

YAC 2021

The Year Abroad: Reimagined

The 3rd Year Abroad Conference

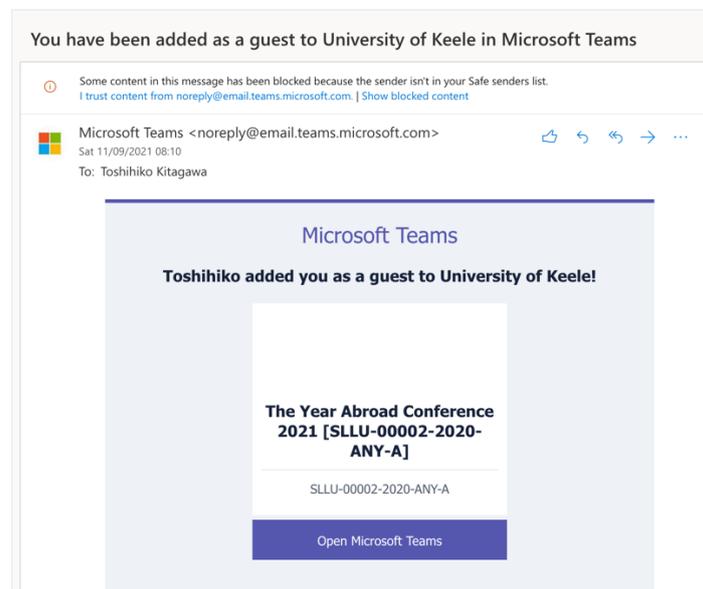
The Programme and Abstracts

The Final Version

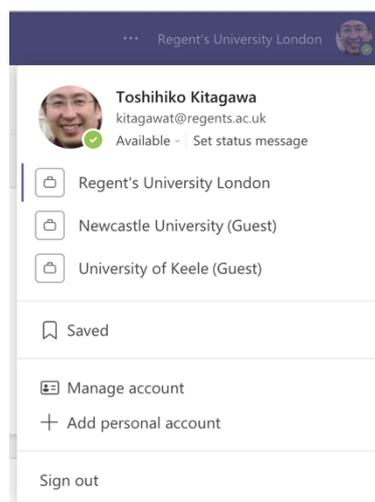
17th September 2021

How to join and get around the virtual Year Abroad Conference

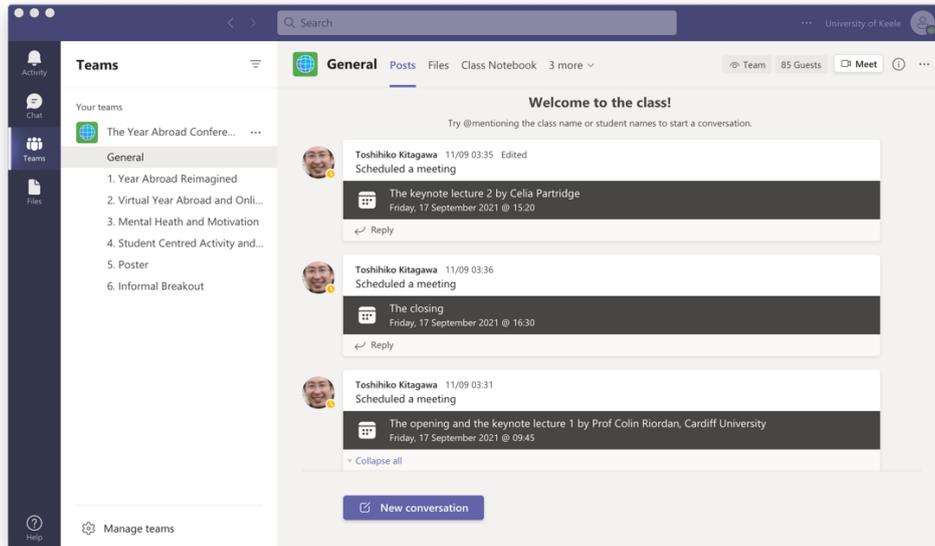
1. An e-mail “You have been added as a guest to University of Keele in Microsoft Teams” has been sent around 10th September 2021 or later. Search spam folder if you can’t find it in your main mailbox. You need to follow the link in the mail to authenticate with Microsoft and join our Keele Teams.



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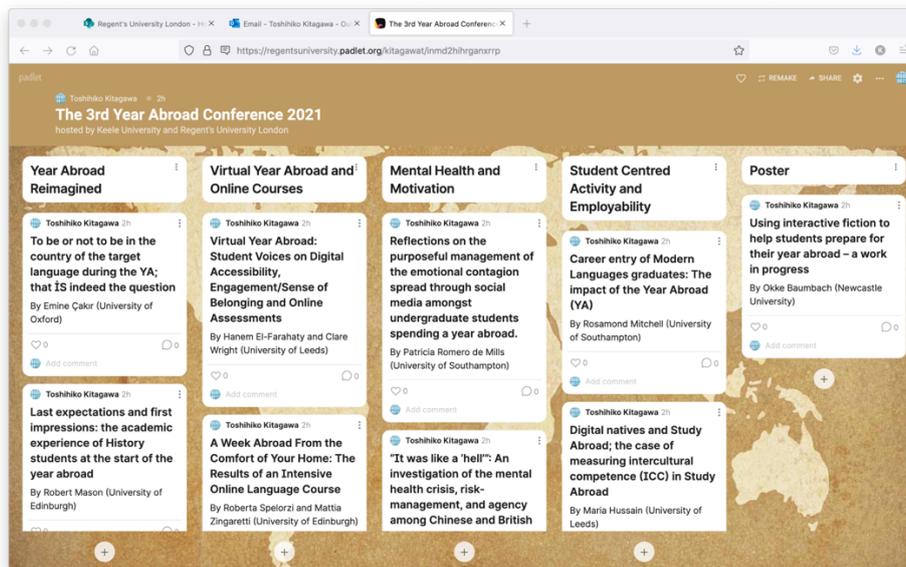
- The opening, the keynote lectures, and the closing take place in the channel “General” and click “join” of a session.
- The presentations in “Year Abroad Reimagined” take place in the channel “1. Year Abroad Reimagined” and click “join” of a session.
- The presentations in “Virtual Year Abroad and Online Course” take place in the channel “2. Virtual Year Abroad and Online Course” and click “join” of a session.
- The presentations in “Mental Health and Motivation” take place in the channel “3. Mental Health and Motivation” and click “join” of a session.
- The presentations in “Student Centred Activity and Employability” take place in the channel “4. Student Centred Activity and Employability” and click “join” of a session.
- The poster session takes place in the channel “5. Poster” and click “join” of the session.
- Informal Breakout sessions take place in the channel “6. Informal Breakout” and click “join” of a session.

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- The presentations and poster have their posts on this Padlet as in the timetable. You may use this as a supplementary communication tool before and after the sessions. The presenters may share their presentation slide here.

The Timetable

9.45	Participants to join conference.			
10.00-10.10	Welcome			
10.10-10.50	Keynote 1: Professor Colin Riordan, Cardiff University Chair: Damien Hall			
10.50-11.00	Coffee Break			
	Year Abroad Reimagined	Virtual Year Abroad and Online Course	Mental Health and Motivation	Student Centred Activity and Employability
11.00-11.30	To be or not to be in the country of the target language during the YA; that IS indeed the question By Emine Çakır (University of Oxford) Chair: Inés Gutiérrez-González	Virtual Year Abroad: Student Voices on Digital Accessibility, Engagement/Sense of Belonging and Online Assessments By Hanem El-Farahaty and Clare Wright (University of Leeds) Chair: Alison Long		Career entry of Modern Languages graduates: The impact of the Year Abroad (YA) By Rosamond Mitchell (University of Southampton) Chair: Toshihiko Kitagawa
11:30-12:00	Last expectations and first impressions: the academic experience of History students at the start of the year abroad By Robert Mason (University of Edinburgh) Chair: Inés Gutiérrez-González	A Week Abroad from the Comfort of Your Home: The Results of an Intensive Online Language Course By Roberta Spelorzi and Mattia Zingaretti (University of Edinburgh) Chair: Alison Long		Digital natives and Study Abroad; the case of measuring intercultural competence (ICC) in Study Abroad By Maria Hussain (University of Leeds) Chair: Toshihiko Kitagawa
12.00-12.50	Lunch Break Poster Session: Using interactive fiction to help students prepare for their year abroad – a work in progress by Okke Baumbach (Newcastle University)			
12.50-13.20	Managing third year abroad mobilities during a global pandemic while making the most out of the Erasmus+ scheme – success stories from the University of Worcester By Cristina Muradore (University of Worcester) Chair: Kazuki Morimoto	Settling into e-Study Abroad – harnessing new technologies to help students' academic adjustment during study abroad By Clare Wright (University of Leeds) Chair: Alison Long	Reflections on the purposeful management of the emotional contagion spread through social media amongst undergraduate students spending a year abroad. By Patricia Romero de Mills (University of Southampton) Chair: Ahmed Masoud	

13.20-13.50	Year Abroad e-portfolio and Year abroad language experience By Hamid Sahki (Cardiff University) Chair: Damien Hall	Development of a Virtual Year Abroad in Response to Global Pandemic: Inter-university collaborative teaching and learning in the UK By Akiko Furukawa (SOAS), Kumi Casey (Newcastle), Elly Darrah (Ippo Ippo Japanese), Mayuko Inagawa (Cardiff), Toshihiko Kitagawa (Keele), Ritsuko Koso-Kirk (Durham), Fumiko Narumi-Munro (Edinburgh) and Mika Takewa (Leeds) Chair: Alison Long	"It was like a 'hell'": An investigation of the mental health crisis, risk-management, and agency among Chinese and British Year Abroad students By Rui He (University of Glasgow) Chair: Ahmed Masoud	
13.50-14.00	Coffee Break			
14.00-14.30	Year Abroad in Italy during the pandemic: a student's experience By Giorgia Faraoni (University of Leeds) Chair: Inés Gutiérrez-González		Changes in student motivation towards Japanese language study before, during and after the year abroad in a time of COVID-19 By Kazuki Morimoto and Martin Ward (University of Leeds) Chair: Toshihiko Kitagawa	Student-led Study Abroad Support Network By Penelope Johnson (Durham University) CANCELLED
14.30-15.00	The IPY (International Placement Year) at DeLC: a case study By Romain Bardot and Isabelle Baron (Lancaster University) Chair: Inés Gutiérrez-González	Learning from online student-led international inter-institutional language exchanges during the era of Covid-19 pandemic By Takako Amano (University of Central Lancashire) Chair: Alison Long		Evaluating Students' Year Abroad Destination Preferences and Discourse Marker Use By Grace Mercy Dornukuor Kitcher and Juliette Delahaie (Université de Lille) Chair: Ahmed Masoud
15.00-15.20	Coffee Break			
15.20-16.00	Keynote 2: Celia Partridge, Universities UK International Chair: Damien Hall			
16.00-16.30	Informal Breakout Sessions Brexit and Visa	Networking (randomly assigned groups) 15 minutes x 2	TBA	TBA
16.30-16.40	Close			

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**To be or not to be in the country of the target language during the YA;
that IS indeed the question**

Emine Çakır (University of Oxford)

Keywords: *Year Abroad, emotions, language immersion, motivation*

The unprecedented global disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic in May 2020, has led to many rapid and challenging changes in the delivery of language instruction at HE. Not only did the language teachers have to quickly attain an understanding of (unfamiliar) technology means for online / digital delivery but also had to respond to logistical challenges as well as to explore different approaches to language teaching and learning; and make necessary adaptations to their syllabi. The Year Aboard (YA) was one of the most affected parts of students' experiences in their academic lives in 2020-21 and YA coordinators had to respond accordingly.

This presentation reports on a case study that explores the YA experience of a student during their second year (immersion in L2 context: Turkey) after they completed an intensive 1-year course in the target language at the Faculty of Oriental Studies, Oxford University. Due to the pandemic and travel restrictions the student had to complete the first term of their YA remotely in their home country following the courses of the host university online. But what happened afterwards?

The study;

1. aims to explain how preparations or on the spot decisions and amendments to the YA was managed by the University during the constraints and challenges brought about by the pandemic. Was it a happy ending for the students?
2. focuses on the emotional responses of the learner to the language learning process during the YA by taking into account the learner's emotional history, the study also tries to make the impact of emotions visible and to show how they affect the motivation and decision of the student. The personal narratives of the learner offer evidence of the ways that emotions either enhance or act as detrimental to foreign language learning, especially of languages less widely learnt/taught.
3. explores the importance of the support provided to the students during their YA providing specific examples.
4. concludes with a discussion for further implications for the role of being in the country of the target language for better immersion during the YA.

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Virtual Year Abroad: Student Voice on Digital Accessibility, Engagement/Sense of Belonging and Online Assessments

Hanem El-Farahaty (University of Leeds)

Keywords: *Virtual year abroad; inclusive learning; disability support; accessible resources*

The sudden turn to online learning since the first lockdown in March 2020 has affected all students during their year/term abroad (YA/TA). They had to leave their studies or put their plans to travel on hold. This situation continued through 20/21 where the School of Languages, Cultures and Societies (LCS), The University of Leeds as well as many other HE institutions decided to have a virtual YA/TA. Even those who managed to travel for their work placements (e.g. in Germany), continued to face challenges caused by the pandemic.

Learning and teaching a language online comes with its challenges, the biggest of which is engagement and sense of belonging. Online learning and assessment is even more challenging for students studying a YA/TA virtually. This is because students are losing once in a lifetime authentic experience and a chance to learn the culture from its origin. As a result, they miss hands on opportunities to enhance employability and interpersonal skills. These factors among many others, such as internet connectivity and workload cause many inclusivity issues that may influence students in general, and students with SpLD, complex physical disabilities, or undeclared disabilities, in particular. Those students face anxiety (related to remote learning by tutors from a different culture and learning context), social barriers, engagement and sense of belonging, online assessment.

As the LCS Academic Lead for Inclusive Practice, I have been working in partnership with students, school reps and course reps throughout last year to get their voice heard via different channels. One of my priorities in LCS was to capture the voice of YA/TA students. To this effect, I investigated the above-mentioned issues and challenges in more depth by launching the following two activities:

- A survey for YA/TA students in all subject areas in LCS about their experience with virtual YA/TA during the first 2020 lockdown and during 20/21. The survey covered aspects of inclusive learning and teaching such as access to online platforms, digital accessibility, availability of materials, online engagement and sense of belonging, course design, online assessments and feedback.
- Focus group with students with registered disabilities/protected characteristics (autistic, SpLD students with complex physical disabilities and students mental health issues) who are seldom heard or represented in student voice sessions.

In this presentation, I aim to present the outcomes of these two student voice activities and will also give recommendations on how to support YA/TA students further.

Career entry of Modern Languages graduates: The impact of the Year Abroad (YA)

Rosamond Mitchell (University of Southampton)

Keywords: *Career entry; employability; multilingual identity*

This paper reports a longitudinal qualitative study of a group of Modern Languages graduates, who have been tracked since their second year of university (in 2011) until 6 years post-graduation (AUTHOR, 2017, 2020). The participants have been regularly interviewed throughout about their language attitudes, their L2 learning, their L2-using practices, and their personal biographies; their evolving proficiency in French or Spanish has also been measured throughout.

Entry into professional employment is not a mechanical process involving the matching of predefined skill sets with employer needs. Instead, it involves a complex and dynamic negotiation between employer needs and sociocultural preferences, and prospective employees' professional and personal preferences, actual and potential skills, and sense of self (Holmes, 2013, 2015). Starting from this perspective, the paper addresses the following research questions:

1. What is the early career progression of languages graduates over time?
2. What is the influence of the YA experience in particular on (a) graduates' sense of a multilingual self, and (b) their earlier and later career choices?

Following graduation in 2013, like other Humanities graduates, the participants (n = 28) took some time to identify a definite career path, and a majority have eventually entered non-language-related professional careers. This paper reports on their maintenance of a positive bilingual/multilingual identity, their efforts to find work opportunities to use their language(s), but also the challenges involved in entering particular language-related careers (e.g. teaching and translation/interpreting). Their generally positive attitudes to their Modern Languages degrees, and their perceptions of the distinctive contribution of the Year Abroad in particular to their current life, employability and career trajectory, whether working in monolingual or multilingual environments, are discussed and conclusions are drawn for MLs educators.

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**Last expectations and first impressions:
the academic experience of History students at the start of the year abroad**

Robert Mason (University of Edinburgh)

Keywords: *ways of thinking and practising; learning environments; foreign languages; history*

This paper explores the way in which students conceptualise the academic experience of study abroad as they prepare to leave for a non-UK university and as they settle down as students at their home institution. Offering a comparison between students taking a degree programme that combines language with another academic discipline, undertaking compulsory study abroad, and non-language students pursuing an optional year abroad, it notes that the former see language-learning as the key goal of a year abroad whereas the latter view the year abroad as offering social, cultural, and career-enhancing opportunities. In both cases, however, the early experience of being a student at a non-UK university posed profound and unexpected challenges to student assumptions about what Charles Anderson and Dai Hounsell (2007) have called 'ways of thinking and practising' in the discipline under study.

The paper draws on (a) a questionnaire distributed among students at a large research-intensive UK university among to leave for study abroad (and based on the design of the questionnaires used in the Enhancing Teaching and Learning Environments in Undergraduate Courses project [2001–2005]); and (b) a series of interviews with a group of students undertaking study abroad in a non-English speaking country, the degree programme for whom includes History (whether or not formally in combination with a language).

The differences between last expectations and first impressions were significant because students encountered differences of course content and of learning environment. Whereas students saw research skills as prized at the UK university, during study abroad they understood the discipline of history as more closely connected with learning a particular body of knowledge and with understanding a tutor's perspective. Crucially, they found important to their success in adapting to a new learning environment was, first, the willingness of tutors to offer explicit explanations of academic expectations, and second, the willingness of students for whom the host university was the home institution to burst an 'Erasmus bubble' in advising visiting students more informally on those expectations. More broadly, the project of course confirms the significance of study abroad for language-learning but seeks to revise understandings of study abroad that underscore most of all its cultural and social aspects by demonstrating that this experience has consequential implications for a student's understanding of 'ways of thinking and practicing' in their academic discipline.

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A Week Abroad from the Comfort of Your Home: The Results of an Intensive Online Language Course

Roberta Spelozzi and Mattia Zingaretti (University of Edinburgh)

Keywords: *year abroad, second language immersion, language learning, first language change, cognition*

The individual and societal benefits of spending a year abroad (YA) are reported widely (for instance, in King, Findlay and Ahrens, 2010): The acquisition and development of foreign language skills, intercultural awareness and improved employment prospects are found alongside the creation of a multilingual and multicultural European graduate population in an increasingly competitive global scenario. However, global challenges such as the withdrawal of the UK from the EU (i.e. Brexit) and the recent break-out of the COVID-19 pandemic have been threatening the traditional benefits associated with YA programmes. Furthermore, while the consequences of Brexit on YA programmes will emerge in the long run, the impact of the current pandemic has already caused major disruption to the YA in 2019-2020 and 2020-2021. As many students were not able to spend a period of time studying abroad, we decided to compensate for the lack of linguistic and cultural input in a second-language (L2) environment by creating an intensive online language course that would replicate an immersion experience in the Italian language and culture. A group of second- and third-year students of Italian from different UK Universities enrolled on a one-week online course taught by L1-speaker teachers of Italian in April 12-18 2021. The course consisted of a daily 2-hour morning session (focused on developing linguistic skills, such as vocabulary and grammar knowledge) and a 1-hour afternoon session (focused on cultural content to develop listening and speaking skills). Given that immersion in an L2 environment for 3 months is found to facilitate L2 vocabulary access at the expenses of L1 word retrieval (cf. Linck et al 2009), we wanted to test whether similar changes would be found after an intensive online course of only one week. We also tested whether this intensive L2-learning experience would yield cognitive improvements as a result of positive effect of intensive learning on attentional performance (cf. Bak et al. 2016; Vega-Mendoza et al. 2015). As we further split students in two groups (with only one group asked to keep on practising Italian for at least 1 hour a day), three weeks later we expected the potential linguistic and cognitive changes found at the end of the course to be maintained only among students who kept on practising Italian (cf. Chamorro et al. 2016; Bak et al. 2016).*

If our predictions are met, this study would represent evidence in favour of supporting and creating alternative ways of immersion in the L2 in the Brexit and COVID-19 era. Given the importance of the YA, Universities could provide a meaningful and engaging way of experiencing the linguistic and cultural aspects of an L2 by making use of the online tools

which we all have familiarised with throughout the pandemic. This would represent the perfect opportunity for students to participate, albeit with some obvious differences, in the YA experience from the comfort of their home.

*Data collection was completed at the beginning of June 2021; we expect to have analysed our results by the time the Conference takes place in September 2021.

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**Digital natives and Study Abroad;
the case of measuring intercultural competence (ICC) in Study Abroad**

Maria Hussain (University of Leeds)

Keywords: *intercultural competence, dynamic assessment, critical reflection, Gen-Z, digitally-enhanced assessment*

Engaging in Study Abroad (SA) is a such an immersive and potentially transformative experience which students are able to develop their academic and employability competencies such as intercultural competence (ICC). With workforces becoming increasingly globalised this has become a key graduate attribute for young professionals. However, unlike other immersive experiences such as the 'Year in Industry' where benefits are clear to both students and potential employers, for SA the onus is on students to 'make sense' of this transformative experience in terms of articulating their experience and development to potential employers.

This paper reports on how dynamic assessment has enabled SA student to better engage and articulate skills and competencies developed during this immersive experience. Through constructive aligning (Biggs and Tang, 2011) the learning outcomes to the assessments together with providing opportunity for students to engage their creative digital literacy skills in dynamic assessment of the year has yielded some encouraging preliminary findings.

After completing just one cycle of the newly aligned dynamic reflective assignments there is a marked increase in overall quality assignments with students being able to articulate their experience in terms of ICC and increased employability through critical reflection drawing on real-life examples from their Study Abroad year through the use of dynamic multimodal assessment. In terms of numbers; 100% of students passed the module, with an increase of 3% to the module average marks and 31% securing a first in multimodal dynamic assignment.

Managing third year abroad mobilities during a global pandemic while making the most out of the Erasmus+ scheme – success stories from the University of Worcester

Cristina Muradore (University of Worcester)

Keywords: *mobility, employability, resilience, flexibility, Erasmus*

Supporting students in making the most out of their Erasmus mobilities despite the challenges put forward by the global pandemic has surely be a recurring worry for most Mobility coordinators in the past year and a half.

At the University of Worcester, we decided to keep going with both our inbound and outbound student mobilities. Numbers have not been the same as before, however students' commitment and dedication has been commendable.

To allow them making the most of their Erasmus even when partners were cancelling inbound mobilities, we supported our students in combining an Erasmus study opportunity with a traineeship one, or in allowing them to study in different universities each semester according to partners' availability. This proved to be very successful and despite the initial disappointment of having their plans completely changed our students achieved great results both during their studies and with their placements. The most important thing is that all of them recognised how this combination had been indeed an added value to their experience abroad as they saw it as an empowerment and personal growth opportunity. Thinking outside the boxes surely became a thing over the past half and a half year and while for younger generations this could be something very natural, bringing such approach to the academic world marks a big change with the pre-pandemic era.

In our brief presentation we aim at describing three case studies of students who thanks to their resilience, made the most out of their year abroad despite all the initial obstacles. We will also focus on the importance of constant communication between mobility managers and students to understand their aspirations and meet their expectations while on the other side, making sure that partners can indeed offer what the students are after. We will reflect on the lessons learnt with the aim at sharing good practices with our colleagues.

Offering such opportunities to students was possible thanks to a team effort within the University but also because of the level of flexibility the Erasmus+ Programme has equipped HEIs with, especially when at least two projects are still open.

In an increasingly competitive jobs market, employers will look for qualities which will set apart one applicant from the others. We are pretty sure that students who embarked on a Year Abroad will have all that it takes to be up for the challenge and stand out of the crowd, while also becoming an asset for their home university in promoting the study programme.

Settling into e-Study Abroad – harnessing new technologies to help students’ academic adjustment during study abroad

Clare Wright (University of Leeds)

Keywords: *virtual year abroad, MOOCs, e-literacy*

During the recent pandemic, institutions and students worldwide have had to rapidly adjust to using new e-tools and virtual learning platforms to support the year abroad experience, often based around self-study toolkits. Online learning is not new, but the rapid shift to using such resources for year abroad purposes is creating new demands on students and staff. It is known that e-learning requires high levels of active engagement and digital literacy skills from students, including independence, autonomy, resilience, and requires new ways of building peer networks in virtual learning environments. Such skills can be challenging both for students going abroad from the UK, but also from abroad into the UK (Wright & Furneaux 2021). Many studies have found the sudden shift to virtual learning to be surprisingly effective in certain ways (Wang & Zhao 2020), and future academic practice seems likely retain some aspect of self-study resources, but do students work well with them? Does it make a difference if students are UK or international? What are the implications on staff for finding the time and capacity to deliver excellent quality materials and check on levels of engagement?

This talk reviews a range of resources used in the last two years, to highlight some of the issues facing educators and students. We draw on three different types of resources: institution-led Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) provided by FutureLearn, including some specifically set up for the Virtual Year Abroad 2020-21 by the UK’s University Council of Modern Languages, and also some more generally aimed at international students coming to the UK. We compare these to smaller-scale experiences of Chinese language teachers adjusting to support their learners in a variety of global settings. The talk aims to compare the experience of students handling different e-pedagogies, whether in using smaller stand-alone or individually tailed virtual year abroad resources, or engaging in a more connectivist MOOC-based shared learning approach. Data from one UK-designed MOOC, Critical Thinking at University: An Introduction (CTAU), shows this could be a potential model for a way forward. The MOOC adapted existing self-study resources, so did not require high levels of new institutional input, but included a more connectivist learning approach, encouraging autonomous learning both individually and collectively. Student comments showed they felt successful in becoming more effective in self-regulated learning, and appreciated developing better intrapersonal peer-based skills through engagement with others in completing the tasks in the MOOC. We present the Curiosity Crank Model - our vision for how and why both subject-

specific knowledge and general e-literacy can develop well in an online MOOC context, and how far this model can apply to more specific virtual resources such as the UCML toolkit. We compare these institutional-led experiences with some smaller-scale lessons learned by teacher-practitioners in teaching Chinese (Wang & Zhao 2020). We finish with some discussion of the implications for how virtual platforms can best retain some role in Year Abroad experiences post-pandemic, and what that might mean for institutional support and resourcing.

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Reflections on the purposeful management of the emotional contagion spread through social media amongst undergraduate students spending a year abroad.

Patricia Romero de Mills (University of Southampton)

Keywords: *Emotions, Support, Facebook, Mental health*

The potential negative effects of social media on adolescents and young adults' mental health has been a cause for concern for some time. Recent research has focused on the impact of disorders such as the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO, see for example, Pasztor and Bak, 2020), the Problematic Use of Facebook, Instagram and Smartphones (Rozgonjuk et al, 2021), and the harmful effects of comparative subjective happiness (Lup, 2015). Research in the field has also been successful in demonstrating the increased rate at which the phenomenon known in the literature as "emotional contagion" occurs on social networks - a behaviour which refers to the tendency of users to mirror and adopt the moods and emotions other users display on their posts regardless of how optimistic or harmful these feelings and thoughts are for the individual receptor (Coviello et al, 2014). Given that social networks are sojourns' natural means of contact with their families and homeland networks, and of communication amongst themselves, it seems pertinent to reflect on the ways this challenging digital panorama could help or hinder key educational experiences such as the Year Abroad, and on whether or not we, as educators, can have -or should have- a role to play in these scenarios.

This paper reflects on the lessons learned through seven years of experience using Facebook groups with the intention to build up a community of practice for the students living abroad. The participants in these groups can choose to share the joys of starting a life abroad at the same time as they discuss the natural and fully expected struggles of this experience. These informal, but structured and carefully monitored virtual meeting points act as a safe space within the seemingly uncontrollable world of social media. In them, students are encouraged to acknowledge, disentangle, and reflect upon the common emotions linked to the experience of living abroad and the ways these encounters are helping them grow personally and professionally. In this way, Facebook itself becomes the tool and method to moderate the negative impact that comparative tendencies and unregulated emotional contagion spread through social media can have on our students' mental health and perceptions of their experiences abroad.

Evidence extracted from student evaluations and student feedback, blogs written by returnee students, and recordings of peer-to-peer advice show an overwhelming approval and appreciation of this practice. Students report feeling that their emotions and experiences become valid and easier to navigate as a result of participating in these Facebook groups.

They also report feeling fully supported, less isolated and greatly understood during their year abroad. Unexpected gains include the discovery and adaptation of long-lasting strategies for self-soothing and self-regulation of particular emotions – an essential skill for them to possess in the testing times we are currently living.

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Year Abroad e-portfolio and Year abroad language experience

Hamid Sahki (Cardiff University)

Keywords: *evidence, skills, engagement, assessment, experience*

I supervised 19 portfolios of students who were abroad in a French-speaking country for the second semester this year. Each portfolio had at least 10 sections. What was the conception of the language learning behind these sections? Evidence, skills, engagement, assessment, experience. I looked through the 19 portfolios to choose the best examples which can give reflection on how these 5 elements evidence, skills, engagement, assessment, experience can be found in the evidence of engagement placed in the portfolios by students and how they can be beneficial or not beneficial for students to realize the portfolio.

Is there a hierarchy between the 5 elements in the learning experience of the targeted language? How can this refer to a materialistic view of the language? Does the portfolio reduce the experience of the targeted language by framing this experience in criteria? Is it completely in the interest of the student learning? How these criteria can be legitimised by employability and give to the student an interest in the activities of the portfolio outside the academic world?

I will look objectively in the portfolios to assess what were the achievements and the failures. I will look to the original template of the portfolio after conducting with the students who made these portfolios an assessment on the advantages and the disadvantages of the portfolio for their learning during the Year Abroad. This assessment of the portfolio made after its realization allow us to improve the portfolio experience. I will review the 5 criteria, evidence, skills, engagement, assessment, experience to give some ideas to amend the template of the portfolio. Can we keep these criteria? Should we change them? Should we explain more how these criteria are linked together to maximize for the student his learning experience of the targeted language abroad? Should we explain to the students what is the general concepts of learning a language which validate the use of the portfolio and its requirements?

Development of a Virtual Year Abroad in Response to Global Pandemic: Inter-university collaborative teaching and learning in the UK

Akiko Furukawa (SOAS University of London), Kumi Casey (Newcastle University), Elly Darrah (Ippolppo Japanese), Mayuko Inagawa (Cardiff University), Toshihiko Kitagawa (Keele University), Ritsuko Koso-Kirk (Durham University), Fumiko Narumi-Munro (University of Edinburgh) and Mika Takewa (University of Leeds)

Keywords: *Virtual Year Abroad, Inter-university collaboration, Crisis management*

In this presentation, we will describe the development of the virtual Japan Year Abroad, Inter-University Support Programme (IUSP), from the motivation for its beginning to the activities that have been delivered as part of the project.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced students on the Japan Year Abroad to leave Japan or to have their studies cancelled. Three cohorts of students have been affected so far. According to Subject Benchmark Statement: Languages, Cultures and Societies (QAA, 2019):

“Where students are not required or are unable to spend an extended period of residence abroad, these objectives are achieved by a variety of methods, including directed intensive language study during vacations, and providing contact with the target language environment through digital resources and/or virtual mobility” (p.15).

With this in mind, Japan Year Abroad Coordinators from seven UK universities got together to set up a support system, IUSP, to provide continued learning opportunities to the affected students.

Since its beginning, this initiative has developed into an undertaking commissioned by the Embassy of Japan in the UK (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan) via the British Association for Teaching Japanese as a Foreign Language (BATJ), with participation extended to involve BATJ members who wish to contribute to teaching as well as to any affected students on a BA Japanese (single and joint) programme at a UK university. For these activities, IUSP has also been awarded an external grant by the Japan Foundation.

Since July 2020, over 100 sessions have been offered, providing opportunities for students to interact with students and teachers from other UK universities as well as students from/in Japan via online language and cultural sessions, lectures, group discussion, language exchanges, career talks by graduates, British diplomats and so on.

The language sessions offered include courses at two different levels (lower-intermediate and upper-intermediate) and preparation for the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT). These sessions contributed to maintain and improve the proficiency levels of the

students. Furthermore, cultural sessions on tea ceremony, calligraphy, Noh theatre and Japanese stand-up comedy helped to foster intercultural awareness and maintain student motivation which may have otherwise been declined due to cancellation of the Year Abroad.

Through this presentation, we hope to share the reflections of the project members regarding the innovative nature of this project, which has brought to life new possibilities in the field of online learning as an alternative for traditional study abroad and in-person teaching, be this for students of Japanese or other languages. In particular, we believe that IUSP provides a useful case study of how educational institutions may respond to crises such as pandemics and natural disasters.

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“It was like a ‘hell’”: An investigation of the mental health crisis, risk-management, and agency among Chinese and British Year Abroad students

Rui He (University of Glasgow)

Keywords: *Acculturation, mental health, Year Abroad, international students, agency*

This research project is within the context of internationalisation in worldwide higher education institutions (HEIs), focusing on Study Abroad Programmes (SAPs) for foreign language learners. A one-term or one-year abroad programme is now embedded in Foreign Studies degree programmes in many HEIs all over the world, either as an optional (e.g. in China) or compulsory component (i.e. in the UK). Nevertheless, there are limited comprehensive insights into these non-degree-oriented foreign language sojourners' study abroad experiences in the countries of their target languages and cultures within the specific context of short-term SAPs such as China and the UK in particular. This has led to an inadequate understanding of the overall experiences as well as the distinct challenges that this specific cohort may face, some of which may even be crucial mental health crisis, as they endeavour to learn both the language and the culture of the host environment in a relatively short period.

This study, as part of this research project, focuses on six outstanding cases in Chinese and British cohorts, investigating their mental health crisis and risk-management during their one-year acculturation experiences and the role their agency plays in their learning, interaction, and development. Under the guidance of an overarching question: “What are the distinct features that characterise acculturation experiences in the context of Chinese and British foreign language learners where culture and language learning take place simultaneously?” This study focuses on the personal aspect and provides a meaningful ‘mirror-image’ investigation to explore and compare the acculturation experiences of two cohorts: a) English language learners in China who took one-year SAPs to the UK, and b) British learners in Chinese Studies who went to China on one-year SAPs. This study adopted purely qualitative approach where creative research techniques (i.e. vignettes and metaphors) were also employed to encourage the participants' in-depth reflections and introspection of their experiences, with a view to facilitating and complementing the semi-structured interview method that was primarily used for collecting data.

Drawing upon Urie Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Human Development and the subsequent extended Academic Acculturation Model offered by Elliot et al. as a guiding theoretical framework, this study provides a fresh and more nuanced insight from the personal aspect to unpack the intricacies in participants' one-year acculturation experiences.

It suggests six key personal bioecological-related factors that impact on these 'in-between direct producers' – foreign language learners' – overall acculturation experiences (both academic and non- academic). A deeper and comparative understanding of the two groups of SAP learners can assist HEIs in offering richer practical intercultural support before, during and after students' educational experiences abroad, and in improving intercultural pedagogy in future education, e.g. through foreign language education and SAP design.

Year Abroad in Italy during the pandemic: a student's experience

Giorgia Faraoni (University of Leeds)

Keywords: *Positive effects of lockdown, Year Abroad in Italy, Identity, Student perspective, Study Abroad in the Covid-19 era*

When countries all over the world started to close their borders due to the pandemic and students on their Year Abroad were called back to their home countries, one of my research participants decided to stay in Italy, experiencing the lockdown with her host family. What marked the premature end of many Year Abroad experiences, became the turning point for hers. This paper presents the positive effects that the pandemic and the national lockdown had on the experience of a UK language student who spent most of 2020 in her Year Abroad host country.

Study abroad experiences have been shown to have an impact not only on the students' linguistic abilities (Kinginger, 2011) but also on many other personal characteristics, such as beliefs (Amuzie and Winke, 2009), emotions (Barcelos, 2015), and identity (Block, 2010), sometimes challenging the students' very sense of self (Pellegrino Aveni, 2005). One often underestimated factor in the study abroad literature is the historical period in which research is carried out (Coleman, 2013), as it is an important variable and contextual factor, and it is even more significant when a worldwide pandemic is involved. In 2020, both Brexit and the spread of Covid-19 have affected and changed the Year Abroad reality as we knew it and have added new layers of complexity to it. This paper explores the YA experience of one of my research participants and her personal journey towards the re-discovery of herself and her identity during, and thanks to, the national lockdown.

My project is a qualitative longitudinal case study that investigates the experiences of two UK language students who went to Italy for their Year Abroad. The focus of my research is on the affective challenges faced by my participants and the coping strategies they adopted to overcome them. However, the outbreak of the pandemic has added a further challenge to my participants' lives abroad. Through an initial questionnaire, multiple interviews, and regular text updates, I followed their Year Abroad experiences in Italy, also gathering their reflections on the changing reality in the early months of 2020. In this paper, I present the personal journey of Lucia (pseudonym), a 26-year-old student of Italian, who spent 14 months in a small town in central Italy. Between September 2019 and November 2020, she moved from struggling to express herself in the target language and "feeling like a child", to re-discovering herself and feeling fluent and confident.

Despite the undeniable negative effects recent events have had, and the uncertainty of the future of study abroad, this paper shares some of the positive impact the pandemic has indirectly had on my project, and it hopes to inspire future research on the everchanging Year Abroad experience.

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Changes in student motivation towards Japanese language study before, during and after the year abroad in a time of COVID-19

Kazuki Morimoto and Martin Ward (University of Leeds)

Keywords: *L2 motivation, Japanese language, COVID-19 pandemic, year abroad*

In recent years an increasing amount of research has been paying attention to effects of study abroad from students' motivational point of view (Anderson 2015, Li et al. 2013, Ueki and Takeuchi 2015, 2017). Whilst these studies may have revealed significant findings about students' affective and motivational changes during their study abroad, few studies have yet shed light on those changes after their study abroad. This study, therefore, investigates the changes in UG students' motivation both during and after their year abroad with a particular focus on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their motivation to study Japanese.

The primary methodological approach for this study encompassed five online questionnaires, focussing on motivational factors and changes in motivation, conducted over a period of 18 months (Sept. 2019 to March 2021) taking in the year abroad and post-year abroad academic year. The standardized format of questionnaire was comprised of eight questions, including a combination of likert-style questions and open questions. The five main questionnaires received 17, 12, 15, 7, and 8 responses.

This study made a number of significant discoveries. Firstly, with regard to motivational factors, 'Language progress' was the participants' primary motivation while 'Parents/family expectations', one of the major 'Ought-to-L2 Self' in Dornyei (2005, 2009)'s studies, was the least important motivational factor for them throughout the research period. 'Academic progress' was considered relatively less important during their year abroad, but its priority increased after their YA. Furthermore, the participants seem to understand the value of their personal development achieved through their experiences both during and after their YA. As for the change of the students' motivation, while the vast majority of the participants felt that their motivation increased during the first year of their study in their home university, mixed perspectives were observed when they spent their first semester/term in their host university in Japan due to individual differences in terms of how they reacted psychologically to the language and cultural immersion.

While the participants overwhelmingly felt that their motivation was increased over the whole period of their YA, more than a quarter of the participants reported that their motivation decreased between January and March 2020 during their YA not least because of

the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent impact on their study methods and social experiences.

However, some of the participants seem to have maintained or even increased their motivation to study Japanese due to their re-focus on a qualification, their reduced anxiety after coming back to their home country and their consolidated determination to study Japanese and eventually go back to Japan. However, the majority of the participants felt that their motivation decreased since their return from Japan and after resumed their study at their home university in the UK. indicating the need to provide enhanced support for this cohort of students throughout the remainder of their degree.

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Student-led Study Abroad Support Network

Penelope Johnson (Durham University)

Keywords: *Year Abroad Support, Student Engagement, Peer mentoring and Support, Preparation for Study Abroad, Reintegration of students Post-YA*

What the students want is not necessarily what they need, however, what the teachers, tutors and any other support staff at the university think the students need is not necessarily what they need or want. In this presentation, I will discuss a project to establish a student-led Study Abroad network using as a case study the School of Modern Languages and Cultures at Durham University. This research has been carried out by using focus groups of third and fourth year students. It is underpinned by theories on peer mentoring and support (Aaron, et al, 2018; Fayram et al, 2018; Lockyer et al, 2002) as well as theories on experiential (Kolb, 1984) and social learning (Kinging, 2013; Isabelli-García, 2006; Jackson, 2008, 2013), motivation in language learning (Dörnyei, 2001,2005; Ushioda, 2003) and the acquisition of soft and transferable skills during the study abroad (Busch, 2009; Gardner et al, 2008; Jones, 2013). After providing the contextualisation and looking at the relevant theories, I will discuss the current support offered in the School of Modern Languages and Cultures at Durham University; this will be followed by a presentation of the results from the focus group study and a discussion of the project of setting up a student-led Study Abroad network. I will also look into the role played by several parties in making this network sustainable: students at different levels in their studies, alumni, academic and pastoral staff, university groups and societies and UK or international groups and associations, before presenting the conclusions and recommendations. Apart from student involvement, this presentation also discusses issues of Pre-YA preparation and also the re-integration of students post-YA.

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The IPY (International Placement Year) at DeLC: a case study

Romain Bardot and Isabelle Baron (Lancaster University)

Keywords: *reflect, YA, preparation, adapting, global*

HE language departments and academic staff involved in the processes related to the Year Abroad, in the UK, are currently going through a major upheaval, brought about by the cumulated effect of Covid and Brexit. Students on their year abroad in 2019/20 and 2020/21 have seen placements cut short or cancelled at the last minute, and those going away in the autumn are now facing new administrative barriers relating to travel and visas. To address these challenges, staff have had to adapt logistically and pedagogically to anticipate and counteract anxieties with a positive and flexible plan of actions which considers external but also internal factors such as our evaluation and assessments of the IPY and ensuring Learning Outcomes are still met at module and programme level.

Our presentation sets out to reflect on our changing IPY landscape and on new ways to support our students, including building mental toughness and resilience in preparation for their year abroad:

First, we will assess the practical short- and mid-term study-related alternatives developed by the department in response to the pandemic: revision materials, alternative tasks and modes of delivery, MOOCs and generally keeping up to date with the sector's discussions around adapting assessments, such as moving to a pass/fail system.

Then, we will examine how the current situation is affecting the preparation of outgoing students. How do we pre-empt Brexit-related fears from applicants whose perceptions of the IPY are now associated with Erasmus+, European policies and an uncertain future?

One-off factors (online environment, new and conflicting regulations on travel and visas, student funding uncertainties linked to the new Turing scheme) have given rise to unprecedented levels of students' anxiety. However, they also provide an opportunity for us to reconsider our support strategies to outgoing students, redefine the role of the IPY tutor and reimagine our relationship with other services of the university to foster more effective and collaborative support networks through our shared expertise.

Finally, we will address the impact that Brexit/Covid have had on our long-held beliefs on the teaching, relevance, and impact of languages in HE in the new global environment. Indeed, the placement abroad, that encompasses the third year of most language degrees in the UK, is not just an opportunity for an intensive and extensive immersion in a new language and a new culture. An essential part of the International Placement Year is acquiring the necessary empathy, open-mindedness, resilience, and emotional intelligence to communicate and negotiate cultural exchanges as a global graduate.

Through our reflection on past and future IPY educational practices, the use of digital technologies in a new teaching environment and a creative outlook on the implementation of our IPY, we may be able to face the educational and personal challenges created by Covid and Brexit and focus on the acquisition of a global mindset for our language students.

Learning from online student-led international inter-institutional language exchanges during the era of Covid-19 pandemic

Takako Amano (University of Central Lancashire)

Keywords: *student-led, international, online, language exchange, Covid-19 pandemic*

It has been an established observation that when learning other languages, people are finding it difficult to express themselves (Richards, 2008). Students of modern languages in higher education are expected to achieve high proficiency in all linguistic skills within a short period of time so it is crucial that they are exposed to opportunities to practice expressing in their chosen target language/s in authentic to semi-authentic situations but Covid-19 pandemic has forced many to give up studying abroad and lose on-campus face-to-face interactions with overseas students.

To compensate for the intensive language learning experience abroad at this extraordinary period in history, some good-will online language tuition has been made available by professional language tutors worldwide and inter-institutions forums such as Inter-University Support Programme (e.g. IUSP, 2020) have been formed.

However, replicating an on-campus face-to-face & teacher-free interactive environment with overseas students has been outside the scope of this and concerns arose at international partner institutions for not having overseas students on-campus. Hence the author negotiated a series of international inter-institutional online language exchanges in English and Japanese for the benefits of both groups of students. The uniqueness of this arrangement being that it was agreed that each exchange session was entirely student-led with no involvement of teaching staff. Whilst much research is available on the evaluation of online language exchange platform (e.g. Gelen & Tozluoglu, 2021) or online foreign language learning (e.g. Maican, M.-A. & Cocoradă, 2021), language exchanges (e.g. Wang, Fang, Han & Chen, 2016) and intern-cultural communication using Zoom (Freiermuth, & Huang, 2001), they are academic staff-led. It is hard to find a set of published data from student-led language and cultural exchanges with no intervention by language teacher that is not restricted to English-Japanese language exchanges.

This research aims to conceptualise the dimension of this series of unique online student-led language and cultural exchange activities and learn from the experience of those involved: student leaders, student participants and international office staff at partner institutions. Interviews and questionnaires are used for data collections and data analysis is carried out using the grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1997; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Findings are in the areas of leadership, community language learning and more with an anticipation to help further improve student and international staff experience for future

online student-led language and cultural exchanges that may be further frequented even after the containment of Covid-19 pandemic.

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Evaluating Students' Year Abroad Destination Preferences and Discourse Marker Use

Grace Mercy Dornukuor Kitcher and Juliette Delahaie (Université de Lille)

Keywords: *year abroad, students' preferences, discourse markers, bon*

This research explores the relationship between French language learners' year abroad destination preferences and the acquisition of the discourse marker *bon*.

Every year, French students in various Ghanaian universities participate in a year abroad programme. Ghana's geographical location, that is an anglophone country situated in the middle of francophone countries, affords students the opportunity to either spend a year abroad in one of its neighbouring francophone countries (for example Togo, Benin...) or in Europe (mainly France). We study the acquisition of different variants of French in relation to the year abroad destination - France and Benin.

We work with native (French and Beninese nationals) as well as non-native (Ghanaians) speakers of the French language. Our data collection technique consists of interviews and semi-guided conversations where participants debate on a given topic in pairs. We explore the reasons behind the choice of a year abroad study context by non-native speakers. In addition, we compare these two year abroad environments (Allihien, 2011; Agbefle, 2014; Annan, 2021) and highlight how context may influence spoken French, especially with respect to the use of discourse markers (Muller, 2005; Sugiyama, 2017).

The findings of our study indicate that Ghanaian students - both those who spent a year abroad in France as well as those who spent a year abroad in Benin - initially had a desire to study in France. This preference for France, according to students who actually did go to France for their year abroad is primarily due to the type of French spoken in France. We realized that the year abroad context does have an impact on the type of French spoken. This is evident in the use of the discourse marker, *bon*, by non-native speakers who study in Benin. Their initial desire to study in France and by inference speak like the native speakers from France does not necessarily translate in the way they speak. Rather, they assimilate to their current environment, and incorporate one of the discourse markers (*bon*) primarily present in our native speaker corpora from Benin in their speech.

¹ *Bon* can be translated as *well* in English

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Using interactive fiction to help students prepare for their year abroad – a work in progress

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Keywords: *year abroad preparation, interactive fiction, student perception, digital learning resource*

Choose-your-own-adventure stories are a type of interactive fiction that allow readers to influence the course of a story by choosing how they would like a particular conflict to be resolved. When the reader has made a decision (e.g. by jumping to a particular page in the book or by clicking on a hyperlink if the story is presented digitally), they can then see the consequence of their choice and proceed to the next conflict, or undo their decision and explore other options. In this pilot at the School of Modern Languages (Newcastle University), a digital choose-your-own-adventure story was developed to provide students preparing for their year abroad an opportunity to simulate the first week in the German host culture. Through the eyes of a protagonist, learners encounter common practical, linguistic, emotional and intercultural adjustment challenges and learn about strategies to cope with them. For many of these challenges, learners are given two or three options for action via hyperlinks. Clicking on them takes them to the respective outcome. Learners receive feedback and information on the conflict as well as on coping strategies immediately after the conflict has been resolved.

The resource is primarily text-based and was created using PowerPoint. The program's SmartArt feature was used to create a branching scenario structure for each conflict and hyperlinks were used to create interactivity. Multimedia content was added where central to the conflict (e.g. audio examples of dialect where the conflict revolved around the protagonist's 'dialect anxiety'). The learning resource was created to supplement the institution's preparation program which focuses more on logistical aspects of the year abroad and is typically delivered in a lecture-format. Informed by research on the use of interactive fiction in educational settings such as Baldwin & Ching (2017), Jenkins (2014), Flynn & Hardman (2019), Pereira (2013), and Neville et al. (2009), the author argued that an interactive story could help learners engage with their year abroad preparation more deeply by having to make decisions actively when engaging with the content, rather than being passive recipients of information. In addition, the story format allows for contextualization of information, for immersion in a simulated world, and for identification with a protagonist who shares the same objectives, motivations, and insecurities as the intended audience.

The pilot of this project in February 2021 focused on collecting data about the learners' perception of the digital interactive story. 14 students worked through the story individually

and completed a questionnaire based on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). The results were positive throughout all four indicators (Perceived Ease of Use, Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Enjoyment, Intention to Use). Limitations arise from the small sample size and an unbalanced number of items across indicators which will need to be adjusted in the second trial. The generally positive feedback to the pilot, however, justifies exploring the potential of this learning resource further in order to better understand the efficacy of interactive fiction with regards to the preparation efforts of students going on their year abroad.

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