Individual differences in cultural learning and pragmatic development on study abroad: Insights from the participants of a web-based in-sojourn course.

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This study investigates the relationship between individual differences in motivation and anxiety, cultural learning, and pragma-linguistic development during study abroad. The participants (N = 26) were German students of English as a foreign language on a study abroad program in an English-speaking country. While abroad, the students were enrolled in an innovative web-based course designed to support their cultural and pragmatic/linguistic learning. The course followed the structure of a reflective cycle: the students were made aware of the language and cultural learning possibilities offered by the study abroad context. They then engaged in a series of activities that pushed them to seek out opportunities to use English to communicate with native speakers in a variety of situations and collect language data through observation. Finally, they were invited to reflect on their experiences, both cultural and linguistic, by comparing and contrasting their findings to their native language and culture. All the participants took two pragmatic tests two weeks before they started the study abroad program and then two weeks after their return. In addition, they also filled out two questionnaires measuring anxiety and motivation. Our preliminary findings indicate that the students welcomed the opportunity to take part in a course that led them through some of their cultural and linguistic discoveries while abroad. In terms of individual differences we found that students with higher levels of motivation and higher levels of input anxiety were more conscious of the many language learning opportunities in a study abroad context than those students who were less motivated. In addition, students with significantly higher levels of output anxiety reported that the tasks were crucial to their linguistic and cultural development as they pushed them to engage in communicative situations that they otherwise would have avoided.