

“What Slowly Kills Me and Frustrates Me is...” Study Abroad during COVID-19: Student Narratives of Space, Language Contact, and Individual Agency

DOI: 10.26379/IL2021002_002

Anne Marie Devlin

University College Cork

amdevlin@ucc.ie

Annarita Magliacane

University of Liverpool

A.Magliacane@liverpool.ac.uk

Abstract

International Student Mobility (ISM) has always been positioned as a desirable element of the student experience and is portrayed as beneficial in terms of the expansion of linguistic repertoires, increased awareness of interculturality, and the acquisition of transferable skills for long-term career prospects. However, while the opportunities for student mobility proliferated over the last three decades (Calderon 2018), ISM has been hugely disrupted by COVID-19 with many programmes pivoting to online, campuses essentially closing and restrictions placed on movement and access to spaces. While the impact of this on the number of students travelling has been negative (de Wit/Marinoni 2021), the pandemic also had repercussions for those who decided to embark on international mobility as it has affected the where, who, why, and how of interaction during the sojourn. In light of this, this study explores, from a longitudinal, narrative inquiry perspective, the experiences of eight Study Abroad/International students for whom language development was a major catalyst for participating in a student mobility programme. Previous research has highlighted that linguistic gains are often predicated on exposure to intense and diverse social interactions while abroad (Dewey et al. 2013; Baten 2020). Given the unique nature of the pandemic, the current study broadens the scope of traditional research by illuminating, following Benson (2021a), how differential interaction with physical and socially-constructed spaces impacted not only language development but also learner agency.

Keywords

study abroad, student mobility, COVID-19, space, learner agency, language, contact