

**SEEKING SELF-EFFICACY AND PROFICIENCY IN THE STUDY ABROAD ADVENTURE:
THE CASE OF STUDENTS FROM UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON AND KWAME
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Abstract: While advances in the science and technology of learning foreign languages, particularly second languages, have been made, it is important not to lose sight of the role that personal motivation, self-efficacy, socioeconomic, political, and related factors play in the life of the language learner and how these factors affect the overall language learning process. Many Ghanaian students on Study Abroad to Benin, France and Spain carry along their socio-cultural socialising traits into the foreign lands that they find themselves in, and the question which arises is how they are able to navigate this critical stage of their lives and at the same time succeed in their self-efficacy of learning a foreign language. This article seeks to analyse how these extra societal matters affect the learning experience of Study Abroad students and to determine to what extent these factors affect the acquisition of the language they are to study in abroad. The study argues that these factors that are mainly glossed over in the Study Abroad literature, are a significant part of the learning process and when these are properly handled, the results would be significant, as most of the students who maintain a balance between these factors and their studies soon become more literate in the foreign languages they chose to study.

Keywords: study abroad, foreign language learning, self-efficacy, zone of proximal development (ZPD)

**RECHERCHE D'AUTO-EFFICACITÉ ET DE COMPÉTENCE DANS L'AVENTURE DES
ÉTUDES A L'ÉTRANGER : LE CAS DES ÉTUDIANTS D'UNIVERSITY OF GHANA,
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TECHNOLOGY, KUMASI**

Résumé : Alors que des progrès ont été réalisés dans la science et la technologie de l'apprentissage des langues étrangères et en particulier dans les langues secondes, il est important de ne pas perdre de vue le rôle que jouent la motivation personnelle, l'efficacité personnelle, les facteurs socio-économiques, politiques et les autres facteurs connexes dans la vie de l'apprenant en langues et la façon dont ces facteurs affectent le processus global d'apprentissage des langues. De nombreux étudiants ghanéens effectuant un séjour d'études à l'étranger au Bénin, en France ou en Espagne, emportent avec eux, leurs traits socioculturels de socialisation dans les pays étrangers. Dès lors la question qui se pose est de savoir comment ils sont capables de traverser cette étape critique de leur vie et en même temps de réussir leur auto-efficacité dans l'apprentissage d'une langue étrangère. Cet

article cherche à analyser la façon dont ces facteurs sociaux affectent les expériences d'apprentissage des étudiants à l'étranger et à déterminer dans quelle mesure ces facteurs affectent l'acquisition de la langue dont ils sont censés étudier à l'étranger. L'étude fait valoir que ces facteurs, qui sont principalement négligés dans la littérature sur les études à l'étranger, constituent une partie importante du processus d'apprentissage et que, lorsqu'ils sont abordés adéquatement, les résultats seraient importants, car la plupart des étudiants qui maintiennent un équilibre entre ces facteurs et leurs études, deviennent plus compétents dans les langues étrangères qu'ils ont choisies d'étudier.

Mots-clés : études à l'étranger, apprentissage des langues étrangères, auto-efficacité, zone proximale de développement (ZPD).

Introduction

The benefits of learning a foreign language (FL) have been touted in many respects and over the years, these advantages have expanded and broadened. Some of these include broadening of one's knowledge base and the perception of other people, efficient interpersonal communication, promotion of an interdisciplinary perspective and the provision of intercultural understanding which is essential in fostering respect among people. These benefits on personal and societal levels are extended to national levels where foreign language learning enhances better cooperative relations between countries. Language learning may be a social-psychological phenomenon, according to studies by Gardner (1985) and Khalid (2016). Khalid (2016) argued that it was important to pay close attention to the conditions surrounding language learning environments. Language has been identified as occupying a substantial portion of the individual's social being and, in most circumstances, a key part of the ecology that separates one individual from the other, as supported by the existing literatures on Foreign Language Learning (FLL). Therefore, learning a foreign language includes more than just developing one's oral language skills and mastering a set of grammatical rules; it also involves altering and transforming one's self-image (self-efficacy in this context). According to Khalid's (2016) recommendations, the language learner must go through a number of processes, such as adopting the sociocultural and behavioural patterns and ways of being of this language (Khalid, 2016). The definition of foreign language given by Moeller & Catalano (2015), is the basis of our journey to the analysis of the benefits of foreign language learning. In their definition of foreign language learning, Moeller & Catalano (2015), indicate that it is a process of "learning a non-native language outside the territory where it is usually spoken". Various scholars have put forward arguments that suggest a distinction between *foreign language learning* and *second language acquisition* indicating that, whereas foreign language learning may denote learning that takes place in a formal classroom setting, the latter denotes language learning without the traditional classroom setting and may usually be used to signify learning within the native community where the language is commonly spoken. While studying abroad offers students a special opportunity to improve their self-efficacy and proficiency, it can also present a number of challenges that can impact their progress. Despite the increasing popularity of study abroad programmes among students at the University of Ghana (UG), Legon, and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi, there has been little research on the factors that contribute

to students' self-efficacy and proficiency in these programmes. What then are the benefits of learning a foreign language? How does the individual learner navigate issues of adaptability and challenging differences in socioeconomic, cultural and political norms and self-efface in order to benefit from the Study Abroad (S. A.) experience. The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between seeking self-efficacy and proficiency in the study abroad adventure for students from UG, Legon and KNUST, Kumasi. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring how Ghanaian study abroad students' pre-departure preparation, host institution support, and cultural immersion experiences impact their perceived self-efficacy and proficiency in the study abroad adventure. It also seeks to find out to what extent they are able to create and maintain healthy social relationships that would enable them to build self-esteem, reduce their fears and be able to self-efface in the new environment they find themselves and excel in their studies. Hypothesising that study abroad students from both universities could be facing challenges and hence might need some support, this paper leans on the following research questions: What factors influence a student's capacity to pursue self-efficacy and competency while studying abroad? What challenges do students from the University of Ghana, Legon, and the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi encounter when studying abroad, and how do these difficulties affect their capacity to attain self-efficacy and proficiency?

1. Attitudes and Language Learning

According to Krosnick, Judd, and Wittenbrink (2005) assert that the tendency for an individual to tend to like or dislike an event or an object defines their attitude toward this object. This like or dislike produces the capacity or the ability in an individual to approach this object or decide to avoid it completely. The works of Allport (1935), cited by Hogg and Vaughan (2018:154), attitudes in general can be defined as "a mental and neural state of readiness, organised through experience, exerting a direct or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related". This definition emphasises the mental and neural readiness of people towards a particular task. This readiness will influence the person's response to whatever task that they must perform. In language learning circles, attitudes towards leaning and perception towards the language to be learned is very crucial in achieving a learning change in behaviour or experience. For Ajzen (1991), attitude could be defined as "the degree of a person's favourable or unfavourable evaluation or appraisal of the behaviour in question". In this context, a person's attitude or reaction towards a 'social' object stems from his consideration of such an object as favourable or unfavourable to him or her. That is, the extent of favour or disfavour that the person derives from an event would determine the rate of reaction of the person towards such an occurrence.

For their part, Hogg and Vaughan (2018:154) describe attitudes as "the relatively enduring organisation of beliefs, feelings and behavioural tendencies towards socially significant objects, groups, events, or symbols". This definition takes into cognisance the deliberate need for an individual to have an enduring approach to socially significant objects; that is, the individual should have a sustained desire to pursue something. In this context of language learning the individuals have decided to pick up an object worth their pursuit and then leave their comfort zones to follow it in order to articulate their self-efficacy in learning a language. One important aspect of this definition is the push and pull factor that undergird the one'

approach to a socially significant object. The suggested definitions above have in one way or the other explained the concept of attitude as the tendency of an individual to be in a state of having a positive or negative reaction or approach towards a social object—a negative reaction makes people withdraw and a positive one draws people to objects. According to Eagly and Chaiken (1998), attitude may be divided into emotional, behavioural, and cognitive components. According to them, the conative or behavioural relates to a person's behaviour towards an object, while the affective includes a person's emotional responses and the cognitive their belief systems. Language study in the domestic context as well as in the Study Abroad context is influenced by the attitude with which the learner comes to the language learning classroom. McKenzie (2010) calls it the stimuli level of the learner and adds that the extent to which the individual is motivated to learn a language depends on “context factors” and the individual's classification of “stimuli into dimensions such as good /bad or friendly or hostile” (p. 24). To him, attitudes are the basis on which what is called “a cognitive schema” is built and developed. Once this important basis is developed, an individual language learner can “categorise and cope with an otherwise complex and ambiguous environment.

One other important value of attitudes as stated by McKenzie (2010) is that they could occupy “a utilitarian function where individuals can maximise their rewards and effectively avoid punishment” (p. 24). This observation is relevant in the Study Abroad context since a good notion of what rewards one gets in the study of a particular aspect of language is tied to the kind of value the person places in this aspect. For example, if a language learner has a positive attitude towards learning the vocabulary in a certain domain such as the restaurant, and goes their way to acquire it, they would be glad to use it when they find themselves in a restaurant in a foreign land where the foreign language learnt comes to play. This becomes the intrinsic reward for the positive attitude they had while the reverse could also be true. The social value of attitudes is also highlighted by McKenzie (2010). In this work, he suggests that, attitudes can play a vital role in socialising and identifying the language learner—a social identity function—and defines it as the situation in which “the expression of an attitude may affirm the central values of the individual” (McKenzie, 2010:25). This is another relevant importance of attitudes in the context of the Study Abroad programme. The other aspects of this socialising and identifying value of attitudes capture what this study seeks to find out: “aid the maintenance of social relationships, maintain self-esteem, reduce inner fear and conflict or cope with threats to self” (McKenzie, 2010: 25).

The language level that is already attained by the student embarking on Study Abroad is key in the process of them benefiting from the acculturation process of the country of arrival. For the student to be able to identify/recognise themselves and be able to ‘package’ this ‘product’ and be able to sell it to people of the country of arrival, a certain degree of competence is needed in the target language. The point about ‘self-concept’ is also important, as it has to be developed and maintained at the same time. For a student to be able to portray a certain kind of identity and be able to maintain it, s/he needs to be able to communicate this identity. The question arises as to what happens when the concept of self is not developed? One of the participants called Awo, had this encounter with a caterer where she lodged during her stay abroad:

- “Madame, qu’est-ce que tu manges ? On m’a dit que tu es au régime ? Et aussi que tu manges pas certaines choses? C’est vrai?
 -je ne comprends pas. Régime? Non, je ne suis pas politicien.
 -ok, parle-moi de ta religion. Quelles croyances et pratiques religieuses as-tu?
 -Please do you speak some English?
 -ok, later, eat this food and je vais voir après si je peux t’aider.”

Awo is not so competent in spoken French and did not speak the Ewe language which is close to the Fon language spoken in Benin. She was asked on her arrival what her dietary needs were and what her beliefs systems were so that a more suitable dietary regime would be conceived for her. She had challenges because she could not express herself in either French or Fon. As it were, this student did not possess the right words to express who she is, in terms of food and religion, and she had a traumatic experience from day one. In other words, even though she was self-aware and had the concept of who she is, she could not express it well in the foreign language for people to help her. It is important to note that Awo was not only unable to communicate her desires because of her language restrictions, there were other linguistics and socio-psychological factors. Coleman indicates that in most of the cases, language be a standalone in the Study Abroad context. Language, in this case, the language that the learners are there to learn has to “act in concert with other communicative channels such as facial expressions, gestures...” (p. 321). In the case above, Awo could have benefitted from gestures and facial expressions relatable to the language of study, in this case, French, but since her competency was limited, she could not benefit from these too. Facial expressions and gestures are very important tools in the hands of the language learner and when it comes to a beginner of language learning, it is even more crucial as these gestures and facial expressions, help the learner to understand the language without detailed explanations. In one of the earliest empirical study on the influence of gestures on learning, Quinn-Allen (1995) made use of cultural gestures to illustrate the sentence’s semantics, and this helped the learners of French to appreciate what they were learning and hence enhanced their comprehension on the topic.

Research into teaching in the modern foreign language classroom has sought to understand what sustains the learner and the learning process. And even more, what would push a language learner to seek to go outside the classroom to the domain of the language on a Study Abroad. Many researchers have attributed this *push* to motivation and attitude (Latchanna & Dagneu, 2009; Lennartsson, 2008). This study pushes beyond the motivation for a foreign language learning to self-efficacy and beyond to social and ecological factors that are paramount in the Study Abroad context. We define self-efficacy as that moment when a language learner appreciates the fact that his or her needs are being addressed during the learning process, and feels confident in applying the language skills they have learned to their daily lives.

2. Methodological approach

This study was based on qualitative research approach where primary data and information were collected from the participants through interviews that were recorded and analysed qualitatively by applying the theory of motivation, attitudes to learning and the theory of self-efficacy in language learning. Purposive and simple random sampling were used to get

20 students who were reading either French or Spanish in either the University of Ghana, Legon or the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi.

2.1 Data collection and analysis

This research was conducted using interviews with 20 students who had been on a Study Abroad programme to Spain, France, or Benin. Participants' ages range from 21-26 years and had 10 males and 10 females. Questions bordering on the preparations that students made before the Study Abroad programme to what motivated their studies were asked. Sample questions were—how was your preparation towards the Study Abroad? Was getting some money for the journey a factor? What was your motivation for the Study Abroad? Was the year away from studies a factor you considered? What about your colleagues finishing and becoming Teaching Assistants (TAs) and teaching you when you come back, were you comfortable learning from them? Participants were also asked to recount the reception they got on their arrival to the place of study and explain to researchers the impact this had on their motivation to learn the language they went to learn. This was to identify if participants developed positive attitudes or not and if it was dependent on their expectations. Participant's answers were analysed using the theory of motivation, attitudes to learning and self-efficacy to draw out students' hypothesis about the Study Abroad process and the expectations at the end of the one to nine months period of study. This method had the advantage of enabling students explain in detail and to provide sincere answers to the questions posed by the researchers about their Study Abroad experience and also the fact that their experiences are documented for the improvement of the Study Abroad programme in Ghana.

2.2 Results and discussions

Discussions with students in the Spanish and French classes at levels 300 and 400 have revealed that most students find language learning as a challenging task to accomplish. One noteworthy statement made by a student studying Spanish as a second language (with French as his L1) during the process of gathering opinions and data for this research is as follows: *qu'est-ce que je vais faire avec l'espagnol? C'est même trop difficile* (what would I use Spanish for, it's even too difficult to study). From this remark, two important preoccupations can be deduced for this candidate. The confirmation of the perception that foreign languages are difficult to learn and the fact that the motivation to learn this language might not be there. He makes very significant points here, as he says there was no reason for him to continue to make the effort to study the language. From the tone of what he says, he had made a deliberate effort to learn the target language, but all efforts are not yielding any fruits and hence the 'blurted out' of the question, *what would I do with Spanish?* This student has been demotivated because the target language does not seem prospective enough to him and what compounds the situation is the challenge of the 'difficulty' of the language. Whether this an assumption is true or not, this student would not benefit from the experience of the Study Abroad programme, as his colleagues would, because his journey of perfecting his language skills in the foreign language, seems to be already cut short with two strong demotivating factors as corroborated by Gardner and Lambert (1972). These early researchers of second language acquisition posit that foreign language learners with positive attitudes are more successful than those with negative attitudes. (Gardner

and Lambert, 1972). Likewise in his later work, Gardner suggests that there are high possibilities that those second language learners who are positively disposed to the learning process of the foreign language and its culture are better placed to acquire language skills than those who do not have such positive attitudes (Gardner, 1985).

For a student studying language to embark on the process of going to Study Abroad entails a huge commitment on the part of this individual. In Ghana for instance, this commitment ranges from forfeiting between six months to a whole year of their study period. In the University of Ghana, Legon (UG), it makes the total study period of a Bachelor's degree for these students extend to five years, making these students who went on Study Abroad programme to end up graduating a year after their course mates. These course mates sometimes become Teaching Assistants (TAs) and even having the opportunity to tutor these students in other courses, on their return. Other challenges include financing the whole process of the Study Abroad; –from getting a passport, translation of documents and legalisation of same. In the interview carried out, the whole adventure begins in the psyche of these students—most students mentioned the fact that they needed to ask themselves if they were ready to have their former mates to teach them on their return. Adama, a student of French in the UG, who went to Benin on Government of Ghana scholarship indicates:

I started asking myself the question from the first day, whether I will have to go for a whole year and whether some of my mates who will not go on year abroad would become TAs when I get back. It's not the idea of them being a TA that bothers me but the fact that most of them were not even at a good competence level and hence did not get the opportunity to be selected to go for the Study Abroad programme.

Adama has captured in the above realities that confront the structure of some study abroad programmes in some universities, not only in Ghana but in other parts of the world. In some universities in Ghana, those who are selected to go for the Study Abroad must have attained a certain grade for selection into the programme, hence the possibility of those not making the cut, remaining and graduating with the language and becoming TAs. The reality sometimes is that, in the third year, some students are stuck with the courses that they have to offer since some other courses are challenging or they are getting bad grades in those and hence they choose the less challenging. This situation of getting a bad TA sometimes brings insubordination in the classroom. Adama's other concern was the fact that she will be behind for “a whole year” as she puts it. The idea of putting one's education on hold for one year to pursue a foreign language that one is not sure of its use and value in the future, puts a psychological strain on those going for the Study Abroad programme. This is however not the case of the students of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi (KNUST), as the Study Abroad programme is part of the 4-year period needed to acquire a Bachelor's degree. These students, from the beginning of the programme know it is compulsory to go on a Study Abroad programme in order to earn a Bachelor's degree in French.

Many Study Abroad students experience huge levels of anxiety before embarking on the programme. From the data gathered, 20 students from both universities expressed the psychological trauma they had to go through to beat deadlines before they finally went abroad. The level of psychological trauma differs among students. It was realised that, students who went

to Spain and France, went through more stress in acquiring the necessary documentation as compared to those who went to Benin. These challenges stem from unpreparedness to not having the right information to adequately prepare for the trip. Evans from UG, complained of not having a passport before completing level 300 but having been selected to go for Study Abroad in Spain. He started the process and realised that for the passport to be issued in time for him to fulfil other process such as legalisation, getting an appointment and finally applying for the visa, he needed to ‘tip’ people along the way. The cost involved in the translation and legalisation of documents was in many instances, not known until the time for the Study Abroad and so, many students in Ghana had to rely on loans and assistance from their parents and family members. The challenge here is the fact that most of these students most often, abandon the whole idea of going for Study Abroad because they could not finance the cost involved in the process.

Evans stated:

I made a mistake, and I didn’t get a passport after completing my second year. When the time came for the Study Abroad, I had to be running to the passport office, pay for express, tip some people, and then had to observe the long wait. For the translation and legalisation of my documents, I had to ask my parents for money. They did not have either, but I was fortunate to have an aunt who came back to Ghana at the time, and she used her dollars. You know she changed a few dollars, and I was okay.

Evans’ story of not having money to be able to afford the whole process of Study Abroad is not an isolated case. Doreen indicates that she had to abandon the whole idea of going for the Study Abroad because she could not afford the processes. Her breakthrough was however the uncle who also came to Ghana just at the time the rest were about to go, but she faced the challenge of late passport, late translation of her documents, late appointment time and late visa application. These challenging issues sometimes have created psychological hedge among students going for Study Abroad programmes. Those students with the wherewithal to pay for their processes now begin to see those who ‘struggled’ through the process as ‘dependents’. Esi remarked that one of her colleagues who ‘connected’ her to a translator and judicial service employee now sees her (Esi) as ‘someone who does not know anyone and hence, talks to her (Esi) anyhow. She recounts: “one day when I was chatting with her, she said, “shut up, shut up, when people who know people in high places are talking those who do not have links should not talk since, they don’t know anything”. The question we ask is, how could such students connect socially with their colleagues and self-efface when it comes to the Study Abroad experience? We intimated earlier that, aside the role that personal motivation in the Study Abroad plays, students should be able to ‘master’ related factors that leaners are confronted with in their journey as language learners. Lev Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development ZPD comes to mind here. The zone of proximal development (ZPD) has been defined as: “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 131). Thus, the ZPD calls for an approximation of learner’s knowledge with that of a ‘more knowledgeable’ peer that he feels comfortable with in order to develop his or her own comprehension of the ‘higher’ topic being taught. In the context

above, the knowledgeable peer is not ready to help in the learning process and hence the adult learner is not capable of building on the knowledge of the peer(s). Three of the participants (Kojo, Nii Anang, Edna) narrated how they felt being in the same class with those who were always putting them down in class—manifested mainly through their body language and behaviour towards them. Aspects of Kojo’s version is captured here:

When the levels for each class was determined, and I found myself in the same class with Japheth I was not happy. He is always asking and answering questions in class. He always tells us ‘on n’apprend pas une langue, on est né avec’ and I am always disgusted when he keeps repeating to those of us making the efforts to speak, on est né avec.

Kojo’s case is a classical one of one of the many challenges that confront the learner on Study Abroad. This challenge has been glossed over in the literature and from many stories recounted by students, some students even came back with a rebellious attitude towards the language and those who spoke it. Just as the student who did not know what to do with Spanish discussed earlier and hence was not motivated enough to learn it, these students who, instead of benefiting from the ZPD, but are rather victims of the advantages of the ZPD, do not last long with the language. For her part, Edna was awash with stories of former Study Abroad participants in Spain who could not benefit from their stay abroad because of conflicts they had with some of their fellow students. Some were tagged as either too knowing or favourites of the lecturers. She mentioned that the fear of this repeating itself drove her into solitude. This posture definitely affects the student’s self-efficacy and ability to benefit from the Study Abroad experience. Most of these participants had high self-efficacy levels as they started the Study Abroad adventure and as the literature indicates, it is expected that these individuals would perform well in their quest to perfection their competence level in the foreign language, however, the expected performance during and after was not met.

-Some social and ecological considerations

Faith and a place of worship drives the Study Abroad experience. Among all the students interviewed, more than half explained the fact that their faith and getting a place of worship to freely express their belief influenced their self-efficacy and their Study Abroad language proficiency achievement. Saint, a catholic by faith and practice went to Spain armed with the rich history of Spain and the Catholic Monarchs thinking that he would meet Catholics everywhere and he will be able to build his faith:

I went to Spain with the history lesson taught by my lecturer at UG knowing that Catholicism was very common in Spain to the extent that some of them are called Jesus made me feel so comfortable and with the belief that I will be able to freely practice my faith, grow in it and have the peace of mind to improve my Spanish. I was imagining listening to the sermon each day in Spanish and having people of similar faith share in various ideas about life—all in the Spanish language. My expectations were however not fully met when I got there and realised that people had their own views about religion.

Saint's comment shows the influence of one social factor: going to church and practicing faith. His desire for a Study Abroad in Spain was partly motivated by information he got from his first-year Spanish history class about his faith—the fact that in Spain, almost everyone is Catholic, but the reality he got on the grounds did not match his expectations. He indicated that at some point, his desire to listen to sermons preached in Spanish and he, practicing with other like-minded Catholics affected his self-efficacy a little bit but he was lucky to have found one devout Catholic who was ready to take him out, speak to him only in Spanish and help him with his assignments. It is very important to highlight the importance of this stop-gap person that 'rescued' the dreadful situation Saint would have found himself in, in the process of accomplishing his desires to study Spanish. He indicated thus "my expectations were however not fully met when I got there and realised that people had their own views about religion". All the hopes, desires, and aspirations he had while emplaning to Spain were about to collapse in front of him just because of one social situation. But with the stop-gap person, he was able to fulfil two big desires, self-efficacy and his language proficiency goals, thus, such a factor should be taken into consideration when reviewing the language proficiency success and self-efficacy of students on Study Abroad.

Another student's self-efficacy and belief was also affected negatively when she was constantly recalling the 'untrue' stories the grandmother told her about other religions—that 'when you hear people chanting, they are coming for you in the night. They will carry your spirit. They will feed you with food in your dreams'. Sandra lived in a shared apartment with a landlady in Spain and she was always chanting and reciting verses and Sandra thought, as her grandmother said, she would be fed in the night and her spirit would be carried away. Her self-confidence and self-efficacy was completely eroded. The thought of being carried away haunted her and it persisted with Sandra and affected her academic work at school. She could barely concentrate in her Spanish writing and composition class. She could not make much input into her oral classes since she was daydreaming of the chanting landlady. At the first session of classes, Sandra came out as the worst performing student in her language class. She spoke to a friend of hers from Ghana who explained to her that the landlady was practicing her religion and that she would not attack her or feed her in her sleep. This got Sandra to have her mental health was restored. This got her to sleep better and become more relax to participate actively in her language classes. This is the extent that ecological factors can affect language competency and self-efficacy on the Study Abroad programme.

-Language teachers

Students on the Study Abroad programme sometimes just abandon the programme because of challenges with the teachers. Kofi, one of the participants who went to Benin had a challenge with the pronunciation and intonation of the teacher assigned to their class and he asked the teacher to pronounce words 'well' and take her time when she is talking so he could hear her well, and the request became a sort of 'challenge' to the teacher. The teacher felt he was challenging her way of teaching and at the same time her personality. Kofi was not called to answer questions in class and when the matter was reported to the Director of the Language centre. This became a case classified as a case of a foreign student disrespecting the language

teacher. Kofi's self-confidence dipped, and his self-efficacy was at the lowest level. He explains how he felt:

I thought it was usual to ask a question, a harmless question such as could you amplify your volume a bit because I could not hear you and could you please slowly pronounce your words so I could hear them? But that was not the case. I was totally devastated. Class days were terrible days for me. I just did not want to go to class. I often told myself, they should take their French; I wanted to go back home.

Kofi's last sentence clearly shows his state of confusion while on Study Abroad. Kofi did not complete the programme but came back to Ghana after just 4 months out of the 9 months. He informed us that a similar situation occurred with another student two years earlier with another teacher. Another student who also went to Benin, did not have the opportunity to return to Ghana. He skipped lessons because the teacher assigned to teach Oral expression in his class, always made him feel he was not making any efforts in class. The teacher made comments which embarrassed him. He stopped attending lectures and in the end returned to Ghana with poor grades which affected him.

-Gastronomy

Going on adventure also means developing a stomach that is not so sensitive. Ghanaian students on Study Abroad in Benin, Spain as well as in France have confirmed the shock and diarrhoea issues they had with the food they had to adapt to. This shock is because they attempted to replay or recreate the food culture and eating behaviour patterns they had at home, and they were largely accustomed to. Students on Study Abroad usually forget that countries have their own food culture and food recipes are largely different from country to country. The frequent stomach aches, the free bowels and the severe diarrhoea that these students experienced, affect their studies. James lost the first week of class in Spain because he heard about the famous Spanish food called paella (which to him was like the normal jollof rice of Ghana), and he ate it to his satisfaction the first week he got to Spain, but his stomach reacted to the food. He had to stay off classes for one week. His absence from class really affected his performance in the first in-class test. His confidence and self-efficacy were greatly affected in the first two weeks. Nana Ama had similar experiences in France. She was not used to a lot of food served in the school's restaurant. The experience for Akua who went to Benin, was not different from the other two participants above. She fell ill after eating a meal she had never eaten and had to be out of class for some days. She was lucky however, when she found similar ingredients from Ghana which she could easily use in preparing her own meals. These observations are corroborated in the literature on food and Study Abroad. Wertz (2021: 2) indicates that "the variety of differences to overcome in terms of food may be overwhelming for students. If students have trouble adapting to a different way of eating, they may develop negative attitudes towards food and therefore their overall Study Abroad experience". The last part of this quotation explains a challenging part of the experience— the hypothesis that students may develop negative attitudes towards food. When food is said to be part of the Study Abroad experience, a negative attitude towards food would negatively impact the general health and wellbeing of the students. The second part of the 'hard experience' is the development of an

overall negative Study Abroad experience. Food and the issue of food culture is a major ecological factor in the Study Abroad experience.

-Lifestyle issues

One key factor that was mentioned by about 50 percent of the students interviewed is the challenge of coping with the lifestyle of friends and colleagues on the Study Abroad programme. In the case of students who go especially to Benin and those who were sponsored by the government of Ghana to go to Spain, there were cases of some rich students having more money to buy certain items and hence were admired by others when they went out. Most of the students who went to Benin confirmed that there exists some form of competition in fashion among Study Abroad students from KNUST and UG; students spent time to display the latest fashion instead of focusing on the reason they went on Study Abroad. Kate confirmed that she had a roommate that had the latest Nike shoes before they got to Benin and she had been wondering when she would also get money to buy such shoes since people had started referring to her roommate as ‘your roommate with the nike shoes’. She got embarrassed one day when her roommate asked her “when you don’t dress like me or buy some of the things I buy, how do you feel as my roommate?” This question made her crestfallen, and her self-esteem and self-efficacy were eroded completely. Kate felt depaysée and did not enjoy the rest of the Study Abroad programme. She indicated that she was very lucky that they were in the 6th month of studies in Benin so she only had to endure 3 months of being labelled a poor girl. She adopted the attitude of staying late in school and learning more—that was what helped her language competence skills. Aillen was another student who had to go through this unpleasant situation of being considered a poor girl. She however did not want to comment on it but commented on how the interpersonal competition became an unhealthy interschool and intra-school segregation. She recounts that this segregation and competition among people to ‘outdress’ each other became very unhealthy that those who were from the less endowed families segregated to one side and those from the rich families were also on one side. The intra-school segregation and inter-school segregation was the worse that happened—all this to the detriment of the Study Abroad programme and a fall in their competency level in the language. Aillen mentioned that the unhealthy competition got to the extent that people were rubbishing the underwear of their friends. They say things like, ‘buy proper panties, those ones are too cheap and too nylon’. And the male students would tease each other with expressions such as “*nylon boxer shorts, buy some cotton. Please buy a white boxer short, those are more expensive and durable not those colour riots*”. This unhealthy competition, as trivial as it looked was mentioned by more than half of the students that were interviewed. This shows how important this factor is in the Study Abroad programme for students and the need for this issue to be unearthed and addressed.

Conclusion

The results of this research show that many socio-cultural and political situations make the Study Abroad experience challenging and that students did not really anticipate some of these challenges. This is evident in the responses given by the majority of students interviewed. They experienced some reduction in the level in self-efficacy. It is recommended that language teachers would explain to students the prospects and possibilities that exist with the study of a

particular foreign language in order to help them better prepare for any study abroad. Students going on a study abroad programme need to understand or anticipate the presence of some sociocultural factors which influence the experience of perfecting the proficiency level in a foreign language. The research suggested some ways of dealing with these unexpected events will be a valuable piece of information for future Study Abroad students.

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