English program under discussion is organized annually and is conducted at a small four-year college campus located in Tennessee. This four-week program is scheduled to run in the months of January and February with the expectation that the Korean students would be more exposed to real campus life since the Spring semester begins early January in most of the American colleges. All the students are housed in a campus dormitory and all instruction and activities are conducted on campus. Weekend cultural activities included the surrounding area. The class size has varied and the average teacher-student ratio was nine students to a native speaking American English instructor.

Each class day from Monday through Friday consists of 5 hours of formal instruction in class; 2 hours in reading/writing in the morning and 2 hours of listening/speaking plus one hour of grammar. Thus, the total amount of time for formal instruction is 100 hours; 5 hours for 20 class days. We purposely put the spoken language class in the afternoon with the assumption and expectation that the students would do better after some exposure to spoken language in the morning section of reading/writing class.

The reading/writing classes were organized to improve their vocabulary and their basic writing skills. One of the main goals was to encourage them not to translate English to Korean in reading and Korean to English in

writing. Each day the students were given a topic for a daily journal. Most of the topics are considered as personal and intimate; for example, 'my best friend' and 'my first impression of the U. S'. Easy topics are chosen to encourage them not to think in Korean and translate into English but think in English and write in English.

Speaking and listening classes were organized to encourage oral practice and often incorporated pair work and dialogues to facilitate participation by all students. In order to encourage them to speak English, assignments and projects were given each day. For example, they had to 'interview' some American friends living in the same dormitory to get some projects finished.

An hour of grammar instruction was also purposely offered in the afternoon. It might be true that all the Korean students have a very good understanding the syntactic rules of the English language, since they were well taught ever since their middle school days. However, most Korean students have difficulty in using their knowledge of English grammar. That one-hour grammar class was, therefore, intended to narrow their gap between competence and performance in the area of grammar. And it turned out to be a success; most of the students reported they enjoyed playing with English sentences and that they felt more comfortable with the rules that they already know.

They also participated in a variety of cultural activities in the evenings and on weekends. Each evening they were given a chance to interact with native speakers. The list of extracurricular activities includes sporting events such as basketball games, musical concerts, conversation nights with American buddies, special discussions with local community leaders and high school students, attending local Church services, shopping, and dramas. Weekends included several cultural sightseeing trips and spending time with local host families for a day. Though it is not easy to measure

the amount of time in these activities, it would be safe to say that they were exposed as much time to cultural activities as to formal instruction in classes.

3. Instrumentation

Data were gathered in pre-camp and post camp surveys. All participating students were asked to respond to the camp survey. However, not every student responded to every question in the questionnaire. Some students left some questions unanswered for some reasons, either carelessly or purposely. The pre-camp survey was given to all participants right before their first class and it contains four questions concerning their command of English and nine questions of expectations from the camp program. Likert scales and open-ended questions were used to obtain information about the students. The post-camp survey was given the last day of classes and it included three questions about their command of English and nine open-ended questions about the program. We used the Korean language to explain any questions not fully understood.

4. Results

Questions in the two surveys are focused on students' relative strength in English language skills, most important to improving their English, skilled improvement, classroom activities, and most beneficial aspects of the camp.

Table 1: Participant information

1.1 Experience of English learning

6–8 years:	14
8–10 years:	10
10 + years:	5

1.2 Experience of Overseas Studies

None:	22
Less than a year:	7
More than a year:	0

All the participants have at least 7 years of English learning, since they started learning English as soon as they entered middle school in Korea. None of them has experience of overseas studies for more than a year and almost 80 percent of the group never traveled overseas for their language training. All the subjects are collegians attending a four year university in Korea. Their average age is 23.3 with the range of 19 to 28. The majority of the students are female students: only four of 29 are male students. Over one-half of the participants were English majors, with business majors comprising a quarter of the group.

The pre-camp survey reveals a roughly reverse order for the choice of their strongest and weakest skills. The camp students consider reading as their strongest area: 73 percent of the responses. This dominance should be attributed to the fact that they had to spend more time in reading than any other skills at school. To most Korean students English is the most important subject for a test, not a language. Reading that tops all the other skills in the choice of the strongest area is at the bottom in the choice of the weakest area, which is very understandable. It is somewhat interesting that 5 students reported listening/speaking as their strongest skills. The data also show that speaking was their number 1 choice for the weakest

skill and the last choice for the strongest skill. This is a reflection of the lack of opportunities for students to practice spoken English in their everyday lives.(Table 2). It is worthwhile to note that a considerable number of students, more than 30 percent, indicated that writing is their weakest areas. That is perhaps because Korean students have very little experience of writing in English, though they spend much time in translating Korean to English. Table 3 also supports the assumption that they are more uncomfortable with their command of spoken language. One interesting thing to note is how the students evaluate their listening skills. The participants consider listening neither as their strongest nor as weakest areas: only 2 chose listening for the weakest and 3 for the strongest.

Table 2: Strength of English Skills

2.1 Strongest Area	2.2 Weakest Area
Reading 19	Speaking 13
Listening 3	Writing 9
Speaking 2	Listening 2
Writing 2	Reading 2
No response 3	No response 3

Table 3: Relative Weakness

Pronunciation 16
Grammar 7
Vocabulary 6

It is interesting to find that a great majority of the group believe that building self-confidence is the crucial key to improving their English language skills. Self-confidence is followed by time to practice, motivation and intelligence. In fact, the motivation to acquire the target language,

participate in the learning process, and experience real communication is closely related to a student's self-confidence. Atsuta (2003) states, "At the heart of all learning is a person's belief in his/her ability to accomplish the task." Self-confidence in one's ability can lead to successful learning of the target language with exposure to an proper environment to "use" that language.

Table 4: Most Important to Improve the Command of English

Self-confidence:	16
Time to practice:	4
Motivation:	3
Intelligence:	3
Money:	2
No response:	1

The pre-camp survey reveals that most of the students participate in the immersion program to improve the command of English not to experience of American culture.(Table 5) As far as their skills are concerned, they want to improve their weakest area, which is speaking. An interesting thing to note is that writing is the second in the list of the weakest skill but the third here in the list of areas they want to improve. This might be due to their belief that they can improve their writing skills at home. A similar but different question was asked: Which area do you "expect" to improve the most from this camp? Different results were reported: the order between speaking and listening is reversed. The students expect to improve listening more than speaking. That might be because they think it will take more time to improve speaking than listening. At any rate, it is obvious that approximately 90 percent of the subjects want to and expect to improve their command of spoken language; speaking and listening. We will see an interesting result from the

post-camp survey later.

Table 5: Reasons to Join the Camp

To improve one's English:	25
To experience American culture:	4
To get to know many friends:	0

Table 6: Expectations for the Camp

6.1 Want to Improve Most	6.2 Expect to Improve Most
Speaking 18	Listening 14
Listening 9	Speaking 12
Writing 2	Writing 3
Reading 0	Reading 0

As mentioned above, we have tried to incorporate as much activity into classes, whether the class is for spoken or written language or even grammar. The main slogan of the camp is "Experience English", which means students are expected to learn English by doing something. Thus, the teachers employed a variety of methods including games, jazz chants, music, pair work, group activities, and field trips as methods to encourage interaction among the students. Surprisingly enough, much more students than expected report that music is their number one choice followed by games for the most enjoyable activities.(Table 7)

Table 7: Most Enjoyable Classroom Activities

Music 15
Games 7
Speaking with Partners 5
Idioms 2

Information on the surveys indicated students experienced improvements in the active command of language skills: writing is the active use of written language and speaking of spoken language. What is most striking is that writing is, contrary to their expectations at the start of the camp, the most common answer on the survey. The results of the pre-camp survey are repeated below for the sake of convenience.(Table 6.2) This result might shed light on the design of a short-term immersion camp. A short-term immersion program should take this result into consideration in designing a curriculum, since writing might be the skill that one can improve most during a relatively short period of time. This result might be due to the fact that writing is the area in which Korean students spend the least time. One more interesting result seems to be that speaking is the second most answer in terms of the least improved as well as the most improved skills. This is perhaps because of their high expectation to improve speaking in an overseas immersion camp where they expect to have a lot of opportunities to train their command of speaking with native speakers.

Table 8: Most and Least Improved Skills

8.1 Most Improved Skills	8.2 Least Improved Skills
Writing 13	Reading 17
Speaking 11	Speaking 7
Listening 5	Listening 4
Reading 0	Writing 1
6.2 Expect to Improve Most	8.1 Most Improved Skills
Listening 14	Writing 13
Speaking 12	Speaking 11
Writing 3	Listening 5
Reading 0	Reading 9

The results of the survey continue to suggest the importance of self-confidence in second language learning. A large number of the participants emphasized in the post-survey that they had gained self-confidence in speaking English. Numerous opportunities to practice English with a native speaker also contributed to this self-confidence. If a person believes in his/her ability to learn a language, motivation will increase and learning will increase. Another benefit of the program was the opportunity to experience and learn about American culture. For many of the students this was their first opportunity to visit and study English in an English speaking country. The opportunity not only provided a variety of opportunities to practice English but to also experience another culture.

Table 9: Most Beneficial Aspect of the Camp

- *Students' confidence in speaking: 13
- *Learning and practicing spoken English with native speakers: 9
- *Learning about American culture: 5
- *Improved writing and speaking skills: 2

The least beneficial aspect of the immersion program was the grouping of all the students into one class. This demerit was an expected result, since the camp was designed exclusively for a group of Korean college students and the group is not big enough for more than one class. The multi-level class limited opportunities for some students to practice their English in the classroom. Students' comments suggested the need for smaller classes for future programs.

5. Discussion

Short-term intensive English Programs in overseas settings are popular study options that provide a means of bringing about positive changes in students' language development as well as bringing about changes in cultural awareness, attitudes and knowledge. Data collected in the study indicate a real gain in students' confidence in using the language. Clement, R., Dornyei, Z. and Noels, K.A. (1994) suggest that integrative motivation—the need to achieve plus linguistic self-confidence plus classroom environment leads to L2 competence. The short-term program provided students opportunities to strengthen their self-confidence in a different classroom environment.

Another benefit of a short-term English program is developing an understanding of another culture. By participating in an overseas program students are exposed to the many challenges of language communication that are interconnected to the understanding of culture. Samovar, Porter and Jain (1981) stated, "...if we are to understand communication, we must also understand culture." Having to use English in different cultural settings provided the students opportunities to understand that communication in English is much more than just understanding the grammar and vocabulary of the English language.

Students participating in the program often developed friendships with native speakers. These friendships continued after the students returned to their home campus. Through e-mail and telephone conversations students were able to continue to communicate with native English speakers thus allowing them opportunities to practice their English skills. These opportunities to use English allowed the students to continue to make progress in their English skills.

Finally, during the program students were given ample time in a variety

of learning situations to practice and use English. Formal classroom settings, casual conversations with American students on campus, conversations with a conversation partner, visiting local historical sites, participating in weekend home stays were some of the variety of settings that required the students to use different registers of English in communication. These multiple opportunities provided students a chance to use the English they studied in the classroom settings.

6. Developing a Short-term Intensive English Program

Short-term intensive English programs offer benefits to visiting EFL students while at the same time offering on-campus opportunities for interaction between American students and international students from a different language and cultural background. Involvement of the on-campus students provides multiple opportunities for the visiting Korean students to practice their English but to also learn about American culture. In developing Short-term IEPs a few suggestions are discussed. Use current exchanges with institutions you already have a relationship with to recruit students. This will deepen the exchange and provide mutual opportunities for American students to participate in similar programs at the sister institution in which a relationship is already established. Clearly state the purpose and goals of the program. Visiting students are expected to participate in class, complete assignments, and practice English. It is an academic focus as well as a cultural learning experience.

The camp should provide a variety of programming experiences in the classroom and outside the classroom. Often Korean students have been subjected to limited methodological approaches to learning English in

Korean. The opportunity to experience a variety of methods in studying English and participating in a variety of cultural experiences will encourage students to develop English skills at higher levels. Focus academic learning on a few skills. Design your program to focus on specific skills that need to be developed by the students. In a four-week program, it is important to focus on those skills that will make the most impact on improving each student's English level. Involve other international and American students on your campus in the program.

7. Concluding Remarks

The analyses of this project indicate that intensive English immersion programs at overseas locations are effective in developing students' self-confidence in using the English language, especially spoken language. It turns out, however, that writing could be the most improved skill during a short period of time. And if it can help develop and encourage students' confidence, the curriculum should be designed to contain as much writing as possible. The camp program should also provide multiple opportunities to use English in a variety of settings and use all forms of interaction with the college community and culture. In a fast-changing world, these interactions provide students the opportunity to gain an understanding of another culture. The value of a short-term intensive English program addresses language improvement by incorporating language and cultural awareness, attitudes and knowledge. Without this greater awareness and knowledge, language remains a boring school subject instead of a vibrant, enriching form of communication.

There is a general lack of research on the impact of short-term intensive English programs. Without more in-depth research, we are only

able to get short glimpses of the benefits of such programs. Further longitudinal studies on the long-term benefits of such a program should be explored. It is our hope that further research in this area and the related affects on those involved in the programs will be undertaken.

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Appendix 1: Pre-camp Questionnaire

A. Personal Information

Gender: M F

Age:

Major:

B. Exposure to the English language

1. How many years have you learned English?
2. Have you ever learned English outside your home country? If yes, please describe your experience.
3. Have you ever been in an intensive English program? If yes, please describe your experience.
4. Have you ever traveled outside your home country? If yes, please describe your experience.

C. Command of English

1. Of the four skills, which do you think is your weakest area?
Listening Speaking Reading Writing
2. Of the four skills, which do you think is your strongest area?
Listening Speaking Reading Writing
3. Which of the following areas is your weakest? (Put a number between 1 to 3: "1" for the weakest and "3" for the strongest)
Pronunciation Vocabulary Grammar
() () ()
4. Which do you think is the most important in improving your English? (Put a number between 1 to 5: "1" for the most important and "5" for the least important.)

9. From which activity do you think you would benefit the most in terms of English learning?

Movies Concerts Athletic Events Lectures/Seminars Sightseeing
() () () () ()

Bible study Church activities Homestay
() () ()

Appendix 2: Post-camp Questionnaire

A. Personal Information

Gender: M F

Age:

Major:

B. Command of English

1. Of the four skills, which do you think improved the most?

Listening Speaking Reading Writing

2. Of the four skills, which do you think improved the least?

Listening Speaking Reading Writing

3. Which of the following areas improved the most during the camp?

(Put a number between 1 to 3: "1" for the weakest and "3" for the strongest)

Pronunciation Vocabulary Grammar
() () ()

C. The Camp

1. How did a camp like this in America help you?

2. How long do you think would be good for a camp like this? ____

weeks

3. How many hours of class a day do you want? _____ hours.
4. What ratio of language to culture would you like to see from the camp?
_____ to _____ (for example, 60 to 40)
5. Tell me something you did outside of class?
6. What was your favorite activity in class?
7. Do you find it easier to speak English now? Explain.
8. Have you met many Americans? Who? Where? When?
9. Describe your overall impressions of Americans, and the Winter English Program.

Abstract

An Intensive English/Culture Camp: its Implications for an Ideal Design

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This paper is an empirical report of an English/Culture camp in U. S. designed exclusively for Korean college students. We did preform two surveys, one before and the other after the camp, and the questions range from their personal experience, expectations and evaluations. The students were exposed to a variety of classroom activities as well as a set of well-designed extracurricular activities outside class. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to gather data. Results indicate that the intensive program was beneficial to the students' English language development, particularly in the two "active" skills of language faculty: writing and speaking. This is somewhat different from their expectation that speaking and listening would improve more than writing and reading. We hope to present a guideline for the ideal design of a short-term English camp for nonnative speakers of English. It is suggested that the curriculum involve as many cultural activities as possible both in and out of classrooms, and that the focus be on writing and speaking, though students are more interested in speaking and listening.

Key words: Korean college students, English immersion program, intensive English camp, extracurricular activities, language skills,
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