



Universitat de Lleida

L2 reading and vocabulary development as a result of a Study Abroad experience

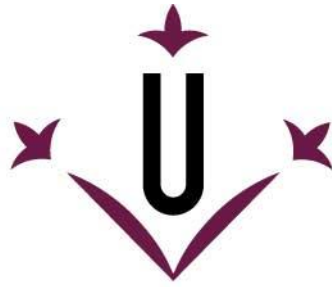
Judith Borràs Andrés

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Universitat de Lleida

TESI DOCTORAL

**L2 reading and vocabulary development as a
result of a Study Abroad experience**

Judith Borràs Andrés

Memòria presentada per optar al grau de Doctor per la Universitat de
Lleida

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"Be yourself, not what the world wants you to be"

— Sara Shepard

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ABSTRACT

Driven by the belief that living and studying in a foreign country offer the most optimal conditions for second language (L2) development, study abroad (SA) has become a reality for many students (Kinging, 2009). However, there are still many gaps within SA research, which sometimes lead to inconclusive findings. First, not all L2 areas have been studied to the same extent, for example, research on the impact that SA has on L2 reading or L2 vocabulary remain uncertain. Moreover, while some types of SA experiences have received a fair amount of attention (e.g. semester-long stays in the target country), others remain rather under-researched (e.g. short-term stays or SA in an English as a Lingua Franca setting).

The present dissertation aimed at filling some of the aforementioned gaps in an attempt to provide more knowledge to the impact that a SA has on L2 development. Accordingly, it examined the linguistic impact that three different SA experiences had over the L2 reading comprehension and fluency, and L2 receptive and productive vocabulary development of three different groups of participants. The SA experiences included in the project are: a group of teenagers who performed a short (3-week) SA in Ireland (n= 52), and two groups of undergraduate students who participated in a semester-long traditional SA in an Anglophone country (n= 31), or in a semester-long SA in a non-Anglophone country (n= 20). All the students took part in a pre-post experiment during which they were asked to complete four language tasks: a reading passage, the Updated Vocabulary Levels Test, a written task, and the Oxford Quick Placement test. Moreover, the teenage group engaged in some semi-structured interviews, and the two groups of university students completed an online questionnaire.

Results indicate that performing a SA can be beneficial, although linguistic outcomes will vary depending on the SA experience and the skill under-study. For example, reading comprehension and receptive vocabulary seem to be more susceptible to gains than reading fluency or productive vocabulary, which need extensive practise and more time to develop. Two other interesting findings are that SA can be beneficial even when short and that traditional SA does not seem to differ greatly from performing a stay in an ELF country.

Keywords: learning context; study abroad; reading; vocabulary; ELFSA; language use

RESUM

Conduïts per la creença que viure i estudiar en un país estranger ofereix les millors condicions per a l'aprenentatge d'una segona llengua (L2), estudiar a l'estranger s'ha convertit en una realitat per a molts estudiants (Kinging, 2009). Tot i així, dins de la recerca de les estades a l'estranger existeixen diferents buits que fan que, a vegades, sigui difícil trobar conclusions definitives. Primer, no totes les àrees de la llengua han estat investigades de la mateixa manera. Per exemple, la recerca sobre el desenvolupament de la lectura i el vocabulari es manté incerta. A més, mentre que algun tipus d'estades han rebut molta atenció per part dels investigadors (p. ex. estades d'un semestre de durada, estades al país on es parla la L2), altres es mantenen poc estudiades (p. ex. estades curtes, o estades en un país on l'anglès s'utilitza com a llengua franca).

Aquesta tesi té l'objectiu d'omplir alguns d'aquests buits en un intent de contribuir al coneixement de les estades a l'estranger. Així, examina l'impacte lingüístic que tres estades a l'estranger han tingut sobre la comprensió i fluïdesa lectora, i el vocabulari receptiu i productiu de tres grups d'estudiants. Les estades incloses en l'estudi són: un grup d'adolescents que va realitzar una estada curta (3 setmanes) a Irlanda (n= 52), i dos grups d'universitaris que van estudiar a l'estranger durant un semestre en un país de parla anglesa (n= 31) o en un país on l'anglès s'utilitzava com a llengua franca (n= 20). Tots els estudiants van participar en un experiment abans i després de la seva experiència a l'estranger, durant el qual van realitzar quatre proves de llengua: lectura d'un text, l'Updated Vocabulary Levels Test, una redacció, i l'Oxford Quick Placement test. A més a més, el grup d'adolescents va ser entrevistat i el grup d'universitaris va completar un qüestionari en línia.

Els resultats de l'estudi indiquen que realitzar una estada a l'estranger pot ser beneficiós, tot i que els resultats varien depenent del tipus d'estada o de l'àrea de la llengua que s'estigui estudiant. Per exemple, la comprensió lectora o el vocabulari receptiu semblen ser més susceptibles al desenvolupament que la fluïdesa lectora o el vocabulari productiu. Dues conclusions més són que estudiar a l'estranger pot ser profitós encara que l'estada sigui curta, i que realitzar una estada en un país de parla anglesa és similar a fer-ho en un país on la llengua s'utilitza com a llengua franca.

Paraules clau: context d'aprenentatge; estades a l'estranger; lectura; vocabulari; ELFSA; ús de la llengua

RESUMEN

Conducidos por la convicción de que vivir y estudiar en un país extranjero ofrece las mejores condiciones para el aprendizaje de una segunda lengua (L2), estudiar en el extranjero se ha convertido en una realidad para muchos estudiantes (Kinginger, 2009). Sin embargo, dentro de la investigación sobre las estancias en el extranjero existen diferentes vacíos que hacen que, a veces, sea difícil llegar a una conclusión. Primero, no todas las áreas de la lengua han sido investigadas de la misma manera, por ejemplo, la investigación sobre el desarrollo de la lectura o el vocabulario se mantiene incierta. Además, mientras que determinados tipos de estancias han recibido mucha atención por parte de los investigadores, otras se mantienen poco estudiadas.

Esta tesis tiene como objetivo rellenar algunos de estos vacíos en un intento de contribuir al conocimiento de las estancias en el extranjero. Así, examina el impacto lingüístico que tres estancias en el extranjero han tenido sobre la comprensión y la fluidez lectora, y el vocabulario receptivo y productivo de tres grupos de estudiantes. Las estancias incluidas en este estudio son: un grupo de adolescentes que realizaron una estancia en Irlanda (n= 52), y dos grupos de universitarios que estudiaron en el extranjero durante un semestre en un país de habla inglesa (n= 31) o en un país donde el inglés se utiliza como lengua franca (n= 20). Todos los estudiantes participaron en un experimento antes y después de su experiencia en el extranjero durante la cual realizaron cuatro pruebas: lectura de un texto, el Updated Vocabulary Levels Test, una redacción, y el Oxford Quick Placement test. Además, el grupo de adolescentes fue entrevistado y el grupo de universitarios completó un cuestionario en línea.

Los resultados del estudio indican que realizar una estancia en el extranjero puede ser beneficioso, aunque esto varía dependiendo del tipo de estancia y del área de la lengua que se esté estudiando. Por ejemplo, la comprensión lectora o el vocabulario receptivo parecen ser más susceptibles a desarrollarse que la fluidez lectora o el vocabulario productivo. Dos conclusiones más que se pueden extraer son que estudiar en el extranjero puede ser provechoso aunque la estancia sea corta, y que realizar una estancia en un país de habla inglesa es similar a hacerlo en un país donde la lengua se utiliza como lengua franca.

Palabras clave: contexto de aprendizaje; estudiar en el extranjero; lectura; vocabulario; uso de la lengua; ELFSA

List of contents

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW	10
2.1. STUDY ABROAD AND LANGUAGE GAINS.....	10
2.1.1. <i>Contexts of learning: SA, AH and IM</i>	12
2.1.2. <i>Global L2 proficiency</i>	15
2.1.3. <i>Oral development</i>	18
2.1.4. <i>Listening development</i>	20
2.1.5. <i>Writing development</i>	21
2.1.6. <i>Grammatical development</i>	23
2.2. STUDY ABROAD AND L2 READING.....	25
2.3. STUDY ABROAD AND L2 VOCABULARY	35
2.4. SHORT SA EXPERIENCES	50
2.5. THE EMERGING ELFSA CONTEXT	56
2.6. THEORIZING THE SA CONTEXT	63
2.7. SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER	66
CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY	68
3.1. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	68
3.2. PARTICIPANTS	70
3.2.1. <i>The teenagers group</i>	70
3.2.2. <i>The young-adults' groups</i>	71
3.3. THE SOJOURNS.....	73
3.3.1. <i>The short SA experience</i>	73
3.3.2. <i>The semester-long SA experiences</i>	75
3.3.2.1 <i>The traditional SA context</i>	76
3.3.2.2 <i>The ELFSA context</i>	77
3.4. INSTRUMENTS.....	78
3.4.1. <i>The reading passages</i>	79
3.4.2. <i>The Updated Vocabulary Levels Test</i>	80
3.4.3. <i>The written task</i>	82
3.4.4. <i>The OPT</i>	84
3.4.5. <i>The questionnaire</i>	85
3.4.6. <i>The semi-structured interview</i>	86
3.5. MEASURES	87
3.5.1. <i>L2 reading comprehension and fluency</i>	87

3.5.2. L2 receptive and productive vocabulary	88
3.5.3. General L2 proficiency	90
3.5.4. L2 engagement	90
3.6. PROCEDURE.....	92
3.7. OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY	94
3.8. DATA ANALYSIS	95
CHAPTER IV RESULTS	97
4.1. PAPER ONE: RE-EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF STUDY ABROAD ON L2 DEVELOPMENT: A CRITICAL OVERVIEW	99
4.2. PAPER TWO: L2 READING AND VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT AFTER A SHORT STUDY ABROAD EXPERIENCE	126
4.3. PAPER THREE: INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF A SEMESTER-LONG STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMME ON L2 READING AND VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT	150
4.4. PAPER 4: IS L2 DEVELOPMENT IN AN ELF CONTEXT COMPARABLE TO L2 DEVELOPMENT IN A TRADITIONAL SA SETTING? THE CASE OF READING AND VOCABULARY	174
4.5. SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS.....	199
CHAPTER V DISCUSSION.....	204
CHAPTER VI CONCLUSION	235
REFERENCES	243
APPENDICES.....	262
APPENDIX 1. READING PASSAGES AND COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS.....	262
<i>Appendix 1.1. A2 Text</i>	<i>262</i>
<i>Appendix 1.2. A2 questions</i>	<i>264</i>
<i>Appendix 1.3. B1 Text</i>	<i>266</i>
<i>Appendix 1.4. B1 questions</i>	<i>268</i>
APPENDIX 2. THE UPDATED VOCABULARY LEVELS TEST (UVLT).....	270
APPENDIX 3. EXAMPLES OF THE WRITING TASK	278
<i>Appendix 3.1. The teenagers' example(same student at different time points)</i>	<i>278</i>
<i>Pre-test:.....</i>	<i>278</i>
<i>Appendix 3.2. The undergraduates' example (same student at different time points).....</i>	<i>279</i>
APPENDIX 4. CLAN OUTPUT FOR A TEXT	280
APPENDIX 5. VOCABPROFILE OUTPUT FOR A TEXT.....	281

APPENDIX 6. CONVENTIONS TO EDIT DATA	282
APPENDIX 7. THE OXFORD QUICK PLACEMENT TEST	283
APPENDIX 8. POST-TEST ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE (UNDERGRADUATE GROUPS).....	292
APPENDIX 9. POST-TEST SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDING QUESTIONS (TEENAGE GROUP)	299

List of tables

TABLE 1. US MOBILE STUDENTS.....	11
TABLE 2. STATISTICS OF THE ERASMUS PROGRAMME IN EUROPE AND SPAIN.....	12
TABLE 3. COMPONENTS OF WORD KNOWLEDGE (NATION, 2001, P. 27).....	36
TABLE 4. US OPEN DOORS REPORT ON DURATION OF SA PROGRAMMES (IIE, 2020).....	51
TABLE 5. TEENAGERS' DEMOGRAPHIC DATA	71
TABLE 6. UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' DEMOGRAPHIC DATA.....	72
TABLE 7. SUMMARY OF THE THREE SA PROGRAMMES EXAMINED IN THE PRESENT STUDY	78
TABLE 8. ERROR CLASSIFICATION SCHEME	89
TABLE 9. SUMMARY OF THE INSTRUMENTS AND MEASURES	91
TABLE 10. SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS IN THE EMPIRICAL STUDIES	201

List of Figures

FIGURE 1. EXAMPLE OF THE UVLT	81
FIGURE 2. COMPLETED EXAMPLE OF THE UVLT	82
FIGURE 3. EXAMPLE A OF THE OPT.....	84
FIGURE 4. EXAMPLE B OF THE OPT.....	85

List of abbreviations (ordered by appearance)

SA: Study abroad

L2: Second language

ERASMUS: European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students

OECD: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

IIE: Institute of International Education

ELFSA: English as a lingua franca study abroad

L1: First language

EU: European Union

BREXIT: British exit, referring to the UK leaving the EU.
<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-32810887>&<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/world/europe/what-is-brex.html>

SLA: Second language acquisition

AH: At home

IM: Immersion at home

NSs: Native speakers

LoS: Length of stay

LCP: Language contact profile

RLCP: Reading Language Contact Profile

IEP: Intensive English programme

VLT: Vocabulary Levels Test

UVLT: Updated Vocabulary Levels Test

CLAN: The Computerized Language Analysis

SPSS: Statistical Package for Social Sciences

Chapter I:

Introduction

To Study Abroad (SA) has become an intriguing reality in the last decades and many people have started participating in SA programmes because it is believed that this naturalistic context is one of the most favourable in terms of secondlanguage (L2) learning (Kinginger, 2009; Pérez-Vidal, 2015; Sanz, 2014). As many authors argue, learning context is crucial when learning a language as it will determine the amount of opportunities for practice, the quality and quantity of the interactions, and the efforts made to use the L2 (Collentine, 2009; Freed *et al.*, 2014; Llanes & Muñoz, 2013). Presumably, the SA setting offers the advantage of freeing learners to explore language use outside of a classroom, which, as Kinginger (2008) states, enables students to escape from the boundaries of the L2 classroom and connect L2 learning with their own lived experiences.

The presumed advantages of the SA context have been gaining much popularity in nowadays societies. Consequently, there has been a significant increase in the number of people enrolling in SA programmes every year. As an illustration of this, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) published a report which yielded that the number of participants in mobility programmes had risen from 26% in 2000 to 43% in 2016 in the USA (OECD, 2017). Furthermore, the report stated that the amount of mobile students would keep expanding and that by 2025 it would reach about eight million students. In Europe, 3.200 students from 11 different countries (Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, France, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and United Kingdom) took part in the European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (ERASMUS) programme when it was created in 1987 (European Commission, 2017). Since then, the number of participants has been continuously growing and, over the past 30 years, more than 9 million people have been part of the project (European Commission, 2017). In fact, the

ERASMUS+ 2015 statistics reported that 678.000 people studied, trained or volunteered abroad and around 69.000 organizations and 19.600 projects were part of the programme (European Commission, 2015a).

At the same time, there has been an increase in the popularity of SA research. As an illustration of this, Tullock and Ortega (2017) claimed that SA research reached a historical peak between 2011 and 2014, and that this willingness to investigate the effects of SA experiences continues to grow. Accordingly, the number of researchers and studies that investigate the impact of SA has risen to the extent that some journals have been created to exclusively direct the topic. As an example, “Frontiers: An interdisciplinary journal of Study Abroad” was launched in 1995, and “Study Abroad Research in Second Language Acquisition and International Education” in 2016.

At first, research on SA started being very popular in the USA and, as a consequence, the first studies in the field investigated North-American students abroad (Kinginger, 2013). Therefore, at the beginning of the 21st century the reality was that US undergraduate students were, by far, the most investigated population within the SA field (Llanes, 2011). Nonetheless, some years after the creation of the European ERASMUS in 1987, researchers started building projects on the topic and there was a significant increase in the investigations of European SA participants who nowadays represent much of the population investigated within the field, together with North-American students (Coleman, 2013). From a quantitative, qualitative or mixed-methods perspective, investigators have attempted to shed light on how SA affects learners’ linguistic (Pérez-Vidal, 2014; Hessel & Vanderplank, 2018) and intercultural development (Coleman, 1998; Merino & Avello, 2014), identity changes (Jackson, 2008; Mocanu, 2019), and communities of practise (Kalocsai, 2009, 2014), among others.

Nonetheless, despite the growing research in the SA literature, it is still somehow uncertain whether SA will provide positive outcomes to all L2 aspects with regard to L2 linguistic development. As an example of this, while oral fluency and receptive vocabulary seem to benefit greatly from SA

(Juan-Garau, 2015; Zaytseva, Pérez-Vidal, & Miralpeix, 2018), the reverse has sometimes been found in terms of L2 grammar or writing skills (Llanes, 2011). According to some researchers, this inconsistency in SA findings is related to the differences in participants' characteristics and study methodologies: "A review of study abroad research literature shows general inconsistencies and inclusiveness on certain issues, particularly on study abroad outcomes and their factors" (Wang, 2010, p.50). Moreover, some areas of language such as L2 reading or L2 productive vocabulary development remain under-researched; therefore, it is practically impossible to draw any conclusions on whether SA is beneficial for these skills (Isabelli-Garcia, Bown, Plews & Dewey, 2018).

Something that should be taken into account when investigating learners' improvement (or lack thereof) after a stay abroad are individual differences (Isabelli-Garcia et al., 2018). Some researchers have established that learning outcomes do not simply depend on learning context, but on participants' individual differences (Mitchell, Tracy-Ventura & McManus, 2017). Some examples of such differences can be learners' proficiency level at the outset of the stay, the duration of the programme, the learners' age, or other psychological aspects such as working memory. To this aim, it seems necessary to take participants' characteristics into account when interpreting changes in learners' L2 after a stay abroad. Again, despite apparently playing a pivotal role on learners' development, individual differences have not been much investigated within SA research and further research is needed in order to determine the extent to which they will influence L2 learning.

The present dissertation

First, it is important to note that there are many programmes of mobility, and not all of them have L2 learning as their objective nor they combine attending classes and living in the target country. As an example of this, only through ERASMUS+ programme in Europe, participants are able to:

- 1) Study at a foreign university: Opportunities to study abroad last from three to 12 months, that is, from one academic trimester to a full year,

and they are available for students at Bachelor, Master or Doctoral levels.

- 2) Perform a traineeship (e.g. internship or work placement) at a foreign institution: With the objective of getting students some valuable experience in the workplace, traineeships last from two to 12 months and they are available at Bachelor, Master or Doctoral levels.
- 3) Participate in a youth exchange: These exchanges enable students to meet people from different countries while working and sharing their time with them outside of an academic environment. The experiences last for up to 21 days and they generally consist on participating in activities like workshops, debates, role-plays, among others.
- 4) Perform teaching activities at a foreign institution: Spend time teaching at an institution abroad (only for staff)
- 5) Receive training: Professional development activities that generally consist of job shadowing, observation periods or specific training courses abroad (only for staff)

(European Commission, 2020a)

Therefore, it is clear that studying at a foreign university is not the only option for people who wish to live in a foreign country. Generally, when referring to “study abroad” experiences, programme organizers refer to those contexts where the immersion abroad includes some L2 instruction, and the participants’ goal is to expand their L2 skills. However, as previously described, there are other types of programmes abroad, which may include working at a foreign institution or performing an internship (Mitchell et al., 2017). Considering the objective of the present investigation, the interest lays only on those learners who perform a mobility programme that involves studying at a foreign institution. Accordingly, the definition of SA adopted here is that by Kinginger (2009, p.11): “A temporary sojourn of pre-defined duration, undertaken for educational purposes”.

The present dissertation had two main goals. First, to determine which the areas that needed further investigation within SA research were and, second,

to conduct different empirical studies that provided new information to the identified gaps. When reviewing the SA literature, it becomes evident that some areas have received considerably less attention than others. The first apparent gap in SA research is found with regard to L2 reading development, since this is the least investigated area within SA studies (Isabelli-Garcia et al., 2018). Only a few studies have examined the impact that participating in a SA programme can have on L2 reading development. Hence, it is uncertain whether the SA setting will help learners to enhance their L2 reading skills (Kinginger, 2009). This lack of research makes it necessary for researchers to provide information on whether the SA context can be beneficial for L2 reading development. Moreover, the close connection between reading and vocabulary and the fact that researchers have found mixed-findings in terms of L2 vocabulary development, especially when it comes to the more productive aspects, call for future studies that investigate L2 vocabulary in a more consistent way that allows for a clear picture of the impact that SA programmes have on L2 vocabulary. With this aim, the two main goals of the present dissertation are to determine the impact of a SA experience on L2 reading (in terms of comprehension and fluency) and L2 vocabulary (receptive and productive).

Moreover, the present thesis investigates the role that some individual differences, namely initial proficiency level and L2 engagement, have on the L2 reading and vocabulary development of the participants. As mentioned before, individual differences play a pivotal role when interpreting SA outcomes (Isabelli-Garcia et al., 2018; Mitchell et al., 2017), hence, it was decided that accounting for some of these characteristics would provide a deeper understanding of the results gathered. Accordingly, this project takes into account the participants' initial proficiency level and vocabulary level in order to determine whether they are related to gains in L2 reading and L2 vocabulary (if any). In addition, it aims at examining whether the amount of L2 use/engagement while abroad can explain the different outcomes in the participants' linguistic development.

Another gap identified within the SA literature is the lack of studies investigating the effects of the SA context on young(er) participants (i.e. children or teenagers) (Llanes, 2011). Generally, studies that investigate the effects of SA programmes do so with university students (usually referred to as “young adults”), leaving children and teenagers rather under-examined (Llanes, 2012; Llanes & Muñoz, 2013). In fact, as can be seen in Llanes (2011), only about five studies had investigated the impact that a SA experience had on a group of teenagers or children until 2011. This may be the reason why Llanes and her colleagues undertook several research projects investigating this topic and, about nine new publications emerged (Llanes, 2012; Llanes & Muñoz, 2013; Llanes & Serrano, 2014). Nonetheless, children and teenagers remain a highly ignored population within SA research, even though they represent a large amount of the participants in SA programmes (especially when it comes to summer programmes abroad). This, again, makes it necessary to conduct studies that determine whether these younger participants would benefit from a SA experience. For this reason, one of the objectives of the present study is to determine whether studying abroad will be beneficial for a group of teenagers who spend three weeks in Ireland.

Spending only three weeks in the target country may seem too short for any L2 development to take place, which is probably why most studies in the SA literature focus on semester- or year-long SA experiences (Llanes, 2011). However, many SA programmes have a duration from two to six weeks (Llanes & Muñoz, 2009; Rodrigo, 2011), or even less (Evans & Fisher, 2005), and both programme organizers and students believe that participants will benefit from the experience. Short SA programmes are very common among L2 learners who, many times, prefer spending some weeks abroad during the summer than performing a semester-long stay abroad during the academic year. This is particularly true in the case of children and adolescents who generally do not wish to be away from their families for long (> 1 month) periods of time (Evans & Fisher, 2005). As an illustration of this, the latest Institute of International Education (IIE) report (2020)

shows that in year 17/18 about 29.9% of SA participants participated in a summer programme abroad that lasted between two and eight weeks, and 5.7% performed a stay that lasted two weeks or less. Moreover, 19% conducted their sojourn for a period of eight weeks or less during the academic year. Finally, only 30.3% decided to perform a semester-abroad sojourn, and 2.2% took part in a year-long SA experience. These data show that short(er) SA experiences are highly popular among L2 learners. Hence, conducting research on these rather short SA experiences is necessary in order to determine the impact that they can have on L2 development. Consequently, one of the objectives of this investigation evolves around gains in a group of teenagers after their participation in a short (3-month) summer programme abroad.

The last issue that concerns the present investigation is the fact that most studies investigating the effects of SA generally focus on programmes through which participants perform the stay in a country where the L2 is the official language. Potentially, this is due to the common belief that what makes the SA context remarkable is the fact that learners are immersed in the language and constantly exposed to the L2: “L2 use in the authentic target culture and in classroom situations” (Tragant, 2012, p. 161). Nonetheless, when English is the learners’ L2, it is no longer necessary to travel to an English-speaking country in order to find opportunities to use the language. Globalisation and role of English as the world’s *lingua franca* have forced universities to become more international which, in turn, has boosted the use of English in most countries, especially among the academic world.

As an example of this, an increasing number of institutions are offering English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) courses (Jenkins, 2014), and this is attracting many international students to universities in countries where English is not the official language but used as means of communication (*lingua franca*) in both university classrooms and informal events (OECD, 2010). Consequently, some authors have begun to pay attention to this emerging context, which Köylü (2016) named as ‘English as a Lingua Franca Study Abroad’ (ELFSA). Within the European context, most of the possible

target countries/destinations for participants in mobility programmes are non-English speaking countries (e.g. Germany, Italy, Finland, Denmark, France, the Czech Republic, Prague, etc.), hence, many times mobile students decide to perform their SA experience in one of such countries. As an example, the most popular destinations among Spanish ERASMUS students are Lithuania, Denmark, the Czech Republic or Finland (European Commission, 2017), none of which have English as their first language (L1). Moreover, due to the fact that the UK will soon be leaving the European Union (EU) (a phenomenon known as *Brexit*), it seems plausible to believe that in the future even less international students might choose this country as their SA destination. Altogether, it is important to determine the impact of a SA in an ELF country on learners' L2 development. Accordingly, the last objective of this dissertation is to provide evidence of the gains (or lack thereof) of a group of undergraduate students participating in a traditional SA experience (studying abroad in an English-speaking country) and to, subsequently, compare these with those found in a group of university students performing an ELFSA stay.

In sum, the present study aims at determining whether three different types of SA experiences (short, traditional SA and ELFSA) will provide a positive impact on the L2 reading (comprehension and fluency) and L2 vocabulary (productive and receptive) development of a group of teenagers spending 3 weeks in Ireland, a group of university students spending a semester in an English-speaking country, and a group of university students spending a semester in a non-English speaking country. Moreover, it aims at determining whether initial proficiency level and vocabulary level are related to gains in L2 reading and vocabulary (if any), and it takes L2 use into account in order to interpret the outcomes presented by the participants.

The present dissertation is divided into six chapters. The present chapter has served as an introduction to the project by generally describing the topic under-research and delineating the objectives of the thesis. Chapter 2 offers a review of the theoretical background of the topic under study. It begins with a general introduction to SA research followed by an examination of previous

studies that have investigated the language-related outcomes emerging from participation in a SA experience. Then, it continues by taking a closer look into the areas of interest in the present project: L2 reading and L2 vocabulary development after a SA experience, short SA experiences, and the possible outcomes rendered by the ELFSA context. In section 2.6, the chapter offers a review of those Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories that may explain the outcomes emerging as a result of SA experiences. In this way, this second chapter presents the rationale behind the project. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary that goes over every topic that described during the literature review.

Chapter three describes the methodology employed in the present project. Therefore, in this third chapter of the dissertation the reader will find the research questions that have guided the study, followed by a description of the participants, the data collection instruments, the measures extracted from such instruments, and the procedure used when collecting and analysing the data.

In the fourth chapter, the results will be presented in a 4-paper format. First, an introduction to the four papers will be offered. Then, the four papers will be presented separately. To finish, the chapter offers a summary of the main findings in the four studies previously presented.

Chapter five provides a general discussion where the main results will be synthesised, contrasted, and debated. The main findings in the present study will be further explained and compared to previous research on the topic.

Finally, the last chapter offers a general conclusion that summarizes the main findings of the project. Moreover, in addition to reporting on some of the limitations of the project, the conclusion offers the implications of the project and some ideas for future research.

Chapter II

Literature review

This chapter offers a review of the theoretical background of the topic under study together with the rationale behind the study.

2.1. Study Abroad and language gains

The SA context has gained much popularity among Second Language Acquisition (SLA) researchers who believe that the nature of the setting provides countless opportunities for L2 practise, which may lead to an immersion in the L2 that could not be achieved in the participants' home country (Briggs, 2015; DeKeyser, 2007b; Serrano et al., 2016). The setting fosters the combination of formal instruction and out-of-class activities (Freed, 1995), and this is considered majestic by many authors because of the belief that participants will engage with numerous opportunities for input, output and negotiation for meaning (Bryfonski & Mackey, 2018; Tullock, 2018). As Gautier and Chevrot (2015) explained, learning an L2 in the target context can be particularly beneficial because of the ample opportunities that learners will find both in quantity and in quality.

In fact, the so-called effects of SA are becoming so popular that every year thousands of students leave their countries in order to participate in a sojourn abroad, and the number of mobile students is only growing. In the USA only, the Open Doors 2019 report established that during the 2018/19 academic year 341.751 North-American students participated in a SA experience, 187.534 of which performed their stays in Europe (The United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, France, Germany, Ireland being the most popular destinations) (IIE, 2019a). During the same year, the USA received 1.095.299 international students from all over the world, whereas only 819.644 students performed a stay in the USA in the academic year 2012/2013. Altogether, the increase in the amount of international students becomes quite apparent when we look at

the numbers of mobile students from and into the USA (see Table 1 for more information).

Table 1. US Mobile students

Academic year	Total outgoing students	SA in Europe	SA in Spain	Total incoming students	From Europe	From Spain
2014/15	313.415	170.879	28.325	974.926	90.625	6.143
2015/16	325.339	176.890	29.975	1.043.839	91.915	6.640
2016/17	332.727	181.145	31.230	1.078.822	92.820	7.164
2017/18	341.751	187.534	32.411	1.094.792	92.655	7.489

In Europe, a total of 3.200 studied abroad through the ERASMUS programme when it was created in 1987 (European Commission, 2017). The increase in this numbers can be seen when looking at the statistics for the 2017/18 academic year when 325.000 participated in the programme (European Commission, 2020). Moreover, it should be noted that these numbers do not include students who take part in a programme organized by private organizations (mainly children and teenagers who perform summer SA experiences). Hence, in reality numbers are even higher (see Table 2 for ERASMUS programme numbers). Finally, considering the population studied in the present study (i.e. Spanish students abroad), it must be remarked that Spain is one of the countries that sends more international students each year, and the leader in study abroad destination (European Commission, 2015b; Campus France, 2020). As an illustration of this, Table 2 presents the numbers of both Spanish students performing a stay abroad and European students going to Spain as part of their ERASMUS experience (European Commission, 2018).

Table 2. Statistics of the ERASMUS programme in Europe and Spain

Year	Total number of ERASMUS participants	From Spain	Into Spain
2013/14	212 208	37.235	39.277
2015/16	303.880	39.223	45.109
2016/17	312.300	40.079	48.595
2017/18	325.000	40.079	51.321

Nonetheless, despite the rising popularity of SA programmes, much remains unknown about the outcomes that these provide (Llanes, 2011). Previous studies have found contradictory results which demonstrate that the setting is far from ideal and that SA outcomes should be explored through a careful analysis of all the variables involved if a more cohesive representation of SA wishes to be reached (Watson & Ebner, 2018).

In the next subsections, a review of the studies that have examined the impact of SA will be presented in order to offer the rationale for the present study.

2.1.1. Contexts of learning: SA, AH and IM

The SA context has often been compared to other L2 learning contexts for the purpose of contrasting learners' outcomes and determining which setting offers the best conditions for L2 development to take place. Hence, in doing so, researchers have generally attempted to contrast the outcomes that arise from different settings. In this section, the two contexts that have traditionally been used to compare those gains made after a stay abroad to those emerging from other contexts will be described.

The SA context has been extensively compared to formal instruction at home (AH or FI) (Barquin, 2012; Foster, 2009; Jiménez Jiménez, 2010; Llanes, 2012; Pérez-Vidal, 2014). The AH setting consists of a period of formal L2 instruction in the participants' home country, where learners attend classes in

the L2 and then go back to living in their usual L1 environment. An example of a big project that compared the AH context to the SA one is the “Study Abroad and Language Acquisition (SALA) project”. This project consisted of comparing the L2 acquisition made by a group of Catalan/Spanish bilinguals after a period of formal instruction AH and after a 3-month SA experience. Different L2 areas were measured in the project including oral development (Juan-Garau, 2014; Valls-Ferrer & Mora, 2014; Avello & Lara, 2014), listening development (Beattie, Valls-Ferrer & Pérez-Vidal, 2014), writing development (Pérez-Vidal & Barquin, 2014), and intercultural awareness (Merino & Avello, 2014), among others (for findings and further information see Pérez-Vidal, 2014).

The general finding among studies that compare SA to AH is that the SA context is superior to the AH one especially when it comes to oral fluency (Valls-Ferrer & Mora, 2014), oral accuracy (Juan-Garau, 2014), degree of foreign accent (Muñoz & Llanes, 2014), and listening (Beattie *et al.*, 2014). However, some studies have claimed that the AH context can be as beneficial as the SA one, or even superior, especially when it comes to L2 writing (Sasaki, 2004) or L2 grammar (DeKeyser, 1991; Hirakawa, Shibuya, & Endonb, 2019).

Despite the amount of research comparing these two contexts (SA and AH), the more recent studies on the topic advocate that they are too different in nature and that, therefore, they should not be compared. Coleman (2013), for example, claimed that it was a misrepresentation to compare groups abroad and groups AH because participants could not be randomly assigned into groups and participants’ backgrounds are inherently different. He claimed that:

“[...] while recognizing that, by some valid and reliable measures, motivation towards language learning of SA and AH groups can be equal [...] to equate their overall motivation seems illogical: some do and some don’t. Do virgins and promiscuous students have the same motivation towards sex?” (pp. 27-28)

Similarly, Sanz (2014) also declared that random distribution could not happen in these type of contexts and that it was like “comparing apples and oranges, because students who choose to go abroad are different from students who choose to stay in their institutions” (p. 3). Overall, it is likely that those learners who choose to go abroad differ greatly from those who stay at home since it is not possible to randomly assign students into groups (Grey, Serafini, Cox, & Sanz, 2015). For this reason, the present investigation does not compare groups AH and groups abroad, and it focuses only on participants who decided to perform a SA experience.

Another setting which has sometimes been compared to the SA one is that of intensive immersion (IM) at home which, as its name suggests, consists of participating in an immersion language programme in the participants’ home country. Although differences between the IM and the SA context are still apparent, these contexts are somehow similar in terms of L2 exposure (Dewey, 2008; Serrano, Llanes & Tragant, 2011). Findings are quite positive towards the IM context, generally concluding that it fosters L2 development to a similar extent to the SA one. Dewey (2008) compared three groups of North-American students, learners of Japanese: SA (n= 20), IM (n= 14) and AH (n= 22) in terms of vocabulary development. His findings show that both SA and IM are beneficial and superior to studying AH. However, the SA group showed greater gains in the situational vocabulary test, which meant that participants in this group were more capable of defining words “typically encountered in everyday situations in Japan” (p. 134). Interestingly, he also found that the IM group outscored the other two groups in terms of the ability to use words in sentences and regarding accuracy for less frequent vocabulary.

Some years later, Serrano et al. (2011) compared a group abroad (n = 25) to one in an IM (n= 69) and another in a semi-intensive course AH (n= 37) in terms of fluency, syntactic and lexical complexity, and accuracy (both oral and written). All participants were Spanish speakers, learning English as an L2. The findings in their study showed that SA participants were the ones to show greater gains, although such gains were only slightly higher than the

ones shown by learners in the AH intensive group and no significant differences were found between these two groups. On the other hand, these authors found that SA was significantly superior to the semi-intensive AH group, especially in terms of fluency and lexical complexity.

Altogether, it can be concluded that the nature of the IM and the SA contexts is similar in terms of opportunities for L2 practise. Nonetheless, the superiority of the SA setting remains for different L2 areas.

2.1.2. Global L2 proficiency

Investigations related to the development of learners' general L2 proficiency have attempted to determine whether the SA context enhances participants' abilities to use the L2. Generally, these studies investigate the impact that the SA immersion provides to the learners, and whether the context will lead to a higher proficiency in the L2. One of the first studies examining the SA context is that by Carrol (1967), who investigated the tests scores in French, Spanish, German, Russian, and Italian, prior to graduation of a group of North-American students (n= 2.872) through the Modern Language Association (MLA) Foreign Language Proficiency test for teachers and advanced students. His results stressed the positive outcomes of SA and he stated that SA was the best predictor of proficiency across languages.

Since the publication of Carrol's (1967) study, only a few studies were carried out within the SA context (Carter, 1973; Dyson, 1988). It was not until the 1990s that researchers began to pay more attention to the field (DeKeyser, 1991; Milton & Meara, 1995). One of the most important works of the decade was the volume "Second Language Acquisition in a Study Abroad Context" edited by Barbara Freed in 1995. This was the first book fully dedicated to investigating the effects of the SA context and it has been one of the most cited works within the SA field. The volume includes 13 studies examining the effects of the setting on different aspects of students' linguistic and sociolinguistic skills. In the book, the studies that focus on language learning show a positive trend towards development after a SA

experience in terms of global L2 proficiency (Guntermann, 1995; Huebner, 1995; Lapkin, Hart, & Swain, 1995). Moreover, one of the studies in Freed's (1995) book had the objective of determining the predictors of language gain in the study abroad environment (Brecht, Davidson, & Ginsberg, 1995). Through a group of 658 North-American university students, learners of Russian as an L2 who performed a 4-month SA experience in the former Soviet Union, the authors established that, in general, participants showed more gains when their initial level was low, and that knowing another foreign language was helpful for the three skills analysed (listening, reading and oral). They also asserted that in terms of listening skills, men were more likely to show gains than women were, and that younger people were more likely to show gains than older ones. Consequently, they claimed that the factors that had more impact on L2 development after a stay abroad were: age, gender, initial proficiency level, and knowledge of an additional language.

A growing number of studies on the overall linguistic impact of SA experiences have been published since the publication of Freed's (1995) volume (Dufon & Churchill, 2006; Kinginger, 2008, 2009; Pérez-Vidal, 2014; Sanz & Morales-Font, 2018). In general, research suggests that the SA context is beneficial for L2 global proficiency (Coleman, 1996; Rees & Klapper, 2007; Hessel & Vanderplank, 2018). As an example, the European Language Proficiency Survey (Coleman, 1996) is one of the largest existing projects investigating overall L2 proficiency. This cross-sectional project investigated the language skills of 18.264 British and Irish students, learners of French, Spanish, German, and Russian as an L2, over their four years at university. Coleman (1996) used a gap-filling test (C-Test) that measured learners' L2 global proficiency and he found that the year spent abroad made a significant contribution to learners' L2. The author found that while changes between the first two years at university were not meaningful, those students who spent their third year abroad showed significantly higher scores in year four. Therefore, he concluded that a period of residence abroad

contributes to learners' L2 development to a greater extent than a year of instruction at home.

Some years later, Rees and Klapper (2007) conducted a similar study on the linguistic progress of a group of 57 German learners from the UK. The authors used the German version of the C-test and a grammar test in order to investigate whether the period of residence abroad had an impact on the learners' L2 global proficiency. Performing a stay abroad was obligatory for all participants in Rees and Klapper (2007), who then decided whether they wanted to spend one (n= 12) or two semesters (n= 45) in a German speaking country (either Germany or Austria). Findings show that, although all students made considerable gains, length of stay was a strong predictor of L2 gains, and students who spent two semesters abroad outscored those staying only one in both tests.

More recently, Hessel and Vanderplank (2018) investigated whether gains on the overall L2 proficiency of 136 German university students, learners of English as an L2, were attributable to spending some time abroad. Participants in the study either spent three (n= 44) or nine months (n=52) at a British university, or continued studying at home (n= 40). Hessel and Vanderplank (2018) used the English version of the C-test in order to measure learners' L2 proficiency development (as in Coleman, 1996 and Rees & Klapper, 2007). Findings show that after the first three months, learners studying abroad already outscored those AH significantly. However, these gains slowed down after the first months abroad. Hence, results in Hessel and Vanderplank suggest that more meaningful gains appeared after the first months and changes in those learners who stayed for an extra term were not as substantial, although there were some gains and these were larger than those showed by the AH group. The authors stated that, instead of simply relying on the naturalistic nature of the SA context, higher education institutions and SA organizers should create more opportunities for L2 practise and promote L2 learning so that students can take more advantage of SA experiences, especially when the duration of the programme is longer.

Finally, it is important to highlight that some recent studies on the topic have striven to establish to what extent the relationships participants form while abroad can impact their language skills (Isabelli-Garcia, 2006; Mitchell, McManus, & Tracy-Ventura, 2017; Nam, 2018). This more socio-cultural aspect of SA experiences seems to be playing a key role in participants' L2 development; hence, researchers have begun to pay more attention to the topic. Coleman (2015), for example, stated that asking participants questions such as "who do they eat with", "who do they drink with?" or "who do they sleep with?" (p. 34) can aid researchers when making sense of learners' SA outcomes. Unsurprisingly, the general finding is that those participants that join more communities while abroad are the ones to show greater gains after the stay. Nonetheless, studies on this area have commonly taken a more qualitative perspective which does not provide evidence of participants' actual gains but learners' perceived improvement (Sanz & Morales-Front, 2018). Therefore, future studies should strive for mixed-methods projects which take into account both the more qualitative variables of the context and the more quantitative ones.

2.1.3. Oral development

The areas of research that have received greater attention are those related to oral skills (Juan-Garau, 2015). Oral fluency, for example, has been greatly investigated within SA research, with authors generally agreeing that this skill improves considerably after some time abroad (Juan-Garau & Pérez-Vidal, 2007; Mora & Valls-Ferrer, 2012; Valls-Ferrer & Mora, 2014). As an example, Valls-Ferrer and Mora (2014) examined the oral fluency development of a group of 27 Catalan/Spanish bilinguals after six months of formal instruction AH and after three months abroad. They found that SA fostered gains in oral fluency, especially in terms of speed and breakdown measures. In line with Brecht et al., (1995), the authors also stated that having a lower fluency level at the outset of the experiment favoured participants and allowed them to show more gains. Another interesting finding in Valls-Ferrer and Mora (2014) is that those that reported spending more time using

the L2 were the ones to improve the most. Hence, this finding suggests that having constant interaction in the L2 is necessary to develop a language.

Another aspect of oral language that has been greatly investigated is oral accuracy (Jensen & Howard, 2014; Juan-Garau, 2014; Mora & Valls-Ferrer, 2012); however, findings do not seem to be as consistent with regard to this measure. On the one hand, studies like the one by Isabelli-Garcia (2010) establish that spending some time abroad will not necessarily boost learners' oral accuracy. In her study, Isabelli-Garcia (2010) compared a group of students AH to a group who performed a 4-month SA experience abroad and found no significant differences in the oral accuracy development of both groups. On the other hand, results in Juan-Garau (2014) show gains in participants' oral accuracy in terms of errors per T-unit and errors per clause. Moreover, Juan-Garau (2014) also found that participants approximated their speech to that of native speakers (NSs) after their SA experience, although some significant differences remained between both groups. Again, those students with a lower level at the outset of the experience were the ones to show more gains after the stay. Likewise, contradictory results are found concerning oral complexity since some studies have found that changes in the speech complexity of their participants are not significant (Pérez-Vidal & Juan-Garau, 2011) or remain unchanged (Mora & Valls-Ferrer, 2012) after a SA experience, whereas some others that show significant positive changes in participants' lexical and syntactic complexity (Howard, 2001, 2005; Llanes & Muñoz, 2013).

Finally, another area that seems to change as a result of SA is pronunciation. Despite measures of pronunciation receiving limited attention from scholars in the field (Llanes, 2011), at least when compared to other measures of oral proficiency, the general finding is that students can improve their L2 pronunciation after SA. Nonetheless, there are some studies which suggest that more than one term abroad is needed in order to find evidence of pronunciation improvement. As an illustration of this, studies like the one by Avello, Mora and Pérez-Vidal (2012) or Højen (2003) suggest that three or four months SA experiences would not lead participants to gains in their

pronunciation and that longer stays were necessary in order to detect changes in participants' phonological development. However, findings in Del Rio (2013) or Muñoz and Llanes (2014) contradict this statement. As an example, Muñoz and Llanes (2014) investigated a group of children abroad (n= 13), a group of children AH (n= 15), a group of adults abroad (n= 15), and a group of adults AH (n= 12) in terms of L2 foreign accent, and they found that a 3-month period abroad facilitated the improvement of learners' foreign accent. In terms of age, Muñoz and Llanes (2014) claimed that children seemed to benefit more from the experience since they had a milder accent than adults after the stay.

Altogether, previous studies show that oral skills have been the most investigated within SA literature. Nonetheless, despite some consensus has been found with regard to these areas, especially in terms of oral fluency amelioration, findings are still somehow contradictory and much research is needed in order to gather a more compact understanding of the impact of SA experiences.

2.1.4. Listening development

A handful of studies have examined the development of listening skills after a SA experience (Beattie, Valls-Ferrer, & Pérez-Vidal, 2014; Cubillos, Chieffo, & Fan, 2008; Llanes & Muñoz, 2009; Llanes & Prieto-Botana, 2015; Rodrigo, 2011). Despite the scarce amount of research on the skill, the few existing studies on the topic point towards a positive development of L2 listening as a result of a SA experience. Beattie et al. (2014) examined the development of a group of Catalan/Spanish speakers (n= 75), learners of English as an L2, after a 6-month period of formal instruction AH and a 3-month SA experience. The authors concluded that the combination of a period of formal instruction AH followed by a stay in the target country was beneficial for participants, who benefitted from both contexts. Nonetheless, this development was only significant after their stay, which seems to indicate that studying abroad can boost learners' L2 listening skills to a larger extent than studying AH.

Short-term programmes also seem to be beneficial in terms of L2 listening development. Llanes and Muñoz (2009), for example, report positive outcomes in the listening development of their participants after only spending three or four weeks abroad. Similarly, Llanes and Prieto Botana (2015) examined a group of 12 North-American undergraduates after a 5-week SA experience in Costa Rica, and the results in their study revealed that, despite the short duration of the programme, participants improved their listening skills significantly. Finally, Rodrigo (2011) also provided a positive picture for SA and listening development. The author compared a group of North-American students who participated in a 5-week SA experience in Spain (n= 18) to a group of students who remained in the USA (n= 21), and she concluded that gains obtained during a 5-week sojourn are equivalent to those attained during a whole semester AH.

All in all, researchers seem to agree in that listening abilities improve as a result of a SA experience. Nonetheless, sometimes scholars have also found that students do better in some tasks than in others depending on how demanding such tasks are. As an example of this, participants in Llanes and Prieto (2015) showed an improvement in the three exercises they were asked to complete during the data collection. However, this improvement varied depending on the type of test used to examine comprehension. The authors claimed that tasks consisting of a single interview or discussion over a longer span of time (e.g. listening to a one-on-one interview or a lecture) allow learners to gather valuable information and understand the general topic, whereas short dialogues (15-25 seconds) are more challenging and, hence, more complex for students to complete. Considering these differences depending on task type and the rather short amount of research on the area, it seems that further research is needed in order to fully demonstrate that this positive trend towards development is solid.

2.1.5. Writing development

SA research has provided mixed findings with regard to L2 writing development, with some researchers establishing the positive outcomes that

SA programmes provide (Barquin, 2012; Pérez-Vidal & Barquin, 2014) and some others demonstrating that SA does not necessarily enhance students' writing skills (Freed, So, & Lazar, 2003; Serrano, Tragant, & Llanes, 2012). This may be due to the fact that researchers tend to study this skill from different perspectives, which makes it difficult to draw any final conclusions (Wang, 2010).

Sasaki (2004, 2007) performed different investigations in order to determine whether spending some time abroad was positive for L2 learners. First, the author conducted a 3.5 year-long longitudinal project that, among other matters, allowed her to compare a group of Japanese students learning English (L2) abroad to a group who remained AH. Sasaki (2004) concluded that both groups improved their English general proficiency and their writing quality and fluency. Moreover, both groups showed an increased confidence towards writing using the L2. The only difference that Sasaki (2004) found between the groups was that the SA experiences had triggered participants' motivation and strategy use when writing in the L2. Some years later, Sasaki (2007) attempted to confirm her 2004 findings by conducting a similar study in which she compared two groups of Japanese university students (SA vs. AH), learners of English as an L2. Again, her findings confirmed that both contexts were positive in terms of general L2 proficiency; however, this time only the group abroad showed improvement in their writing quality and fluency. The SA students attributed their gains to the fact that they were required to write much and regularly whereas the AH students attributed their lack of improvement to the few opportunities they had to write in the L2. Due to these inconclusive findings, Sasaki (2007) demanded that more studies, with higher number of participants, were performed in order to reach a deeper understanding of how SA experiences affect students' writing abilities.

More recent results on the topic are those by Barquin (2012) and Serrano et al. (2012), which also provide inconclusive results. On the one hand, Barquin (2012) established that participating in a 3-month SA experience was positive for the writing fluency a group of 30 Catalan/Spanish bilinguals, learners of English as an L2. However, Serrano et al. (2012) investigated a group of

Spanish students abroad in terms written fluency, complexity and accuracy (together with some oral measures), and they found that gains in the written measures only appeared after learners had been abroad for two semesters. Therefore, they declared that while some months were enough for the oral measures to develop, writing development required more time. The authors concluded that learners must spend longer periods abroad if they want to improve their writing skills significantly.

Altogether, it can be stated that findings with regard to writing are far from conclusive, possibly because of the differences in the tasks used when examining writing outcomes as a result of a SA. Oftentimes the methods used when investigating writing development are too different in nature; different scholars have investigated various measures or have conducted studies with participants of different ages, which could provide an explanation to the inconclusiveness of the findings. For this reason, it seems essential to carry out more research on the topic in an attempt to assemble a more coherent picture of the impact that SA can have over L2 writing.

2.1.6. Grammatical development

The SA literature is rather scant regarding L2 grammar development. Moreover, the few studies on the area have not reached an agreement as to whether or not SA aids grammar development. Accordingly, some researchers have found that their participants improve their grammatical skills after spending some time abroad (Guntermann, 1995; Howard, 2001, 2005; Juan-Garau, Salazar-Noguera, & Prieto-Arranz, 2014) and others have argued that in terms of grammar development taking part in a language course AH can lead to the same or even greater gains (Collentine, 2004; DeKeyser, 1991; Hirakawa et al., 2019).

One of the earliest studies on the area is that by DeKeyser (1991). He compared the grammar development of a group of American students AH to that of a group abroad in Spain. The author found no differences between learning a language in an AH classroom and abroad. Hence, he concluded

that learning a language abroad does not necessarily mean that students are going to pick it up faster and that, at least when it comes to grammar, learning can take place at a similar pace AH. Similarly, Torres (2003) and Collentine (2004) also compared groups abroad and AH and concluded that participants in the SA group did not differentiate much from those in the AH in terms of grammatical proficiency. Even more surprising findings come from Hirakawa et al. (2019) who found that, not only the SA context was not superior to the AH one, but that the students AH significantly outscored those abroad in terms of adjective ordering restrictions. The authors established that explicit instruction AH was more beneficial for learners than just being exposed to the language naturalistically (i.e. abroad).

Overall, it seems that grammar does not benefit much from the naturalistic context. Nonetheless, a few studies exist pointing out the positive outcomes of SA over grammar development (Howard, 2001, 2005). For example, Howard (2001) investigated a group of Irish undergraduates learning French AH and one who did so in France and he suggested that the SA group outscored the AH one in terms of aspect marking (*passé composé* vs. *imparfait*). These contradictory findings could be partially explained by the complex nature of grammar and the differences between the studies that have investigated the area. First, examining grammar is challenging because of its many-sided nature, and results will vary depending on the linguistic feature being examined (Dufon & Churchill, 2006). Moreover, participants' background (initial proficiency level, age, motivation) could also affect their grammar development to a great extent (Llanes, 2011). Hence, future studies should report on all these variables when drawing conclusions on this, or any other topic within SA research.

On the whole, the first general conclusion that can be drawn from this part of the chapter (SA and language gains) is that many times investigators reach different outcomes, making the SA literature look contradictory and inconclusive for some L2 areas. However, the problem may rely on the fact that the measures and methods utilized in SA studies are simply too different in nature. Therefore, since there is no clear consensus on which are the best

tools to examine L2 development after a SA experience, researchers tend to use different instruments and measures when doing so, and this sometimes leads to ambiguous conclusions. Finally, taking together all the findings presented in the present section, the second conclusion that can be reached is that the SA context affects different areas of language differently and that the outcomes that this setting provides are going to be different depending on the skill being analysed. Accordingly, while on the one hand oral (especially oral fluency) and listening skills may take advantage of this naturalistic context, other areas of language such as writing or grammar development may not benefit as much as a result of a SA experience.

Two examples of language areas that show inconclusive results are L2 reading and L2 vocabulary. On the one hand, not many studies have been conducted examining the impact that SA experiences have on L2 reading. Moreover, when investigating this skill researchers have generally focused on only one aspect (namely reading comprehension) and other characteristics have been rather overlooked. At the same time, research on L2 vocabulary and SA has provided mixed findings. Although researchers generally agree in that learners will enhance their receptive vocabulary, the same does not always hold true in terms of productive vocabulary, which has led to a lack of harmony within lexical studies. The present dissertation attempts to provide more solid information upon the clear gap that exists in the literature of SA by investigating the impact that different SA experiences have on L2 reading and L2 vocabulary. Accordingly, the following sections in the chapter present the areas that are under investigation in the present study: L2 reading, L2 vocabulary, short SA programmes, and the ELFSA context.

2.2. Study abroad and L2 reading

As previously established, within the SA literature some areas of language have received great attention, whereas others remain have been neglected (Llanes, 2011). Research is especially scant in terms of L2 reading, which is possibly the least investigated area in the SA literature. Thus, it is uncertain whether a SA experience could provide positive outcomes to the

development of L2 reading (Isabelli-Garcia et al., 2018). As Kinginger (2009) claimed, reading competence “is remarkably under-represented in the applied linguistics literature related to study abroad” (p. 61). This may be due to the fact that people take reading as something that is done with little effort and practise, something that, as Grabe (2009, p. 4) said, we take ‘for granted’. Nonetheless, this is a misbelief since different studies have demonstrated that reading is a skill that needs much practise in order to develop (Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Iwasaki, 2007), especially when it comes to reading in an L2 (Beglar, Hunt, & Kite, 2012; Grabe, 2009).

In relation to reading, the two main aspects that influence academic success are comprehension (Li & Kirby, 2014) and fluency (Hudson, Lane, & Pullen, 2005). Comprehending a text is often described as a complex process that evolves over time (Li & Kirby, 2014). Pressley (2002) described comprehension as the ability to identify ideas in a text and integrate them so that the reader can interpret what is being read. Some years later, Grabe (2009) stated that, in order to be able to read effortlessly, L2 readers must spend many hours reading so that they become automatic in word recognition, syntactic parsing, and meaning formation. On the other hand, reading fluency is described as the ability “to read rapidly, smoothly, effortlessly and automatically with little attention to the mechanics of reading such as decoding” (Meyer & Felton, 1999, p. 284). Therefore, reading fluency requires automaticity in word recognition, accuracy in decoding and rapid reading rates.

Reading comprehension and fluency are closely connected, and one can influence the efficiency of the other (Beglar et al., 2012; Biancarosa & Cummings 2015). Reading fluency is an essential element of reading comprehension and, the reader’s fluency impacts how well readers are going to understand a text. Some decades ago, Smith and Holmes (1971) already established the close connection between reading fluency and reading comprehension by saying that proper text comprehension would not happen unless readers read fast enough because of the memory system. According to these authors, taking too long to read a sentence or a text would imply not

being able to retain, organize, and store all the information in an effective way. More recently, other studies have provided evidence that proves this hypothesis. As an example, Beglar et al. (2012) and Huffmann (2014) concluded that the faster learners read, the more they are able to take from the text, simply because they do not have to spend so much time decoding and they can focus on understanding what they are reading.

One problem that L2 learners face when attempting to improve their reading skills is lack of practise. Grabe and Stoller (2002) stated that L2 readers do not get enough exposure to L2 print (through reading) and this prevents them from building fluent L2 processing. A clear difference between reading in the L1 or the L2 is the amount of print texts they have access to. Usually, L2 readers have very limited exposure to L2 print, most of which comes from L2 classroom contexts while L1 students find thousands of opportunities to read in the L1 every day. For this reason, it seems logical to believe that the SA context would not only provide learners with constant exposure to the L2 (despite not only in a written form), but also with more opportunities to read in the L2, which should help them improve their L2 reading skills to a great extent. Nonetheless, the real impact that SA experiences have on L2 reading remains unknown. Moreover, it seems that SA provides many opportunities to practise speaking or listening in the L2, however, writing or reading do not seem to be practised to the same extent (Llanes & Muñoz, 2013). Hence more research is needed on the area in order to establish whether spending some time abroad actually provides enough opportunities to be exposed to L2 print and whether these will be enough for learners to enhance their reading abilities significantly.

A second problem shared by L2 readers lies in their lack of L2 proficiency. L2 texts can sometimes be too difficult for readers merely because of their low L2 expertise (Grabe, 2009). The previous section of this chapter shows that, generally, the immersion that the SA context provides boosts general L2 proficiency. Therefore, it could be hypothesized that participants could enhance their L2 proficiency while abroad, and that such improvement would be reflected in their reading skills. Again, however, the short number of

studies on the area make it difficult to determine whether this is true: “while SA students may improve in such skills as listening and speaking, or at least feel that they have improved in those areas, the same does not necessarily hold true for reading” (Li, 2014, pp. 73-74).

The first studies that investigated the effects that SA had over reading are those by Carrol (1967) and Gomes da Costa, Smith, and Whitely (1975). Through the ModernLanguage Association reading tests, both investigations found that SA anticipated gains in L2 reading comprehension. Some years later, Lapkin et al. (1995), Brecht et al. (1995) and Huebner (1995) conducted several multidimensional studies in which they investigated learners’ L2 development as a result of a SA experience (in Freed’s edited volume). Lapkin et al. (1995) examined the speaking, writing, listening and reading development of a group of English adolescents (n= 119) who were learning French as an L2. Lapkin et al.’s (1995) aim was to determine whether a 3-month stay in Quebec (Canada) would have a positive impact on their participants’ L2 skills. Concerning reading, they investigated learners’ development in reading comprehension and their perceptions towards their learning. They computed a Pearson correlation to assess the relationship between the students’ pre-test scores and their gains scores and found some modest gains in their reading comprehension scores ($r(55) = -.26, p < .06$). Hence, they concluded that spending three months in the target language’s country helped participants to slightly improve their reading comprehension. Moreover, some participants were somehow able to perceive this improvement. Lapkin et al. (1995) asked the learners to complete a questionnaire before and after the stay in which students had to compare their French skills to those of French native speakers and a portion of the students (four in ten) changed their initial ranking from “much worse” to “somewhat worse”, indicating that despite not all students felt an improvement, some started feeling slightly more positive towards their reading comprehension skills.

Positive findings were also found in Brecht et al. (1995), whose investigation had two main goals: first, to determine whether participants would improve

their L2 language skills, and second, to outline those factors that predicted language gains during the stay. In order to examine participants' reading skills, the authors used different reading passages, which varied in difficulty and length. The results in their study indicated that participants benefitted from the stay in terms of L2 reading, and the authors established that the factor that predicted gains in the area was initial proficiency level (the lower the level at the outset of the experiment, the greater the gains the learners experienced).

Finally, Huebner (1995) compared a group of North-American undergraduates who continued studying Japanese AH (n= 12) to one who performed a SA experience in Japan (n =10). Findings in Huebner's (1995) study indicate a slight, non-significant advantage in the SA group in terms of reading comprehension, however, the small number of participants in the study makes it difficult to find any statistical differences in the quantitative tests. Positive results come from his qualitative analyses in which, despite much individual variation, differences were found between the groups in terms of participants' attitudes towards L2 reading. It seems that participants abroad generally appreciated the opportunities they had to be exposed to L2 texts; however, those students AH were not so keen on reading in the L2.

Two more recent multidimensional studies including L2 reading development are those by Evans and Fisher (2005) and Kinginger (2008). Evans and Fisher (2005) investigated the L2 development of a group of English secondary school students (n= 68), learners of French as an L2 after a short stay abroad. Their study stands out because of the very short duration of the programmes: 6 days (n= 11), 9 days (n= 35) or 11 days (n= 22). This short length of stay (LoS) could be related to the participants' age. As Evans and Fisher (2005) stated, unlike university students who many times perform stays of one or two-semesters long, younger learners (children and adolescents) tend to take part in shorter SA programmes which, generally, last for one or two weeks. It seems, therefore, that the opportunities for acquisition are more limited among younger learners. On the whole, Evans and Fisher (2005) attempted to determine whether short periods abroad would be beneficial for L2

development in terms of speaking, writing, listening, and reading. The authors used the standardized optional tests and tasks produced by the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority for England to examine L2 reading and listening development from pre- to post-test, and results indicated that even though no changes emerged in the students' reading skills, they improved their listening comprehension significantly ($t= 4.13, df= 61, p< 0.000$), also showing large size effects according to the eta-squared statistic ($\eta^2= 0.22$). Similarly, a significant increase was found in the students' overall writing skills ($t= 3.164, df= 64, p< 0.002$), although this time the size effect was moderate ($\eta^2= 0.07$). Hence, although progress was found in learners' listening and writing skills, the authors concluded that such short SA experiences would not have any meaningful influence on participants' L2 reading.

A longer SA experience was examined in Kinginger (2008). In her monograph, the author examined a group of 23 North-American undergraduates, learners of French as an L2, who studied abroad in different regions of France for a semester. She used a standardised language test (*Test de Français International*) to measure participants' development in reading, listening and grammar, an oral interview to examine sociolinguistic and socio-pragmatic variability, and a role-play task to investigate learners' oral skills. With regard to reading, the test was divided into three sections: error identification, incomplete sentences, and reading comprehension. Results in Kinginger (2008) only show modest gains in participants' reading scores ($t(22) = 2.47, p< .05$), whereas gains were found in most of the other areas examined. Therefore, the author concluded that, although SA generally aids L2 learning, the context does not necessarily lead to significant gains for all L2 areas, as is the case of reading.

In a nutshell, although gains in L2 reading comprehension are not always significant, some of the previously described multidisciplinary studies point to a positive trend for L2 comprehension development after a SA experience. Nonetheless, because of their interdisciplinary nature, none of these investigations focused on L2 reading development exclusively, and all of

them used very general proficiency tests (i.e. examining more than more skill) to examine L2 reading. Hence, none used an actual reading test that focused on learners' reading abilities only. Moreover, the only aspect that authors seem to have examined to this point is reading comprehension, and other aspects of the skill such as reading fluency are still unexplored.

A few examples exist of studies focusing solely on L2 reading development after a SA experience (Dewey, 2004; Li, 2014; Kraut, 2017). The first one was that by Dewey (2004), who compared two groups of North-American undergraduates learning Japanese as an L2 ($n=30$) in two learning contexts: SA ($n=15$) and IM ($n=15$). He examined reading comprehension using three different measures: free-recall protocols, vocabulary knowledge tests and participants' self-assessment. For the quantitative assessment, students were asked to read a text and write out anything they remembered about that text. Then, they were asked to complete a vocabulary test which consisted of different words that had appeared in the text they had just read. This process was repeated three times during the data collections. Subsequently, participants completed a self-assessment computer-based test on their reading abilities and the Reading Language Contact Profile (RLCP).

Findings in Dewey (2004) revealed that the only significant difference between the groups was found in participants' self-assessments ($F(3, 26) = 6.53, p < .05$) and it implied that students in the SA group felt more confident towards their reading abilities than those in the IM group. The results from the RLCP data indicated that participants abroad had spent more time interacting and reading in the L2 than those in the IM group, which could have affected their increased confidence towards reading in Japanese at the end of the experiment. Nonetheless, the student-teacher relationship also played an important role in the IM group in terms of reading development in that the more out-of-class contact students had with their teachers, the more positive reactions they showed towards L2 texts after the experience ($F(1, 13) = 10.40, p < .01$). On the whole, findings in Dewey (2004) indicate that the SA and the IM contexts will provide similar outcomes to L2 learners in terms of L2 reading development. However, from the qualitative perspective,

results point out that the SA context helps participants feel more confident and willing to read in the L2, which supports the hypothesis that SA is beneficial for L2 participants.

More promising results come from Li (2014), who compared the L2 reading development in terms of strategy use and comprehension of six groups of North-American students, learning Chinese as an L2. Li's study consisted of groups of three proficiency levels (beginner, intermediate and advanced) in two learning contexts: SA and AH. Accordingly, participants were divided into beginner AH (n= 15), beginner SA (n= 9), intermediate AH (n= 13), intermediate SA (n= 15), advanced AH (n= 10), and advanced SA (n= 11). Reading comprehension was examined through the reading section in the Chinese Proficiency Test for foreign learners of Chinese, and reading strategies were investigated through a self-report questionnaire that offered an interpretation of readers' text processing. Moreover, the author also used the language contact profile (LCP) and the RCLP (as in Dewey, 2004) in order to control for language contact.

A 2x3 ANOVA indicated that the SA group generally outscored the AH one in terms of general Chinese proficiency ($F(3, 69) = 8.781, p < .004$) and reading comprehension ($F(3, 69) = 11.137, p < .003$). Concerning overall proficiency, significant differences between the SA and AH groups were found in the intermediate ($F(1, 27) = 31.634, p < .001$) and advanced students ($F(1, 20) = 12.804, p < .003$). Conversely, when it came to reading comprehension, the only group that significantly outscored the others was the SA intermediate one ($F(1, 27) = 41.382, p < .001$). In terms of self-reported reading strategies, the scores in the intermediate and advanced groups abroad were significantly higher than those AH ($F(1, 27) = 4.483, p < .001, F(1, 20) = 5.092, p < .011$), indicating that these two groups started using and being more aware of their strategies while reading in their L2. Again, no differences were found between the beginner group abroad and AH ($F(1, 24) = 31.095, p < .001$). Li concluded that these differences between proficiency levels could be explained in terms of L2 contact while abroad. The LCP and the RLCP indicated that intermediate and advanced learners not only spent more time

reading, but they also made use of reading materials other than their textbooks. At the same time, their higher proficiency level also allowed them to have more opportunities for language and culture contact. Overall, Li's (2014) study suggests that SA outcomes will vary depending on participants' initial proficiency level, and that amount of reading in the L2 and taking advantage of the opportunities that the SA context offers will aid L2 reading development in terms of comprehension and strategy use.

One last study that examines L2 reading development after performing a stay abroad is that by Kraut (2017). What is special about Kraut's study is that it examines gains in an intensive English program (IEP), which offered students 22 hours of English instruction per week. During these language lessons, all aspects of English were practised: reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary, and communication skills. Overall, it can be claimed that participants in Kraut were part of a more intensive SA programme that offered students a great opportunity to combine L2 (intensive) instruction with the immersion that the SA context already provides. Participants in Kraut (2017) were 15 Arabic and one Korean international students who attended English classes for 22 hours a week at an American university for eight weeks. The objective of the investigation was to examine the impact of this especially intensive SA experience on learners' lexical inferencing abilities, vocabulary breadth, reading comprehension and reading fluency, and participants' attitudes towards reading.

Findings provided a significant growth across some of the reading categories, namely reading fluency ($t= 4.98, p < .001$), willingness to read out of curiosity ($t=2.39, p < .05$), and students' perceived self-efficacy ($t= 3.53, p < .01$). Moreover, improvement in willingness to take on challenging tests ($t= 1.85, p < .08$) and reading comprehension ($t= 1.96, p < .06$) approached statistical difference. Another finding that emerged from Kraut's study was that the amount of time that students spend reading outside of the classroom correlated positively with gains in reading comprehension ($r= .453, p < .05$) and reading fluency ($r= .472, p < .05$). Hence, the author highlighted the importance of instructors encouraging students to read extensively outside of

the classroom in order to foster L2 reading development. All in all, findings in Kraut (2017) portray the SA as beneficial for L2 reading development. Nonetheless, the fact that learners were placed in an IEP should be emphasised. Traditionally, SA programmes are not as intensive when it comes to L2 instruction, hence, the fact that participants in Kraut took part in an IEP could be the reason why they improved to such a great extent.

Overall, despite some studies establishing that reading will be developed after a SA experience, the scarce amount of research and the unclear findings on the area make it challenging to draw any robust conclusions on whether living and studying abroad will have a positive impact on L2 reading. To date, only ten studies within the SA literature have investigated the effects of a SA experience on the skill and, out of these ten, seven are multidimensional studies that use very general measurements to investigate L2 reading development and only provide a general overview of students' development. Hence, only three studies to date have examined the development of L2 reading in a more extensive manner.

Moreover, from a quantitative perspective, 1) all the investigations but one (Kraut, 2017) focus on the development of L2 reading comprehension, and other aspects of reading remain unexplored; 2) all the studies but one (Evans & Fisher, 2005) investigate university students; and 3) all the studies but one (Evans & Fisher, 2005) examine long (+ 8 weeks) SA experiences. All things considered, the review of the literature on L2 reading corroborates the statement that reading represents a remarkably understudied domain within the SA field (Isabelli-Garcia et al., 2018) and that, due to the mixed findings in the area, it is difficult to demonstrate whether a stay abroad can have a positive impact on the development of the learners' L2 reading skills. Consequently, due to the aforementioned reasons, it seems necessary that future research projects provide information on the impact of SA experiences on the area.

2.3. Study abroad and L2 vocabulary

Previous research has provided evidence of the strong relationship between reading and vocabulary, showing that lack of L2 vocabulary knowledge can have a strong negative impact on L2 reading skills (Grabe, 2009; Koda, 2005; Laufer & Goldstein, 2004; Nation, 2001). As an illustration of this, Zaytseva (2016) established that lack of lexical knowledge would be “a major obstacle for successful comprehension, even for advanced learners” (p. 45). Researchers have defined this problem by stating that those readers who are weak at word recognition skills will become too dependent of context when attempting to understand a text and this will impede fast reading and efficient comprehension (Grabe, 2009; Grabe & Stoller, 2002). Accordingly, it can be claimed that much vocabulary knowledge is required in order to be able to use a language well, and this is particularly true for reading. Therefore, it seems logical to believe that increased vocabulary knowledge should have a positive impact on learners’ L2 reading skills.

Moreover, in addition to being closely linked to L2 reading, vocabulary plays a significant role on learners’ proficiency level because, as Milton (2009) states, it is “not an optional or unimportant part of a foreign language. Still less is it an aspect of knowledge that can be disposed of without much effect on the language being learnt” (p. 3). Therefore, vocabulary knowledge is a key language factor that will have a strong impact on participants’ L2 proficiency. In fact, some researchers assert that vocabulary can be used as an indicator of L2 proficiency (Miralpeix & Muñoz, 2018; Schmitt, 2010), and this seems to be a reasonable belief since without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed (Milton, 2009).

L2 vocabulary research has been studied from different perspectives and through different measurements. These differences in the methods used when examining L2 vocabulary development are due to the multifaceted nature of this area of language. In sum, researchers agree that vocabulary knowledge involves not one but different aspects of language, which makes it very challenging to examine the area (Schmitt, 2010). In an attempt to create a

model that examined L2 vocabulary knowledge as a whole, Richards (1976) established that knowing a word involved knowing its spelling, pronunciation, syntactic behaviour, collocations, associations, frequency of occurrence, and register. Some years later, Nation (2001) expanded this conceptualization in an attempt to create a point of reference for vocabulary researchers. Nation (2001) divided word knowledge into receptive and productive, with three dimensions in each: “form, meaning, and use” (p. 27). “Form” referred to having knowledge of the written and the spoken aspects of the word, in addition to word parts; “meaning” involved knowledge of form/meaning connections, and its semantic relations and associations; and, “use” included knowledge of the word’s grammatical functions, its collocations, and its register and frequency (See Table 3).

Table 3. Components of word knowledge (Nation, 2001, p. 27)

		Receptive knowledge	Productive knowledge
Form	Spoken	What does the word sound like?	How is the word pronounced?
	Written	What does the word look like?	How is the word written/spelled?
	Word parts	What parts are recognizable in this word?	What word parts are needed to express this meaning?
Meaning	Form/meaning	What meaning does this word form signal?	What word form can be used to express this meaning?
	Concepts and referents	What is included in the concept?	What items can the concept refer to?
	associations	What other words does this make us think of?	What other words could we use instead of this one?
Use	Grammatical functions	In what patterns does the word occur?	In what patterns must we use this word?
	Collocations	What words or types of words occur with this one?	What words or types of words must we use with this one?
	Constraints on use (register, frequency)	Where, when, and how often would we expect to meet this word?	Where, when, and how often can we use this word?

Nation's framework of vocabulary knowledge exhibits the complex nature of vocabulary. Furthermore, it portrays the difficulty of examining its many aspects within one study. The author raises awareness of the two main distinctions within L2 vocabulary: receptive (or passive) and productive (or active). Receptive vocabulary is the ability to recognize a word when heard or seen, hence, it normally refers the amount of words over which learners have at least some superficial knowledge. This aspect of vocabulary is generally investigated in terms of size or breadth. For this reason, size tests consist of a large sample of words (generally from different frequency levels) so that learners can reflect their general vocabulary knowledge. Although, as Read (2000) claimed, sometimes size tests are criticised for being superficial, they can provide "a more representative picture of the overall state of the learner's vocabulary" (p. 115) and, consequently, help researchers to reach a greater understanding of students' development (Laufer & Goldstein, 2004).

On the other hand, productive vocabulary consists of the learners' abilities to use this vocabulary effectively. Laufer (1998) separated vocabulary knowledge into "controlled" and "free" (p. 257). The former refers to the ability to use words when prompted by a task, whereas the latter involves the learner's use of words with no specific prompt (i.e. free writing or speech). It seems reasonable to believe that productive vocabulary will require higher proficiency, as Milton (2009) suggests, "The number of words a learner can recognise in the context of speech or writing is likely to be different from the number of words the same learner can call to mind and use" (p. 118). Some authors suggest that production is much more complex than receptive recognition, and they state that receptive knowledge will only turn into productive knowledge once learners have a certain control over the language and words have been integrated into their lexicon (Meara, 1997; Schmitt, 2014).

How receptive mastery will change into productive usage is a big question among vocabulary researchers. Generally, investigators in the field acknowledge that much input is needed in order to learn new words receptively (Milton, 2009). Moreover, in order to transfer receptive

knowledge into productive mastery, learners need to be able to use the words they know (i.e. practise), so that these words can be internalized in the students' mental lexicon. Altogether, it seems that L2 vocabulary development requires much input and practise. Accordingly, productive vocabulary learning supports DeKeyser's (2007a) skill acquisition theory, which proposes that a considerable amount of practise will transform controlled knowledge into automatic knowledge and, consequently, allow learners to use their declarative implicit knowledge in a more automatic, effortless way (See Section 2.6. for more information about this theory).

The immersion that the SA context renders seems ideal for L2 vocabulary learning because of the massive amounts of exposure participants will get. As Milton (2009) said, the SA context should "provide ample exposure to the foreign language, as everyone will speak the foreign language and all interactions will be carried out in it" (p. 231). Therefore, SA participants will find themselves surrounded by the L2 in their everyday life (i.e. going shopping, going to a restaurant or a bar, socializing, etc.). Moreover, these informal interactions will be combined with formal instruction, since learners will attend some classes while abroad (either at a language school or at university), and this increases the amount of opportunities that participants will have to interact in the L2.

It is also important to note that, despite vocabulary learning occurring somewhat incidentally (Ellis, 1994), learners cannot randomly create their L2 lexicon by simply being exposed to the L2 outside of the classroom. Accordingly, the combination of explicit instruction and implicit exposure to the L2 seems to help learners to become successful when learning L2 words (Milton, 2009; Sanz, 2014; Zaytseva, 2016). The SA context offers this combination of L2 classroom and L2 opportunities for incidental learning outside the class, and that is why researchers believe that this environment could be so beneficial for L2 vocabulary learning. As Zaytseva, Pérez-Vidal, and Miralpeix (2018) said:

“[...] It seems reasonable to believe that the SA environment, which is a priori characterized by a massive exposure to authentic input and unlimited opportunities for target language (TL) practice and interaction in a variety of real-life situations [...], enhances communicative competence and speeds up growth in vocabulary knowledge” (p. 210)

Nonetheless, it is sometimes uncertain whether researchers refer to receptive or productive knowledge when referring to L2 vocabulary and this can be problematic because, as specified above, these aspects of the lexicon are exceedingly distinct and they develop at different paces. As an example, whereas learners are more likely to expand their receptive vocabulary during a stay abroad because of the immersive nature of this setting, the more productive aspects of vocabulary may take more time to develop (Briggs, 2015; Fitzpatrick, 2012). This is because productive vocabulary requires much more practise, and the mere fact of being exposed to the L2 will not lead learners to a developed productive mastery unless the skills are considerably practised. Furthermore, the complex character of L2 vocabulary makes it difficult to investigate all its different aspects within one study, which is why researchers have used such varied methodologies when examining this topic. However, this has become a problem because the large difference in research methodologies has many times resulted in contradictory findings that do not help the understanding of receptive/productive issues (Schmitt, 2010).

Overall, in terms of L2 receptive vocabulary, researchers seem to agree in that the SA context benefits this aspect of the lexicon, indicating that learners' L2 receptive vocabulary of language tends to improve greatly after an immersion abroad (Ife et al., 2000; Milton & Meara, 1995). On the other hand, mixed-findings have been found with regard to L2 productive vocabulary, specifically when using “free” measures which Laufer (1998) described as “use of words at one's free will, without any specific prompts for particular words” (p. 257). An example of an instrument that renders measures of “free” vocabulary knowledge can be a written task or an oral

narrative (Barquin, 2012; Zaytseva, 2016). In sum, most researchers in the field have established that SA favours the acquisition of certain aspects of the lexicon, but not all (Fitzpatrick, 2012). Hence, while aspects such as L2 receptive vocabulary tend to improve significantly after a stay abroad, the more productive aspects of L2 vocabulary may need more time to develop (Briggs, 2015; Jensen & Howard, 2014; Serrano, et al., 2012).

Milton and Meara (1995), who examined the receptive vocabulary development of a group of 53 international students studying English at a British university for six months, conducted one of the first studies on L2 vocabulary. Participants in their study came from different parts of Europe including Germany (n= 26), France (n= 16), Spain (n= 8), and Italy (n= 3) and the authors established that all of them had a “high” level of English at the beginning of the stay. They used a computerised yes/no test (Eurocentres Vocabulary Size Test) which targeted 10.000 words of different frequency levels and created an estimate of the amount of words that students know. Milton and Meara (1995) found significant development in their participants’ L2 receptive vocabulary ($t= 9.12$, $df= 52$, $p< .001$). They also compared the gains students made as a result of the 6-month stay to their half-yearly vocabulary growth AH in an attempt to compare the SA context to the AH one, and results revealed that the growth rate during a SA is four times as big as the rate AH ($t= 6.98$, $p< .001$). Hence, they concluded that studying abroad can be extremely beneficial for the learning of new words.

Milton and Meara (1995) made a very innovative contribution to the SA field, which paved the way and motivated future studies to investigate L2 vocabulary after a SA experience. As a result, some years later, Ife et al. (2000) performed a study in which they examined a group of 36 British undergraduates, learners of Spanish as an L2. Participants in their study had an intermediate (n= 21) or an advanced (n= 15) level at the beginning of the stay, and they spent one (n= 25) or two (n= 11) semesters in Spain. The authors examined learners’ L2 receptive vocabulary through the three-word association test (A3VT), a test consisting of 120 items. Each item is comprised of three words, two of which are strongly associated with each

other and a third one that does not have any relation with the first two. Hence, the aim of the test is for participants to “identify the word that is the misfit in each set” (p. 61). Moreover, the authors examined participants’ knowledge of productive vocabulary through a translation activity (“controlled” task, as defined by Laufer, 1998). In this task learners were asked to provide an English translation to all the items (n= 120) in the A3VT. This second task was performed because Ife et al. (2000) wanted to determine if participants knew a word but also how well they knew this word (in-depth knowledge). Findings in their study confirmed that the SA context was beneficial for learners since they improved significantly in both tasks. Furthermore, although some slight differences exist in relation to participants’ initial proficiency level, these were not significant, which suggests that both groups (intermediate and advanced) improved to a similar extent. Finally, they found that LoS was an important predictor of gains, and that those students that stayed abroad for two months significantly outscored those whose sojourn lasted one semester.

A similar study was conducted by Jiménez-Jiménez (2010), who wanted to replicate previous studies in the area of L2 vocabulary by performing a study with more participants and a more rigorous design. The author compared the SA and AH experiences of a group of 87 North-American university students, learners of Spanish as an L2. He used an adapted version of the A3VT (Ife et al., 2000), which targeted 150 words instead of 120, and a translation task in which learners had to translate the 150 words in the A3VT test. Findings in his study support the benefits of SA: while participants AH did not improve their vocabulary significantly, those abroad showed a significant increase in their vocabulary size and their depth of lexical knowledge. Hence, he concluded that learners are more likely to acquire a higher level of vocabulary after a SA experience rather than AH because the latter setting does not provide the elements that trigger L2 vocabulary development.

Another study that compares different learning contexts is that by Dewey (2008), who examined the L2 vocabulary development of a group of students

abroad (n= 20), AH (n= 22) and IM (n= 14). The 56 participants in his study were North-American undergraduates, learners of Japanese as an L2. In order to capture participants' L2 vocabulary size and depth of knowledge, he used three tasks: 1) A vocabulary matching test, which measured the learners' ability to match a word with its definition (there were 150 items of different frequency levels in total); 2) a Japanese version of the Vocabulary Knowledge Scale, a measure of controlled productive vocabulary which provides information about how well learners know a word; and 3) the Japanese situational vocabulary test, a test which consisted of providing definitions for words frequently encountered in everyday situations within the target community, for example "words used on signs, train schedules, and menus" (p. 131). Dewey (2008) argued that, while it may seem obvious that the SA group would outscore the other two groups in the final task, the selection of this latter task was due to the objective of determining whether SA participants did in fact learn L2 everyday vocabulary. Findings in Dewey (2008) suggest that the SA setting fosters L2 vocabulary learning to a greater extent than the AH one since participants abroad showed significantly higher scores in the three tasks employed. Nonetheless, the IM group also developed their L2 vocabulary greatly, showing similar results to the group abroad. Therefore, the main difference between the SA and the IM groups was found in the situational vocabulary test, in which SA participants significantly outscored the IM ones, probably because of the opportunities for L2 exposure to everyday vocabulary that the former group had.

More recently, Briggs (2015) investigated the L2 vocabulary development of a group of 251 international students who performed a sojourn in the UK. A second objective of her study was to determine whether the contact that participants had with the L2 outside of the classroom was related to their vocabulary gains (if any). Briggs (2015) grouped participants in terms of LoS in the country: short SA (6-10 weeks), medium SA (11-15 weeks), and long SA (16-20 weeks). Concerning the instruments, she created an adapted version of the vocabulary levels test (VLT) which emerged from the combination of Nation's (1990) receptive VLT and Laufer and Nation's

(1990) productive VLT. This test allowed her to examine participants' L2 receptive and controlled productive vocabulary simultaneously. To examine out-of-class context, she used an adapted version of the LCP by Freed et al. (2004). Altogether, Briggs (2015) found a general significant improvement with regard to L2 receptive vocabulary [$F(2,193) = 3.05, p < .050, \eta^2 = .03$], and gains in productive vocabulary also appeared after the stays [$F(2, 190) = 3.749, p < .025, \eta^2 = .04$]. Nonetheless, a repeated measures t-test was run in order to investigate whether the different lengths of stay had impacted the students' vocabulary gains and it was found that in terms of productive vocabulary only the medium stay ($p < .002, \eta^2 = .18$) and long stay groups ($p < .000, \eta^2 = .21$) made significant gains. Moreover, learners in the long sojourn outscored those in the medium length one on all the measures analysed.

Hence, the author concluded that LoS was an important predictor of gains in terms of L2 vocabulary, and that longer stays would be significantly more beneficial than shorter ones. Finally, no statistically significant correlation was found between out-of-class contact and L2 vocabulary development, which Briggs explains in terms of the few L2 activities in which participants took part while abroad. Therefore, she said that the out-of-class contact that participants in her study had was insufficient for the learners to show any significant relationship between the variables. Accordingly, she determined that language institutions and teachers should encourage students to engage in activities that promote L2 use in order to increase their exposure to the target language and, consequently, promote its development.

All in all, Briggs' (2015) study provided evidence that the duration of a SA experience has a substantial impact on the learners' outcomes, especially when related to L2 productive vocabulary. This corroborates findings in Jensen and Howard (2014), Lara (2014), Laufer and Paribakht (1998), Pérez-Vidal and Juan-Garau (2011), and Serrano, et al. (2012), whose investigations also established that some aspects of L2 productive vocabulary take longer to develop and spending long periods abroad may be necessary for them to be enhanced. This is particularly true when productive vocabulary

is measured through oral and written tasks (“free” tasks, as defined by Laufer, 1998).

As an example, Serrano et al. (2012) examined a group of 14 Spanish university students who performed a year-long SA experience in the UK. Learners’ oral and written skills were examined three times (at the beginning of the stay, at the end of their first semester abroad, and once the stays finished) in terms of fluency (number of words per T-unit), accuracy (number of errors per T-unit), syntactic complexity (number of clauses per T-unit) and lexical richness (measured through Guiraud’s Index). To do so, the authors used an oral narrative task and a descriptive essay. Findings in Serrano et al. (2012) indicate that although learners’ benefitted from a semester abroad in terms of oral fluency ($Z= 3.18, p< .001, d= 0.93$) and oral lexical richness ($Z= 2.48, p< .013, d= 0.54$), the one-term-long stay did not prove to be enough for learners to show a significant improvement in the rest of the measures under-study. As a result, the main finding emerging from Serrano et al.’s (2012) study was that LoS can make a difference for L2 productive measures to develop. Overall, the authors concluded that some L2 systems develop slower than others, and some skills develop faster than some others. Moreover, they established that changes seemed to appear earlier in oral skills than in written production. Similarly, Jensen and Howard (2014), who compared a group of Chinese and French L1s, learners of English as an L2, also concluded that gains in the learners were substantially more evident when their SA stay had a duration of two semesters rather than only one.

Other studies that have asserted that one semester abroad is not enough for learners to develop their L2 productive vocabulary are those by Laufer and Paribakht (1998), Pérez-Vidal and Juan-Garau (2011), and Lara (2014). Laufer and Paribakht (1998) compared the L2 vocabulary development of a group of Israeli students learning English abroad ($n= 79$), to one who continued their L2 instruction AH ($n= 103$).The authors examined the students’ receptive and productive (both controlled and free) vocabulary development of both groups, and they found that each dimension of vocabulary developed at a different pace. Hence, while participants abroad

outperformed those AH in terms of L2 receptive vocabulary (as measured through the VLT), they did not show an advantage with regard to productive vocabulary. In fact, the results in Laufer and Paribakht (1998) established a significant advantage on the AH group in terms of lexical sophistication, implying that a period of formal instruction at home helped participants improve their L2 lexical sophistication whereas the SA setting did not. Finally, the authors also established that gains in productive vocabulary are much less predictable than those in receptive vocabulary, and that long periods of time abroad (of about 2 years) may be needed in order to find gains in the former.

Similarly, Pérez-Vidal and Juan-Garau (2011) and Lara (2014) also failed to find gains in different aspects of participants' L2 productive vocabulary after a 3-month SA experience. On the one hand, Pérez-Vidal and Juan-Garau (2011) examined a group of 55 Catalan/Spanish bilinguals who performed a SA experience in an English speaking country for 3 months and they compared their skills to those of a group of native speakers (NSs) ($n= 19$). Participants were examined by means of a role-play task and a written composition before and after a 6-month period of formal instruction AH, which was followed by the 3-month stay. Both instruments were examined in terms of fluency (number of words per clause and number of words per minute), accuracy (ratio of errors per word), grammatical complexity (number of dependent clauses per clause, clauses per T-Unit and the Coordination Index), and lexical complexity (through Guiraud's Index of Lexical richness).

Results in Pérez-Vidal and Juan-Garau (2011) show that the SA period was significantly more beneficial than a period AH, and that gains measured through the oral task were more apparent than those measured using the written task (as in Serrano et al., 2012). In their study, they found a significant improvement after the SA in the students' oral skills in terms of fluency ($F[2,38]=12.03$, $p< 0.0001$), accuracy ($F[2,38] =20.19$, $p< 0.0001$), grammatical complexity ($F[2,38] = 1.77$, $p< 0.1834$), and use of formulaic language ($F[2,38] = 10.12$, $p< 0.0003$). This advancement did not happen for

any of the oral measures after the AH period. With regard to the students' written skills, significant gains were only found after the stay and in terms of fluency ($F[1,36] = 27.23, p < 0.000$) and lexical complexity ($F[1,36] = 17.54, p < 0.000$). Finally, albeit improvement was found in some of the different measures under-study, differences between the learners and the NSs remained large.

Following a similar method, Lara (2014) compared the development of a group of 47 Spanish undergraduates (45 of which were Catalan bilinguals), learners of English as an L2, who spent three ($n = 33$) or six ($n = 14$) months abroad. In her study, 24 NSs were used as baseline data. Lara used a problem solving role-play task which was analysed through measures of syntactic and lexical complexity, accuracy and fluency. Her results revealed that the SA was not exceedingly beneficial in terms of L2 productive vocabulary, regardless of LoS. Participants in the study only showed significant improvement in terms of oral fluency and this enhancement happened after both stays (the 3-month and the 6-month one). Hence the author concluded that SA impact was limited and more easily found in measures of speech rate.

Albeit this more adverse side of the SA setting, there are some studies that found gains in participants' L2 productive vocabulary even after spending only one semester, or less, in the target country (Barquin, 2012; Llanes & Muñoz, 2009; Zaytseva, 2016). As an example, Barquin (2012) used an argumentative essay to investigate the L2 writing development of a group of 30 Catalan/Spanish bilinguals. The group was investigated after six months of formal instruction at their home university, and after a 3-month SA experience in an English-speaking country. Moreover, 28 NSs of English participated in the study and were used as baseline data. In terms of L2 productive vocabulary development, she examined learners' fluency, complexity, accuracy, lexical diversity and lexical sophistication. Barquin (2012) concluded that the SA context was significantly beneficial concerning students' fluency (they wrote longer essays after their stay), and lexical diversity (as measured through Guiraud's Index). Moreover, her findings suggest that there were no significant differences between participants'

writings and those of the NSs in terms of fluency and diversity after the stay. No changes were found in terms of lexical sophistication, which consisted of a comparison of the words used based on their overall frequency in the English language. Barquin suggested that this was in line with previous research, which has found that some measures develop faster than others. Moreover, she referred to the mixed-findings that have been found within SA and L2 vocabulary research by saying that the undetermined link between receptive and productive vocabulary could explain the lack of changes in some of the more productive measures.

Some years later, Zaysteva (2016) examined L2 productive vocabulary development following a similar methodology to Barquin (2012). The author examined a group of 30 Catalan/Spanish university students, learners of English as an L2, after a 6-month period of formal instruction AH and a 3-month SA experience. In her study, lexical fluency, density, diversity, accuracy and sophistication were examined by the use of an argumentative essay. Zaytseva (2016) found gains in all the measures analysed but one (namely, lexical sophistication), therefore, she concluded that a SA was beneficial for L2 productive development, even when the stay is only three months long. As far as lack of development in terms of lexical sophistication, results in Zaytseva (2016) are in line with Lara (2014) and Serrano et al. (2012), who found that different measures of L2 receptive and productive vocabulary develop at different paces in various language contexts. Moreover, it adds evidence to the fact that lexical sophistication may be one of the L2 productive vocabulary measures that take longer to develop (as found in Barquin, 2012 and Laufer & Paribakht, 1998).

Nonetheless, a recent study within the SA field found gains in learners' L2 lexical sophistication after a SA experience (Tracy-Ventura, 2017). In her study, Tracy-Ventura examined a group of 27 Spanish learners who spent nine months in Spain or Mexico. Participants were examined by means of the X-lex test (similar to the LFP), which provided information of learners' knowledge of words of different frequency bands, and an oral and written task which were used to examine whether participants used more

sophisticated words after their stays. In short, the aims of the study were to determine whether participants learnt low frequency level words during the stay, and if they used them in their oral and written performances. Findings in Tracy-Ventura (2017) show a significant increase not only in participants' knowledge of low frequency L2 vocabulary but also in their use of these words: "learners increased their use of less frequent vocabulary from bands 2-5 and produced less vocabulary from band 1 over time" (p. 42). This finding could be explained in terms of programme duration. Participants in Tracy-Ventura (2017) participated in a year-long SA programme; hence, they lived in the target country for substantially longer periods than learners in other studies such as that by Barquin (2012), Laufer and Paribakht (1998), or Zaytseva (2016), who did not show an enhancement in their lexical sophistication. Therefore, differences in participants' outcomes could again be explained in terms of the amount of time they spent in the target country (the longer, the better).

Finally, another study which found gains in participants' L2 productive vocabulary is that by Llanes and Muñoz (2009). What is interesting about this study is that participants only spent three to four weeks in the target country. Llanes and Muñoz (2009) investigated a group of 24 Catalan/Spanish who spent three or four weeks in an English speaking country. Participants engaged in oral interviews (before and after their stays) which consisted of a series of biographical questions followed by a picture-elicited story task. The picture-description task was examined through different measures of oral fluency and accuracy, and findings showed an improvement in most of the measures analysed: Syllables per minute ($t(23)= 6.108, p < .000$), other language word ratio ($t(23)= 4.383, p < .000$), articulation rate ($t(23)= 4.556, p < .000$), longest fluent run ($t(23)= 2.493, p < .020$), ratio of errors ($t(23)= 2.168, p < .041$), average errors per clause ($t(23)= 3.314, p < .003$) and ratio of lexical errors ($t(23)= 4.513, p < .000$). Moreover, the authors established that initial proficiency level predicted gains in the learners, with those who had a lower level at the outset of the experiment showing more gains at the end, especially in terms of fluency and lexical accuracy. Furthermore, learners

were asked to keep a diary during their stay in order to keep track of the amount L2 practise they received. They were asked to write a daily report on how much time they spent listening, speaking, reading and writing in English, and their use of other languages. These notebook entries were examined in light of the possible relation between time spent used the L2 and gains. Some positive correlations were found between amount of L2 reading, writing and listening and accuracy, which suggest that practising any of these three skills can have a positive effect on how accurately learners use the L2.

On the whole, it can be stated that L2 vocabulary has received great attention within the SA literature, at least when compared to L2 reading. Moreover, it seems that, generally, this area of language benefits from SA experiences since all studies have found development in at least one aspect of L2 vocabulary. In particular, participating in a SA programme promotes gains in L2 receptive vocabulary, probably because as Webb (2005) said, vocabulary learning is primarily receptive. Acquiring productive mastery, on the other hand, seems to be more complex because “(1) more word knowledge components are required, and (2) many of these components are contextual in nature (e.g., collocation, register constraints) and take a long time to develop” (Schmitt, 2014, p. 920).

It is also important to mention that most of the studies that have investigated L2 vocabulary development as a result of a SA experience have mostly explored only one aspect of the lexicon (i.e. receptive vocabulary, L2 lexical fluency, accuracy, or sophistication). This is understandable considering the multifaceted nature of vocabulary and the difficulties of examining different aspects of vocabulary within one study. As Schmitt (2010) declared, a battery of tests that studied all of the word-knowledge aspects for words would be “extremely unwieldy and time consuming” (p. 80). However, these differences in the way L2 vocabulary has been investigated so far and the lack of studies focusing exclusively on different aspects of vocabulary could be the reason why sometimes researchers have identified contradictory findings in the area. Therefore, it is obvious that, in order to gather a more complete picture on the development of L2 vocabulary after a SA experience,

more consistent methods and a combination of approaches to target different facets of vocabulary knowledge need to be employed (Zaytseva et al., 2018).

2.4. Short SA experiences

Most of the experiences that have been described in this chapter so far include stays of a long (>8 weeks) duration, which makes the lack of studies examining short stays evident. The reason why this type of stays have not received as much attention may rely on the fact that some researchers believe that not much change will emerge in the learners' L2 after a short stay abroad (Llanes & Muñoz, 2009). However, the few studies that have explored the topic have generally found gains in participants' L2, at least in one of the measures they examine (Evans & Fisher, 2005; Llanes & Prieto Botana, 2015; Rodrigo, 2011). As an illustration of this, participants in Evans and Fisher (2005) and Llanes and Prieto (2015) significantly enhanced their listening comprehension, and those in Llanes and Muñoz (2009) demonstrated that short stays can play a meaningful role in helping students increase their overall fluency and accuracy in the L2. Thus, even though significant changes have not been found in all L2 measures, research has provided evidence of the positive traits that emerge from participating in a short SA experience.

Moreover, short programmes abroad have recently been gaining much popularity, which makes it even more necessary to investigate their impact and how they affect learners' L2 skills. As an illustration of this, the 2019 US Open Doors report on the duration of study abroad programmes shows that the amount of people that performed a summer experience of two to eight weeks during the academic year 2017/18 (29.9%) was almost equal to the amount of students that participated in a semester-long experience (30.3%). Moreover, a high number of university students took part in 1-month-long (about four weeks) programmes abroad in January (7%), and in programmes that lasted eight weeks or less during the academic year (19%), whereas the number of people that participated in year-long programmes is extremely low (2.2%) (see Table 4).

Table 4. US Open Doors report on duration of SA programmes (iie, 2020)

Duration	2011/12	2013/14	2016/17	2017/18
Summer term: Two to eight weeks	33.4%	33.5%	30.5%	29.9%
8 weeks or Less during the academic year	14.4%	16.5%	18.8%	19.00%
January Term	7.00%	7.5%	7.1%	7.00%
One semester	35.00%	31.9%	30.7%	30.3%
Academic year	3.2%	2.9%	2.2%	2.2%
Other	7%	7.7%	10.7%	11.6%

The figures in Table 4 demonstrate that short SA experiences are as popular as semester-long ones, at least among North-American university students. Considering European learners, summer programmes abroad seem to be a very popular option, especially among younger learners (Evans & Fisher, 2005; Llanes & Muñoz, 2009). As an illustration of this, in Germany 15% of the students who travelled abroad in 2017 performed a stay that was shorter than 2 weeks, and 11% did so for two to four (mostly through a summer programme), which amounts to 26% of SA participants performing short SA experiences (Wissenschaft Weltoffen, 2019). Moreover, the Wissenschaft Weltoffen (2019) report also established that around 80% of international SA experiences do not last more than one semester, with the most frequent visits being those that last up to three months (41%), followed by visits that last three to six months (40%).

These numbers provide evidence of the popularity of shorter programmes abroad. Nonetheless, short programmes abroad are normally organized by private organizations; therefore, despite knowing how many people participate in semester- and year-long programmes through the ERASMUS

programme, it is challenging to find any statistics on the amount of students that perform short stays that are not within an institutional context. This may also explain why summer programmes abroad have not been much researched, since being able to reach these private organizations is also more challenging than doing research with students from a public institution. Overall, it seems essential to conduct research on short sojourns because, despite their large popularity, not much is known about the effects that they can have on the learners' L2.

Some early examples of studies that have investigated short SA experiences are those by Cubillos et al. (2008), Evans and Fisher (2005), and Llanes and Muñoz (2009). Evans and Fisher (2005) conducted a multidimensional study through which they analysed the L2 skills of a group of 68 British teenagers, learners of French as an L2, after their participation in a short programme abroad. The exchange was in France and it lasted for six, nine, or eleven days. Findings in Evans and Fisher (2005) revealed that the programme abroad produced a great impact on learners' L2 listening comprehension and writing performance. However, no significant changes were found in terms of reading comprehension and oral development. The authors concluded that despite the stay being short, learners took advantage of the immersion and they were able to show some improvement regarding listening comprehension and writing. Nonetheless, findings in Evans and Fisher (2005) suggest that L2 reading comprehension will not be enhanced after a short stay in the target country and a longer period abroad may be needed for this measure to show any change.

Three years later, Cubillos et al. (2008) investigated the impact of a 5-week programme abroad on the listening comprehension of a group of North-American university students, learners of Spanish as an L2. The authors stated that their study was motivated by the growth in the popularity of short-term programmes among North-American undergraduates and the dearth of research on the topic. In their study, they compared a group of students who completed a 5-week winter term in Spain or Costa Rica (n= 42) to a group who continued their studies AH (n= 92). They examined listening

comprehension through the listening test provided by the Spanish advanced placement test. Different questionnaires were employed to examine the students' use of strategies when answering the comprehension questions, their self-assessment on their Spanish L2 skills, and their language course (either AH or abroad). On the one hand, similar gains emerged in both groups concerning listening comprehension, which suggests that both groups improved to the same extent. Nonetheless, when taking a closer look into the results, the authors discovered that a SA subgroup of high achievers was the one to show higher gains in the long narrative task. Hence, Cubillos et al. (2008) established that, at least when looking at the long narrative task, high achievers in the SA group outscored their peers who remained on campus. Some differences between groups were also found in the questionnaires. First, findings suggested that the SA context promoted the use and reinforcement of strategies while listening. Moreover, the self-assessment questionnaire yielded that learners abroad felt more confident with regard to their listening skills after the stay. Finally, the SA setting was described as more exciting and students abroad claimed that interacting in Spanish with native speakers during the stay was more rewarding than doing so back home. Overall, findings in Cubillos et al. (2008) suggest that, although the listening outcomes shown by learners abroad are similar to those of students staying AH, the SA context fosters the students' confidence and motivation when using the L2, even when the sojourn is short.

Another study that provided evidence of the positive impact of short SA experiences is that by Llanes and Muñoz (2009). The authors examined how a 3-4 weeks programme affected the oral fluency, oral accuracy, and listening comprehension of a group of 24 Catalan/Spanish students, who were learning English as an L2. A second objective of their study was to explore to what extent were learners' individual differences related to their L2 progress. Gains were found in most of the measures under analysis, which implied that learners in their study had become more fluent and accurate using the L2 in addition to understanding oral discourses significantly better. Hence, the authors concluded that completing a SA experience can have a meaningful

impact on learners' L2 oral and listening skills, even when the duration of the programme is as short as three or four weeks. Concerning individual differences, those learners who had a lower level at the outset of the experiment increasing the amount of syllables they used per minute, decreasing their use of L1 words, and making fewer lexical errors in their post-test oral tasks.

More recently, three studies have also attempted to shed some light on the impact of short SA programmes, generally finding that they can have a positive effect on the learners' L2 (Llanes, Mora & Serrano, 2016; Llanes, Tragant & Serrano, 2018; Serrano, Llanes & Tragant, 2016). Llanes et al., (2016b) investigated whether a 3-week programme in England would provide the same outcomes as an intensive course AH in terms of L2 pronunciation. Learners were all Catalan/Spanish teenagers ($n = 36$), learning English as an L2, and they were examined through an oral imitation task in terms of voice onset time and perceived foreign accent. Results in Llanes et al. (2016b) emphasize the positive nature of the SA experience since, although both groups improved, more positive changes were found in the participants abroad. The SA participants significantly improved their voice onset time, producing longer, more target-like voice onset time durations (SA: $t(13) = -4.473$, $p < 0.001$, $r = 0.546$), whereas changes in the AH group were not significant ($t(21) = -0.741$, $p < 0.467$, $r = 0.04$). Similarly, changes in the degree of perceived foreign accent started reaching significance in the SA group ($t(13) = 1.945$, $p < 0.074$, $r = 0.159$), while this did not happen in the AH one ($t(21) = 1.06$, $p < 0.326$, $r = 0.081$).

Another example is Serrano et al., (2016), in which the authors compared a group abroad to one in an intensive course AH (as in Llanes et al., 2016b). The objective of their study was to investigate whether two groups (SA vs AH) of Catalan/Spanish teenagers ($n = 102$), learners of English as an L2, would experience the same gains in terms of written and oral production, grammar, and use of formulaic sentences. Changes in the learners' L2 were comparable after participation in both programmes, which suggests that participants improved to a similar extent regardless of their learning context.

Although this may seem surprising, the intensive nature of the AH programme provided much input and opportunities for L2 output and interaction, and this could have had a positive impact on the learners' L2. Nonetheless, differences were found in some of the measures: On the one hand, the SA context was found to be significantly more favourable in terms of use of L2 formulaic language than the AH one ($F(1,111) = 9.352$; $p < .001$; $\eta_p^2 = .078$); moreover, they increased their lexical richness (as measured through Guiraud's Index) significantly more than those AH did ($F(1,39) = 4.94$; $p < .032$; $\eta_p^2 = .112$). However, the time and context variables favoured learners AH in terms of grammatical development in that although their scores were lower than their SA counterparts, they progressed more from time 1 to time 2 ($F(1,109) = 3.81$; $p < .053$; $\eta_p^2 = .034$). The authors explained these outcomes in terms of type of the L2 practise each setting provided. Altogether, Serrano et al. (2016) concluded that intensive and constant exposure to the L2 is what boosts learners' development, regardless of the learning context and the duration of the programme.

Finally, one of the most recent studies on short SA experiences is that by Llanes et al. (2018). The authors explored the outcomes of a short programme abroad through a written task in terms of written fluency, lexical richness, grammatical complexity, and accuracy. Participants were a group of Catalan/Spanish adolescents ($n = 64$), learners of English as an L2, who performed a 3-week summer stay in England. Results in Llanes et al. (2018) show that improvement was significant in terms of written fluency, that is, students wrote longer texts ($Z = -4.583$, $p < .000$, $d = .445$), lexical richness, as measured through Guiraud's Index ($t(60) = -4.947$, $p < .000$, $d = .420$), grammatical complexity taking into account the percentage of types of verb forms out of the total words and the ratio of clauses per T-unit ($t(60) = -1.648$, $p < .012$, $d = .09$), and accuracy, taking into account the ratio of correct verb forms ($Z = -2.091$, $p < .037$, $d = .14$). Hence, in line with Llanes and Muñoz (2009), the authors said that even a short stay abroad can provide positive changes in the learners' L2.

In general, it seems that short SA experiences (that is, those that last two months or less/ < 8 weeks) can provide positive changes on the learners' L2, especially when it comes to oral and written measures. However, only a few studies have examined the impact of these stays; hence, conclusions are far from final and more research is needed on the topic in order to be able to demonstrate whether short SA is certainly positive for L2 development. Moreover, to the authors' knowledge, despite some measures of vocabulary have been examined as a result of a short stay abroad (Serrano et al., 2016), no study has focused on the impact that these type of stay has on different measures of L2 vocabulary. This is rather surprising considering that learning new words is one of the most common objectives among short-SA participants (Allen, 2010). Similarly, only one study within the SA literature (Evans & Fisher, 2005) includes a measure of reading development, and no study (of short duration) has exclusively centred the attention on L2 reading, despite this skill being extremely important for L2 success (Grabe, 2009).

2.5. The emerging ELFSA context

Typically, when referring to SA experiences, people think of those programmes that offer participants the opportunity to live and study in a country where the L2 is the official language of the country, for example, going to study English in the UK or learning French in France. This belief probably comes from the common understanding that SA fosters "L2 use in the authentic target culture" (Tragant, 2012, p. 161), and it is probably the reason why SA participants many times decide to perform their stays in a country where their L2 is the official language. Thus, the fact that great attention has been given to these traditional SA experiences seems logical, since students believe that exchanging conversations with NSs while abroad is necessary for their L2 to develop (Güvendir, 2017). However, such tendency to focus on these types of SA has neglected a large portion of the SA reality, especially when participants' L2 is English since, as Glaser (2017) established, this language: "is increasingly used as a lingua franca

during study abroad in non-English-speaking host countries, especially in the European context” (p. 112).

Nowadays, English has become the world’s lingua franca par excellence. As an example, 374 million people speak it as their L1 and one in four people in the world use it as their L2 (Holmes & Dervin, 2016). This phenomenon has received much attention among SLA researchers who have coined the term ELF (English as a lingua franca) when referring to interactions between speakers who have different first languages (Seidlhofer, 2005). On the whole, ELF refers to communications in which English is used as a common language between speakers who hold different linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Jenkins, 2009). Crystal (2012) published a volume on English as a global language in which he reports the use of English around the world and finds reasons why this language has become today’s lingua franca. In his book, he indicates that around 400 million people have learnt English as their L1, and that between 500 to 1.000 million people have learnt it as a foreign language. Moreover, he suggests that the number of people learning English as an L2 will increase significantly in the near future, consequently, rooting English as an international language.

This new role of English as a lingua franca has made it necessary for universities around the world to increase their international profile and offer opportunities to practise English, even when English is not the country’s official language (Jenkins, 2014). In 2015, De Wit, Hunter, Rumbley, Howard and Egron-Pollak described internationalization as:

“The intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society” (p. 28)

Moreover, the authors stated the importance of enhancing the international curriculum of European universities in order to make them more competent. The belief that, by increasing their curriculum, universities will gain quality

and become more accessible to all the world is probably the reason why there has been a large increase in the amount of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) courses offered by universities worldwide (Borghetti & Beaven, 2017). As an example of this phenomenon, France created a strategy known as “Bienvenue en France”, which placed emphasis on the internationalization of the French institutions, and reaffirmed France’s will to offer the best services to international students. In fact, in France programmes and courses taught in English are becoming more and more common and there were about 1.600 in 2019 (campus France, 2020). Therefore, as Risager (2016) claimed, the idea of focusing on target countries, native speakers, and national cultures must be abandoned, since English is no longer specific to English-speaking countries. For the same reason, researchers must start investigating whether English students can benefit from SA experiences regardless of their destination country, which requires present and future SA research to broaden their perspective and investigate the outcomes that SA experiences can have on L2 English learners when they decide to perform their SA in a non-English speaking country.

Today, students have become aware of the fact that it is unnecessary to perform a SA experience in an English-speaking country in order to practise their English L2 skills. Hence, many SA participants decide to perform their stays in countries where English is not the L2 but where they will use the language as means of communication with their friends and their teachers in and outside of the classroom (English as a Lingua Franca Study Abroad, ELFSA) (Köylü, 2016). This is particularly true within the European context (Glaser, 2017), where English is predominantly used as a lingua franca between international students, regardless of their L1 or the destination country (Mitchell et al., 2017). As an example of this, the most popular destinations for Spanish mobile students are Lithuania, Denmark, the Czech Republic or Finland (European Commission, 2017), none of which have English as their L1. Moreover, two of the main objectives of the ERASMUS programme are to enhance multilingualism and multiculturalism as well as the European citizenship, which promotes SA experiences anywhere in the

continent, not only in English-speaking countries such as the UK or the Republic of Ireland.

Another fact that adds to the popularity of ELFSA programmes is the uncertain situation of some of the countries that used to be popular destinations for SA participants. For example, the unpredictable consequences of Brexit in the United Kingdom or the new immigration policies in the United States have resulted in a slow growth in the number of students who decide to perform a stay in the UK or in the USA (Campus France, 2020).

Briefly, this new role of English as a lingua franca has given many responsibilities to the English language. One of such responsibilities is acting as a common language among international students who use English as means of communication (Kaypak & Ortaçtepe, 2014), which makes it necessary to determine whether performing an ELFSA experience could lead to positive changes in the learners' L2 skills. To date, some studies have investigated the ELFSA context. However, the few existing studies on the topic focus on how students use ELF features while abroad (Maíz-Arévalo, 2014), how ELF is used as a marker of interculturality (Murray, 2012), or how students create and perceive their communities of practice through ELF (Kalocsai, 2009, 2014). Hence, within SA research, only a handful of studies investigate the ELFSA context from an SLA perspective, which creates the need for future research to investigate if the context is beneficial for students' L2 development (Glaser, 2017).

Köylü (2016) was among the first researchers who established the need to investigate the impact of ELFSA experiences. She conducted an exhaustive mixed-methods study in which she compared a group of Turkish L1 undergraduates (n= 46) learning English (L2) in three different contexts: traditional SA (n= 7), ELFSA (n= 24), and AH (n= 15). Her study had three main goals: The first objective was to compare the three learning contexts in terms of L2 oral and written development (in terms of linguistic complexity, accuracy, and fluency gains). Secondly, the study attempted to contrast the

amount of English use and practise learners had in the different settings. Finally, the last objective was to investigate participants' perceptions towards multilingualism. To examine learners' oral skills, Köylü (2016) used a semi-structured interview that was followed by an oral task that consisted of talking about a given topic for about a minute. Six measures were analysed using the aforementioned instruments: spoken fluency (pruned speech rate), breakdown fluency (silent and filled pauses longer than 250 milliseconds divided by the total time expressed in seconds), repair fluency (disfluencies as determined by the number of repetitions, retraces, and reformulations divided by total time expressed in seconds and multiplied by 60), accuracy (errors per AS-units), lexical complexity (CLAN's D measure), and syntactic complexity (clauses per AS-units). Concerning their written skills, participants were asked to produce a composition about their life: "My life: Past and present expectations" (p. 66), and they were given 15 minutes to do so. Out of this written task four measures were examined: fluency (words per T-unit), accuracy (errors per T-unit), syntactic complexity (clauses per T-unit), and lexical complexity (Clan's D measure). Finally, two questionnaires were used to collect data on participants' L2 use while abroad, and another questionnaire was used to examine participants' perceptions towards multilingualism.

Several interesting findings emerge from Köylü's (2016) study. First, the SA and the ELFSA contexts were equally beneficial in terms of speech rate, breakdown fluency, oral accuracy, oral lexical complexity, written fluency, and written lexical complexity, which provides a positive (or at least not negative) picture to the ELFSA setting. One difference between the SA and the ELFSA groups is that participants in the ELFSA one created an ELF identity while abroad and reported to feel more multilingual after the stay. Likewise, participants in the ELFSA group prioritized meaningful communication over using their L2 approaching a native-like manner. Altogether, the author suggested that results in her study indicated that ELFSA experiences could promote multilingualism. Another finding of the study is that, interestingly, the AH group outscored both the SA and the

ELFSA groups in terms of written fluency development since the AH group improved their written fluency significantly ($t(13) = -2.15, p < .047$) whereas the SA ($t(6) = -2.208, p < .070$) and the ELFSA ($t(23) = -.503, p < .620$) did not, which suggests that as previous research has established, not all language skills develop in the same way and that the AH context is conducive to L2 development regarding certain measures such as written fluency.

Two more studies that have investigated the impact of ELFSA experiences are those by Llanes, Arnó and Mancho-Barés (2016) and Martin-Rubió and Cots (2018). Llanes et al. (2016a) examined a group of Catalan university students ($n = 39$), learners of English as an L2, who performed a 15-week SA experience in a non-English speaking country. Llanes et al.'s (2016a) objective was to determine whether learners would enhance their L2 general proficiency (as measured through the Quick Oxford Placement Test), and their writing skills, with regard to lexical and syntactic complexity and subordination (as measured through a timed composition) after an ELFSA experience. A Wilcoxon signed-rank test revealed that learners in their study had improved their L2 general proficiency significantly ($Z = -3.479, p < .001, d = 0.27$). Moreover, a paired-samples T-test confirmed that students also improved their lexical complexity significantly ($t(37) = -3.153, p < .003, d = 0.56$). No improvement was found concerning syntactic complexity and subordination. The authors concluded that, although their participants only showed improvement in two of the four measures analysed (namely general L2 proficiency and written lexical complexity), findings in their study pointed to SA experiences being beneficial, even when stays are performed in a non-English speaking country given that: “several studies that have examined writing skills as a result of ‘standard’ SA, that is, in a country where the L2 is the official language, showed no gains at all” (Llanes et al., 2016b, p. 301).

Positive results also emerge from Martin-Rubió and Cots' (2018) study. In their study, the authors investigated a group of Catalan students ($n = 6$) learning English in Denmark in terms of oral fluency and accuracy development through an oral narrative consisting on describing a comic strip

with six vignettes. A second objective of the study was to identify whether learners perceived an increase in their confidence after the stay, which was analysed through an interpretative analysis of the pre and post focus groups interviews. Findings in Martin-Rubió and Cots (2018) show a general improvement in terms of oral fluency and accuracy, with students producing longer discourses which contained fewer pauses and fewer errors after their stay in Denmark. All the after-stay oral narratives had more syllables than the before-stay ones, with an increase of 106 syllables in average. This increase was also portrayed in the length of the stories, since students increased their speech time from 60.59 seconds to 95.84 seconds on average. Finally, although changes in oral accuracy were subject to individual variation, students generally reduced the number of mistakes they made per 100 syllables, which suggests that they became more orally accurate after their stay in Denmark. Moreover, the analysis made from the focus groups revealed that learners also increased their self-confidence when using the L2. Altogether, the authors concluded that this type of SA experience was beneficial for English L2 learners not only in terms of their perceptions but also with regard to their L2 performance. Nonetheless, it must be highlighted that much individual variation was found in Martin-Rubió and Cots' study and that, due to their small pool of participants (n= 6), findings in their study cannot be generalized. Future studies on the topic should aim to have bigger groups of participants so that statistical findings can be inferred.

Finally, the most recent study on the topic is that by Llanes (2019), who investigated a group of Catalan/Spanish university students (n= 18) after their semester-long stay in Italy (n = 2), Denmark (n = 10), Germany (n = 1), Belgium (n = 2), Finland (n = 1) and the Netherlands (n = 2). Two of the goals of this study were 1) to track the students' development in terms of general proficiency and oral development (fluency, accuracy, lexical richness and grammatical complexity), and 2) to investigate whether initial proficiency level would affect learners' development. Findings in Llanes (2019) show that learners improved the five measures under-study, however, this enhancement was only significant in terms of general L2 proficiency

($t(17) = -2.775$, $p < .013$, $d = .27$), oral fluency both in terms of number of words per minute ($t(17) = -4.618$, $p < .000$, $d = .75$), and lexical richness as measured through Guiraud's Index ($t(17) = -3.817$, $p < .001$, $d = .93$). In relation to the second objective, no correlation was found between initial proficiency level and L2 gains, which suggests that learners' L2 level at the outset of the experiment did not play a role in their learning. Overall, the author concluded that results in her study were positive because, even though enhancement was only significant for three of them, learners showed some enhancement in the five measures under analysis. Moreover, the outcomes in Llanes (2019) were similar to previous research on traditional SA experiences, which suggests that learners can improve to a similar extent after completing a SA or an ELFSA experience.

On the whole, the few previous studies on the topic offer a positive picture of the ELFSA context and suggest that this setting could be beneficial for learners' L2 development. Hence, although some may believe that the ELFSA context will not offer students the same amount of opportunities for L2 interaction and practice, the literature on the topic seems to put forward that ELFSA experiences can be as beneficial as traditional ones. Nonetheless, research on the topic is rather scant, and only a handful of studies have reported learners' outcomes after such experiences, which makes it nearly impossible to draw any general conclusions on the topic. Accordingly, this lack of research suggests that future studies should attempt to provide evidence on whether this type of SA experience is in fact positive for L2 learning or, at least, if participating in an ELFSA experience will render the same outcomes as doing so in a traditional, English-speaking context.

2.6. Theorizing the SA context

For some years, researchers have stated that our capacity to speak is the most unique ability held by humans because it differentiates us from other species such as animals. Repeatedly, researchers have attempted to construct theories that explain how children learn their L1 (Bloomfield, 1933; Chomsky, 1965). However, it was not until the late 1960s that the field of second language

acquisition emerged as an interdisciplinary discipline which, as Ortega (2009, p. 2) describes, “investigates the human capacity to learn languages other than the first, during late childhood, adolescence or adulthood, and once the first language or languages have been acquired”. In sum, the main objective of SLA theories is to determine how people learn an L2, and to describe the process of learning an additional language.

As far as the present project is concerned, some of the classic SLA theories can be interpreted as supporting of the fact that the SA context provides the optimal opportunities for language learning. As an example, Long’s Interaction Hypothesis (1985) gives support to the idea that the SA is one of the most beneficial contexts for L2 learning. This theory emerged in response to Krashen’s Input hypothesis (1985), and it shifts attention from comprehensible input to the more interactive aspects of language. Hence, this theory proposes that, in order to develop their L2 proficiency, learners need to take part in L2 interactions such as informal conversations that require learners to negotiate meanings. Some years later, Long (1996) reformulated his theory by placing more attention on how learner cognitive processes work. In his reformulation of the Interaction hypothesis, Long proposed the existence of different links between input, linguistic environment and learner-internal aspects. He suggested that, during meaning negotiation interactions, negative feedback can facilitate L2 development, especially with regard to vocabulary, morphology, and syntax. Therefore, Long (1996) suggested that, if learners became aware of their mistakes during meaning negotiation, this would help them to be more successful in using the same structure in the future. Altogether, since the SA context offers constant opportunities for interaction and meaning negotiation, which, according to Long’s Interaction Hypothesis, should boost learners’ L2 skills, it seems logical to believe that performing a stay abroad will be beneficial for learners’ L2 proficiency.

Another theory that reinforces the positive traits of stays abroad is Swain’s Output Hypothesis (1995). This theory suggests that learning happens when learners encounter a gap (or problem) in their L2 linguistic knowledge and attempt to modify their output by internalizing, and subsequently using, this

newly acquired knowledge. That is to say, the Output Hypothesis suggests that producing output in the target language will help L2 learners to become aware of their problems, to reflect and analyse these issues, and to try using different structures with the objective of improving their output. Accordingly, the fact that the SA context pushes semantic processing to syntactic processing (Sanz, 2014), could explain why SA participants show improvement in their L2 after studying and living in the foreign country.

Finally, one last theory that could be used when explaining SA outcomes is the Skill Acquisition Theory (DeKeyser, 1997). This theory stresses the need for practice in order to become fluent in the L2, and it explains the transition from declarative (controlled) to procedural and automatic knowledge. On the one hand, declarative knowledge is self-regulated and it requires more effort and use of cognitive resources such as attention and working memory. On the other hand, procedural knowledge is automatic and, therefore, it requires a smaller effort. DeKeyser (1997; 2007a) suggested that what is needed in order to go from declarative to procedural knowledge is practice. This process is known as *automatization*, “the process that leads to automaticity” (DeKeyser, 1997, p. 197). As established before, the SA context offers countless opportunities for informal interaction and L2 practice, hence, it is plausible to believe that the amount of L2 practice opportunities offered by the SA context will drive the automatization process and, hence, take learners’ L2 knowledge from declarative to procedural (or automatic).

Moreover, the skill acquisition theory also suggests that automatic knowledge is skill-specific which implies that the different linguistic subsystems will develop differently. Hence, while some L2 skills may develop fast, others may require a greater amount of practice (Mitchell, Myles & Marsden, 2013). To exemplify this, DeKeyser (2007a) established that before the more complex skills can be developed, simpler skills must become automatic. Overall, this ‘skill-specific development’ may help researchers understand why sometimes some measures examined improve after a SA experience whereas others remained unchanged.

Altogether, the aforementioned theories seem to indicate that the SA setting could offer the optimal conditions for L2 learning to happen. Nonetheless, SA research is still in its infancy and it is difficult to determine whether any of these theories are supported by the immersion that the SA context renders. Moreover, it is uncertain whether these theories could help to explain learners' outcomes in L2 reading and vocabulary since they seem to promote oral communication over the rest of the areas.

2.7. Summary of the chapter

This chapter has contextualized SA research within the field of SLA in order to present the rationale behind the project. Five main findings arise from the review of the literature. First, the lack of research on L2 reading development after a SA experience becomes apparent, since only ten studies have investigated whether studying abroad will aid the development of learners' reading skills. Moreover, seven out of these ten studies are multidimensional studies, therefore, only three focus on reading in a more exhaustive way; and only three examine an aspect of reading that is not comprehension.

Secondly, although L2 vocabulary development has received greater attention within the SA field, it was found that the inconsistent methods that are generally used to examine L2 vocabulary development have only led to mixed findings on the area. This inconsistency does not allow for robust conclusions to be drawn. Besides, not many studies have examined receptive and productive vocabulary within the same investigation.

The third and fourth findings are related to the lack of studies on short SA experiences and the insufficient amount of studies containing younger age groups. It seems that researchers have tended to investigate the impact of semester-long stays whereas short (<5 weeks) programmes have been left under-researched. Similarly, the most examined population within the SA field are university students, which neglects other age groups that are equally important (such as children or teenagers).

Finally, the need to investigate ELFSA experiences also becomes evident when reviewing the literature, especially when considering the new role of English as a lingua franca, globalisation, and the internationalization of universities.

With the objective of providing a new insight and more conclusive findings into the SA literature, the present project aims at filling the aforementioned gaps. Therefore, this study examines the L2 reading (comprehension and fluency) and L2 vocabulary (receptive and productive) development of two different age groups (teenagers and young adults). Moreover, it investigates three study abroad experiences: a 3-week stay in Ireland (short SA), a semester-long stay in an Anglophone country (traditional SA) and a semester-long experience in a non-Anglophone country (ELFSA). One last objective of the project is to determine whether the initial proficiency and vocabulary level of the students predict gains in the learners L2. Finally, the study takes into account L2 engagement when interpreting the findings. Altogether, this project will provide several theoretical and practical implications to SA researchers since it will fill some of the most neglected gaps in the literature. Moreover, these implications could be used by programme organizers and policy makers as well as by those students attempting to participate in a SA experience given that the present project will provide some deep insights about the impact of SA experiences and it will also offer some recommendations about how to take the most advantage of the different sojourns under-study.

The following chapter will present the methodology used in order to conduct the present project. It discusses the purpose of the study, and it offers a description of the research questions, the participants, and the data collection instruments, measures and procedure employed.

Chapter III

Methodology

As shown in the previous section, the SA context can have a significant impact on L2 development. However, findings are not consistent for all L2 areas and, whereas some language-related areas have received great attention, others are still rather under-researched and, consequently, need further exploration. For this reason, the current study aims at filling some of the gaps identified in the SA literature. To do so, the main objectives of this investigation are 1) to determine the areas that needed further exploration within SA research and 2) to investigate them in order to provide a new insight into SA experiences. Hence, the second objective of the study was to examine the impact that three different SA experiences (short, traditional, and ELF) would have on the L2 reading comprehension and reading fluency, and L2 receptive and productive vocabulary of a group of adolescents and two groups of young-adults.

3.1. Research objectives

As established in the previous paragraph, the present study had two main goals. First, it aimed at identifying the areas that needed further research within the SA literature. Hence, the first research question that guided the present investigation was:

RQ1: Which are the areas that need further research within the literature of study abroad? (Paper 1, section 4.1)

The second objective was to examine the gaps found within the research of SA experiences. Accordingly, after the exhaustive research on the SA literature, it was considered appropriate to conduct research with the following characteristics: First, to examine two rather ignored areas, which are L2 reading (comprehension and fluency) and L2 vocabulary (productive and receptive). Second, it was decided that one of the groups would be formed by a population that was uncommon in previous SA studies, for this

reason, a group of teenagers was included. Third, it was also considered necessary that at least one of the studies examined the impact of a short SA program since this is the most common type of SA program, yet the least examined one, which is why one of the studies investigates the impact of a short summer programme abroad. Fourth, the initial level of the participants needed to be examined given the scarce literature on this variable and the unclear results. Finally, it was determined that one of the studies would examine the impact of ELFSA experiences in order to provide information on this emerging type of SA, which is becoming extremely popular among today's societies and very little information about its impact is available. All things considered, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ2: Will a short (3-week) SA experience have a positive impact on a group of teenagers' L2 reading comprehension, reading fluency, and receptive vocabulary and productive vocabulary? (Paper 2, section 4.2)

RQ3: Will a traditional semester-long SA experience have a positive impact on a group of undergraduates' L2 reading comprehension, reading fluency, and receptive vocabulary and productive vocabulary? (Paper 3, section 4.3)

RQ4: Are initial vocabulary knowledge and initial proficiency level related to gains in L2 reading and/or L2 vocabulary (if any)? (Paper 2, section 4.2; Paper 3, section 4.3)

RQ5: Will a semester-long traditional SA experience provide comparable outcomes to an ELFSA one in terms of L2 reading and L2 vocabulary? (Paper 4, section 4.4)

RQ6: To what extent do learners use the L2 while abroad in a traditional SA setting and in an ELFSA one? (Paper 4, section 4.4)

Altogether, six main research questions guided the present investigation.

3.2. Participants

In order to answer the different research questions, participants from two different age groups were included in the present study: a group of teenagers and a group of young-adults. In this section both groups are introduced separately.

3.2.1. The teenagers group

A total of 52 teenagers (n= 25 males, n= 27 females) participated in one of the several data collections involved in this study. Their ages ranged between 12 and 17 years old (M= 15,35), they came from different parts of Spain (n= 51) and Andorra (n= 1), and they all shared English as their L2. Most of them (n= 46) were from Catalonia, Majorca and Valencia and they were Catalan/Spanish bilinguals. Some others (n= 5) came from the Basque country and were Basque/Spanish bilinguals. Finally, one participant came from Asturias and he was monolingual of Spanish. Their English proficiency level at the outset of the experiment ranged from A2 to B2 (A2 n= 31, B1 n= 17 and B2 n= 4), as measured by a general proficiency test that the students were asked to take as part of the data collection (see Section 3.4.4). The participants declared that they started learning English in primary school. Moreover, all of them stated that they were enrolled in extracurricular English classes in their hometowns. In fact, it was for that reason that they received the opportunity of participating in a summer programme abroad. Table 5 offers a summary of the participants' demographic data.

Table 5. Teenagers' demographic data

Gender	males (n= 25) females (n= 27)
Age	12 (n= 2) 13 (n= 1) 14 (n= 14) 15 (n= 6) 16 (n= 14) 17 (n= 15)
L1	Catalan/Spanish (n= 46) Basque/Spanish (n= 5) Spanish (n= 1)
Pre-departure proficiency level	A2 (n= 31) B1 (n= 17) B2 (n= 4)

3.2.2. The young-adults' groups

Initially, a total of 72 undergraduate students participated in the study. Nonetheless, 21 did not take the post-test data collection. Hence, the final sample of the present project only includes data from those 51 students that participated in both the pre and the post data collection points.

The 51 students were all Catalan/Spanish bilinguals and learners of English as an L2. There were 43 female and eight male participants and their ages ranged from 19 to 27 years old (M= 19.96). They were studying two different degrees related to languages at two different Catalan universities (Translation and Interpreting, n= 38; Teaching English in primary education, n= 13), which required them to perform a SA experience during their second or third year. All participants declared having started studying English in primary school; however, the general proficiency test they completed as part of the

data collection (see Section 3.4.4) revealed they had different proficiency levels at the outset of the experiment (n= 5 A2, n= 26 B1, n= 17 B2). When asked about their knowledge of other foreign languages, some participants declared that they also had a certain amount of control over French (n= 16), German (n= 12), French and German (n= 8), Italian (n= 3) or Arabic (n= 1). Table 6 offers an overview of the participants' demographic data.

Table 6. University students' demographic data

Gender	females (n= 43) male (n= 8)
Age	19 (n= 26) 20 (n= 16) 21 (n= 3) 22 (n= 3) 23 (n= 1) 27 (n= 1)
University studies	Translation and Interpreting (n= 38) Teaching English in primary education (n = 13)
L1	Catalan/Spanish (n= 51)
Pre-departure proficiency level	A2 (n= 5) B1 (n= 26) B2 (n= 20)
Other languages	French (n= 16) German (n= 12) French & German (n = 8) Italian (n= 3) Arabic (n= 1) None (n= 11)

3.3. The sojourns

Three SA experiences were included in the present investigation in order to answer the different research questions: a short (3-week) summer programme abroad, a semester-long traditional SA experience, and a semester-long ELFSA experience. In this section each context will be presented separately (See Table 7 for summary of the stays).

3.3.1. The short SA experience

The group of teenagers participated in a 3-week summer programme in Ireland. This programme is organized by a well-known language school which arranges summer trips for teenagers aged 10 to 17 in different countries (Ireland, the UK, the USA, and Canada, among others) with the objective of practising English as an L2. The programme that is investigated here is one of the most popular that the school offers, with around 50 to 100 participants each summer. The participants in the programme have the opportunity of living in Ireland for two, three or four weeks. Nonetheless, for the present investigation only those who stayed for at least three weeks were included (n= 52). It must be pointed out that participants staying for 4 weeks were also included, but they were treated as their 3-week counterparts because the post-test was administered at the end of the third week abroad.

During the sojourn participants lived with Irish host families which were formed by two parents and, typically, one or two siblings who were normally the participant's age. The objective of having host siblings whose age was close to the learners was to make it easier for participants to interact with them. The houses were located in different Irish towns; hence, not all students lived in the same area during the experience. Moreover, unless the contrary was requested by the participants' biological parents, each participant lived with a different host family so as to avoid L1 communication when at home. This was only the case for two participants who were biological sisters and, thus, their parents asked the school whether they could be placed with the same host family. Altogether, participants spent

every evening and weekend with their host families, with whom they shared meals, watched TV or went on weekend trips, among other activities. It is important to highlight that all the host families have successfully been part of this programme for some years, which reinforces the fact that participants will live in an enjoyable environment.

During weekdays (Monday to Friday), participants attended a language school where they performed different activities in relation to English learning. In the morning they attended L2 classes which lasted for four hours, with a 30-minute break in between. Hence, their morning consisted of a 2-hour class, a 30-minute break, and another 2-hour class. These classes fostered L2 learning through different activities (warm-up games, listening and reading comprehension tasks and, predominantly, oral activities) and they were taught by English native speakers who held a teaching degree. Once classes finished, participants had a lunch-break at the school, which was followed by some afternoon activities, also organized by the teachers in the language school. Every afternoon, students took part in different activities that had the objective of teaching students something about the Irish culture and included playing sports, doing arts and crafts, visiting cultural areas, and singing and dancing Gaelic songs, among others. These lasted for about 2 hours and once they were completed, the students were taken home to their host families. Furthermore, participants engaged in a different weekly activity during the weekends. These activities were organized by the language school and they consisted of 1) going to a farm and learning about farm chores, 2) going to a shopping centre, and 3) going to a nature park. Additionally, it is important to mention that there were different supervisors, who were referred to as 'leaders', who walked the students everywhere. These supervisors came from Spain and they were the ones in charge of making sure that all the participants were at school and at home when required. Finally, it must be noted that neither the teachers at the school or the host families spoke the students' L1, which forced participants to use English at all times when communicating with their teachers or someone in their host family. The only time they were able to use their L1 was during school breaks, when they

shared time with their Catalan/Spanish co-nationals, or some evenings when they called their parents back home.

3.3.2. The semester-long SA experiences

It was a requirement for all the undergraduate students in the present study to participate in a semester-long SA experience during their studies. During their stays, participants typically attended some lessons at a local university from three to five hours per week; however, some of them stated receiving more than five hours of instruction per week. This depended on the amount of academic credits they had to fulfil while abroad.

All participants in the present study but five (n= 46) performed their stay through the ERASMUS (European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students) programme, which is the most important exchange programme in Europe, and it has been promoting learning mobility since it was created in 1987. Through this programme the exchanges can last from three to twelve months, with students normally staying for what is considered one or two semesters abroad (European Commission, 2014). Moreover, students have the possibility of studying abroad in 33 different countries: the 28 European Union (EU) Member States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey (European Commission, 2015). Another characteristic of this programme is that it is funded and, therefore, its participants receive a certain amount of money which they can use to perform their stay abroad.

On the other hand, five participants did not engage in the ERASMUS programme and they decided to perform their sojourns through a mobility programme created by their university. These programmes are created for those students who are willing to travel somewhere outside Europe and they include different countries such as the USA, Mexico, and Japan, among others. The five participants that took part in this kind of programme studied abroad at the same university in the USA. No large differences exist between the ERASMUS programme and this one apart from the fact that the

destination of the latter is much further away and a visa is necessary to enter the country.

It must be highlighted that the two universities involved in the present project asked their students to perform a stay abroad at least once during their university degree. Hence, it was obligatory for all participants in this study to travel and study in a foreign country for a semester. All participants were required to choose whether they wanted to participate in an ERASMUS experience or in a mobility one (that is, performing their stay outside of the EU). If different students wanted to perform their sojourn in the same institution and there were not enough places for all of them, the International Relations Office (*Oficina de relacions internacionals*) would take into account the mean score in the students' academic record and give the candidates with higher marks their preferred option. Subsequently, the rest of the candidates would be offered the chance to perform their stay in their second or third choices. It is also important to note that, if students were not able to travel abroad for economic or medical reasons, their home universities would offer them the possibility to study for a semester in an international school in Barcelona in which all their classes are taught in English in an attempt to provide them a more multilingual experience. This was not the case for any of the participants in the present study who were all able to perform their stay in a foreign institution (For more information on the selection process or the different type of programmes, please visit the website of one of the universities that participated in the current study, Universitat Pompeu Fabra: *Mobilitat i intercanvi*, 2020). Altogether, two different SA contexts emerge from the undergraduates' experience: The traditional SA context and the ELFSA one. Here they will be described separately.

3.3.2.1 The traditional SA context

The traditional SA context consisted of a semester-long stay during which participants lived in an English-speaking country. A total of 31 undergraduate students participated in this kind of experience. On the one hand, 26 decided to perform their sojourn in the UK and the rest of them (n= 5) did so in the

USA. Traditionally, the UK is a more popular option because the country is closer to the participants' home country and, consequently, it is the most affordable alternative. Moreover, the UK is part of the ERASMUS programme which, as mentioned above, facilitates mobility within Europe to a great extent. Nonetheless, five participants decided to complete their SA in the USA through a programme offered by their home university (namely '*programa de mobilitat*'). Considering accommodation, participants lived in residence halls (n= 10), with host families (n= 4), or in flats (n= 12) shared with co-nationals (n= 8), with international students (n= 2) or with both (n= 2). Five students did not provide information on accommodation.

3.3.2.2 The ELFSA context

The ELFSA context consisted of a semester-long stay during which participants lived in a non-English-speaking country. As mentioned before, within the ERASMUS programme there are a total of 33 countries where participants can perform their SA experience. Hence, going to an English-speaking country (such as the UK) is only one of the options. Moreover, participating in an ELFSA experience is often seen as a preferable alternative because of 1) its more multilingual nature, 2) the possibility of practising an additional language, and for 3) economic reasons. Furthermore, it seems that the UK will be leaving the European Union in the near future, and the country will possibly no longer be part of the ERASMUS programme. This will probably lead to ELFSA experiences becoming even more popular and, consequently, making it more necessary to study the context. On the whole, a total of 20 participants in the present study selected this alternative for their sojourn abroad. They lived in Belgium (n= 1), Denmark (n= 2), France (n= 4), Germany (n= 6), Hungary (n= 3), Poland (n= 3), or Prague (n= 1). With regard to accommodation, participants lived in residence halls (n= 10), with a host-family (n= 1), or in a flat (n= 6) shared with other co-nationals (n= 2), international students (n= 3) or both (n= 1). Again, three students did not provide information for accommodation.

Table 7. Summary of the three SA programmes examined in the present study

Type of stay	Age	Living arrangement	Organizer	Destination country
3-week SA summer programme (n= 52)	12-17 years old (M= 15.35)	host family (n= 52)	Private institution	Ireland (n= 52)
Traditional SA (n=31)	19-23 years old (M= 19.67)	Shared flat (n= 12) Residence hall (n= 10) Host family (n= 4) n.a. (n= 5)	ERASMUS (n= 26) University specific programme (n= 5)	UK (n= 26) US (n= 5)
ELFSA (n= 20)	19-27 years old (M= 20.15)	Shared flat (n= 6) Residence hall (n= 10) Host family (n= 1) n.a. (n= 3)	ERASMUS programme (n =20)	Belgium (n= 1) Denmark (n= 2) France (n= 4), Germany (n= 6) Hungary (n= 3) Poland (n= 3) Prague (n= 1)

*n.a. = not acknowledged

3.4. Instruments

A variety of instruments were used in the present study in order to measure learners' L2 reading comprehension and fluency, L2 receptive and productive vocabulary, general L2 proficiency skills, and L2 use. All these instruments were used before (pre-test) and after (post-test) the SA experiences with the objective of gauging L2 development (see Table 9 for summary of the instruments).

3.4.1. The reading passages

Two reading passages were chosen to measure participants' L2 reading comprehension and fluency. It was considered necessary to have two texts of different proficiency levels to ensure that all participants in the study would find at least one of the readings adequate for their proficiency level. It was determined that the passages would not differ much in length and that both of them would have a topic that was not familiar to the participants, so that they could not benefit from any previous knowledge on the subject.

Following Kraut (2017), both texts were taken from the Reading Explorer series (2015). These series of books contain texts of different lengths, topics and proficiency levels, which are followed by some comprehension questions. A passage from the *Reading Explorer 2* and one from the *Reading Explorer 3* were selected for the present study to make sure that the texts targeted different proficiency levels and that they were suitable for all participants in the study. It is important to note that both passages were previously piloted with undergraduate students to make sure that they were not too easy or too difficult for the participants in the study. During the first pilot study, it was observed that the first passage was too easy (all participants scored almost all the answers right). Hence, the first text was changed and piloted again to ensure its suitability for the study.

The *Reading Explorer 2* contains texts of a low-intermediate (A2) level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The chosen passage was entitled "A dangerous job", it was 504 words long, and it described two different jobs with which participants were most likely not familiar (namely sandhogs and sewer workers). To make sure that the text would be adequate for participants in the present study, its readability index was calculated and it showed a 72.3 in Flesh reading ease, meaning that the difficulty of the text was equivalent to texts generally used during the first year of secondary education. Altogether, the text seemed to be adequate for both teenagers and young adults.

All the passages in the *Reading Explorer 3* are intermediate (B1) in terms of proficiency level. From this book, the passage “Deadly contact” was selected. It was 707 words long, and it described different mortal viruses and the process through which a virus can pass from an animal to humans. Once more, the topic of the passage was probably one with which participants were not very familiar. Its readability was calculated and it showed a 52.8 in Flesh reading ease, indicating that the difficulty of the text was similar to texts read during the last years of secondary education and the A levels.

As mentioned before, the passages in both books were followed by a set of multiple choice questions which were used in the present study. Nonetheless, some questions were slightly changed and some others were added by the authors (these were also piloted) because the book only offered six questions and more were needed in order to grasp changes in participants’ L2 reading comprehension (see Appendix 1 for both the passages and the questions).

3.4.2. The Updated Vocabulary Levels Test

As its name suggests, the Updated Vocabulary Levels Test (UVLT) is an updated version of the Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT). The VLT is one of the most popular tests to measure lexical knowledge (Read, 2000; Schmitt, 2010). In fact, Meara (1996, p. 38) referred to it as “the nearest thing we have to a standard test in vocabulary”. The test was originally created by Nation (1983) and then updated by Schmitt, Schmitt and Clapham (2001). Nonetheless, some years later, Webb, Sasao and Ballance (2017) noticed that the latest version of the VLT still had some limitations and, consequently, they decided to modify the existing version. The reasons Webb and colleagues give are that first, the words examined in the VLT probably did not reflect current English vocabulary because they were taken from texts from the 1930s and the 1940s. Secondly, the authors expressed the necessity that a new version of the VLT examined words from the 1,000 frequency level because 1) previous versions of the VLT did not examine words from this level and 2) this level accounts for 80% of everyday English. Consequently, it seems coherent that an updated version of the VTL

examines words from the first frequency level because of the relevance these words have on everyday life. In the present study, participants are possibly going to learn and use words from the first frequency level in their everyday communication while abroad, which adds up to why this Updated version of the VLT fits in the present project. Altogether, the UVLT examines words from the 1.000, 2.000, 3.000, 4.000 and 5.000 frequency levels and it provides a general idea of the participants' receptive vocabulary knowledge. Finally, Webb et al. (2017) also performed some changes with regard to the test's layout because they believed that it would be easier for learners to complete the test and for teachers and researchers to correct it.

In a nutshell, the UVLT is a form recognition test which measures receptive vocabulary knowledge. As mentioned before, the test is divided into five frequency levels (K1, K2, K3, K4, and K5) and words are provided in sets of six words with three possible definitions. Learners have to match the items with their proper definition (with three words used as distractors). See Figure 1 for an example:

Figure 1. Example of the UVLT

	game	island	mouth	Movie	song	yard
Land with water all around it						
Part of your body used for eating and talking						
Piece of music						

In this example six items can be found (game, island, mouth, movie, song, and game), and three of them need to be matched with their proper definition whereas three will not be used (i.e. distractors). A tick or a cross should be placed under the definition that the participant believes is correct. In the case of “land with water all around it”, “Island” would be considered the right answer. Figure 2 is an example of what the test looks like:

Figure 2. Completed example of the UVLT

	Game	island	Mouth	movie	Song	yard
Land with water all around it		✓				
Part of your body used for eating and talking			✓			
Piece of music					✓	

In total, there are 30 definitions per level and five frequency levels, which amounts for a total of 150 definitions (see Appendix 2 for the complete version of the UVLT). It was decided to use a test which examined receptive vocabulary because previous research establishes that these tests provide a broader picture of L2 vocabulary development, whereas more comprehensive tests (such as those which examine vocabulary depth) can only examine a handful of words (Read, 2000). Nonetheless, research has also provided evidence that vocabulary has a multifaceted nature (Schmitt, 2010; Webb, 2005) and that, for this reason, more than one test should be used when measuring this aspect of language, which takes us to the next instrument: the written task.

3.4.3. The written task

The multifaceted nature of vocabulary makes it almost impossible to investigate each of its characteristics within one study, mainly because a battery of tests that studied all of the word-knowledge aspects would be “extremely unwieldy and time consuming” (Schmitt, 2010, p. 80). However, it is possible to investigate different features of the lexicon within the same study, which would lead to a greater understanding of how vocabulary is developed. As an illustration of this, Webb (2005, p. 504) declared that using both receptive and productive tests “may give a much more accurate assessment of the degree and type of learning that has occurred”. This is the main reason why it was decided to use a second task to measure participants’ vocabulary in the present study. Moreover, many researchers have concluded that much data can be gathered from a written task (Tracy-Ventura, 2017;

Zaytseva, 2016), and that it is a reliable tool to gather data for lexical knowledge and lexical error analysis. Altogether, the UVLT presents an estimation of how many words participants learnt during their stay (receptive vocabulary) whereas the written task provides evidence of the extent to which participants use L2 words (productive vocabulary).

Deciding the topic for the written task was a rather complex task. At first, the option that was being considered was the following: “Someone who moves to a foreign country should always adopt the customs and the way of life of his/her new country”. This prompt was employed in the Study Abroad and Language Acquisition (SALA) project with the objective of investigating written academic progress (Pérez-Vidal & Barquin, 2014) and intercultural awareness (Merino & Avello, 2014). It seemed interesting to use such a prompt because it allowed researchers to examine the development of L2 productive vocabulary aspects, but it also provided information about participants’ “beliefs, values, emotions or sense of identity” (Merino & Avello, 2014, p. 292). Therefore, the task could have been used for future studies.

Nonetheless, this topic did not seem suitable for younger learners. Thus, it was decided to use a broader topic which was suitable for participants of different ages. For this reason, the prompt used in the present study was: “My life: Past, present and future expectations”, which is less complicated in nature and, therefore, suitable for participants of all ages. Furthermore, different researchers have used this and similar prompts in the past (i.e. description of oneself) in order to compare L2 development with participants of different ages, and they agree that it leads to much interesting L2 data (Köylü, 2016; Llanes & Serrano, 2014; Torras, Navés, Celaya, & Pérez-Vidal, 2006). On the whole, as the title of the task suggests, learners were asked to write a composition about their lives: their past experiences, their present selves and their expectations for the future. Participants were given 15 minutes to perform this task (as in Llanes & Muñoz, 2013; Köylü, 2016). No specific word limit was required, although they were asked to write as much as possible (see Appendix 3 for examples).

3.4.4. The OPT

The Oxford Quick Placement Test (OPT) was used to measure participants' general L2 proficiency. This test measures the language knowledge that students have and it provides detailed information about their proficiency level through a practical and reliable method (Oxford University Press, 2018). Therefore, this measurement can be used when examining the L2 development of a group of students (Llanes et al., 2016a), but also when placing students into a class or when deciding the level of the activities that will be completed during an academic course. Moreover, it should be highlighted that the test has been tested and validated at various occasions, and by different institutions, which gives it even more reliability and validity (Oxford University Press, 2018).

On the whole, the Quick OPT is divided into two sections: 1) Listening and 2) Use of English. However, both sections can be employed separately, and for the purpose of this study only the latter was employed. This 'Use of English' section consists of a battery of 60 grammar and vocabulary multiple-choice questions. The first five items are composed by different notices and participants have to choose option A, B, or C (where they would be more likely to see them). Here is an example (see Figure 3):

Figure 3. Example A of the OPT

1	Please leave your room key at Reception.	A in a shop B in a hotel C in a taxi
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In this example, the correct answer would be B (in a hotel). Hence, participants simply have to circle letter B. The rest of the test (questions 6 to 60) is composed by gap filling exercises where participants have to choose the option that best fits each gap (questions 6-10 have three possible answers – A, B, C – and questions 11-60 have four – A, B, C, D). As an example of

this, in the following example participants would be expected to circle option D (see Figure 4) (see Appendix 7 for the whole test):

Figure 4. Example B of the OPT

55	I	to other people borrowing my books: they always forget to return them.		
A	disagree	B avoid	C dislike	D object

3.4.5. The questionnaire

An online questionnaire was distributed among participants before and after their sojourn. The questionnaire was based on the Language Contact Profile (LCP) (Freed, Dewey, Segalowitz, & Halter 2004) and the Language Engagement Questionnaire (LEQ) (Mitchellet al., 2017). Nevertheless, two main changes were applied. First, some questions were added with regard to L2 reading and L2 vocabulary because these were the two areas under research in the present investigation. Secondly, the questionnaire was distributed in Catalan because the objective was to gather as much information as possible about participants' SA experiences. Hence, it was believed that they would write longer answers when necessary if they were able to use their L1. As it was mentioned before, two questionnaires were used (one before the students left the country and one once they came back from the stays); however the data of the pre-test questionnaire was only used to gather information about participants' background. Therefore, for investigation purposes, only the post-test questionnaire was used in the present study (see Paper 4 in the results section).

Altogether, in the post-test questionnaire there were 37 open- and close-ended questions which enquired about participants' engagement with English, their use of English and other languages while abroad, their perceived improvement, and their insights and reflections on the experience (see Appendix 9 for the questionnaire). Again, out of the 37 questions only eight have been used to answer the research questions in the present project (see Paper 4 in the results section).

3.4.6. The semi-structured interview

In order to triangulate data with the teenage group, the author of the present study travelled to Ireland with them, which allowed her to perform some semi-structured interviews with the participants once they arrived and before they departed from the host country. Because of time constraints, not all the learners in the language school could be interviewed, hence, a sub-group of participants (n= 25) was selected to perform this task. The 25 respondents were randomly selected, although the interviewer made sure that they were part of the group that stayed in the country for at least three weeks so that the same participants could take part in both the pre- and the post-test interview. At the language school, there were seven different classes/levels, hence, in order to have people from different ages and levels, between three and four students from each class were chosen for the task.

During the first interview (at the beginning of the experience) 19 questions were asked to the students about their expectations towards their stay in Ireland. Students were told that they could answer these questions in either English or their L1 (Catalan or Spanish) since the goal was to gather information about their stays rather than to examine their L2 skills. Out of the 25 interviewed students, 21 completed the interview in English, one did so in Catalan, one in Spanish and two alternated the use of English and Catalan. A total of 33 questions were used during the post-test interview (at the end of the third week). These questions were used to guide the interview, but they sometimes led students to talk about topics different than the ones posed; hence, in some cases, more questions emerged from this semi-structured conversation. The first 23 questions were related to their beliefs around the experience and their language gains. The rest of the questions (n= 10) had to do with their host families, in an attempt to gather a more robust understanding of this type of living accommodation. Again, students were given the choice to answer the questions in their L1 or their L2. This time, 16 students responded in English, five in Catalan, and four in Spanish. In addition to the interviews, the researcher was also allowed to observe the

students during their classes, their breaks and their afternoon activities. Moreover, she had the chance to informally interview the teachers, the leaders, and the students. It is important to note, however, that in the present dissertation only the informal observations and the post-test interview were used with the objective of explaining the quantitative results that emerged from the language tests. Hence, neither the interviews nor the observations have been used in order to answer any of the research questions (see Paper 2 in the results section and Appendix 9 for the questions that guided the post-test semi-structured interview with the teenage group).

3.5. Measures

Nine measures were obtained from the instruments previously described: L2 reading comprehension and L2 reading fluency, L2 receptive and L2 productive vocabulary (lexical fluency, lexical accuracy, lexical density and lexical sophistication), L2 general proficiency level and L2 contact while abroad (see Table 9 for a summary of the measures).

3.5.1. L2 reading comprehension and fluency

L2 reading comprehension and L2 reading fluency were analysed through the reading passages. Reading comprehension was measured by the amount of correct answers participants had in the multiple-choice questions. The A2 text consisted of 13 questions; therefore, participants could obtain a maximum of 13 points. Similarly, the B1 text had 11 questions which meant that the maximum score that participants could get was 11. Every question had four possible answers and only one was correct.

Reading fluency was computed by the amount of words that participants had read per minute (WPM). This is calculated following the formula: number of words the text had x 60/total number in seconds students took to read the text.

3.5.2. L2 receptive and productive vocabulary

Receptive vocabulary was measured through the UVLT. As explained before, this test examines 150 items and it provides information about participants' lexical knowledge. Therefore, in order to measure development (or lack thereof) in receptive vocabulary, the raw score out of 150 was calculated.

Concerning productive vocabulary, four measures were analysed: lexical fluency, lexical accuracy, lexical density and lexical sophistication (following Zaytseva, 2016). First of all, all the writings were computerized. Then, two programmes were used in order to examine the different measures. The Computerized Language Analysis (CLAN) software (MacWhinney, 2000) was used to examine lexical fluency and lexical accuracy (see Appendix 4 for an example). Lexical fluency was measured through the total number of tokens participants used in their texts. On the other hand, lexical accuracy was measured dividing the total number of lexical errors by the total number of tokens. Hence, if a student had made four lexical errors and used 150 words in their text, their lexical accuracy was 0.02. When deciding whether something was a lexical error Zaytseva's (2016, p. 254) error classification scheme was followed. Table 8 shows the four types of errors and it provides a description and some examples taken from the written tasks of the students in the present investigation. It is important to note that, in order to ensure inter-rater reliability, two raters examined 15% of the students' writings, one of them a native speaker (For some examples please see Papers 2 and 3 in the results section).

Table 8. Error classification scheme

Type of error	Definition	Example from the students' writings
L1 transfer	“Literal translation or direct borrowings of L1 words; false friends”	<i>I am actually doing Translation and Interpreting</i> (from “actualmente” meaning “currently”)
Word choice	“Wrong or inappropriate lexical choice; mistakes with commonly confused words”	<i>I hope I have a stable work</i> (meaning “job”)
Non-words	“Non-existent words based on L1 forms or resulting from erroneous morphology”	<i>It required effort and constance</i> (meaning “perseverance”)
Fixed expressions	”Problems with formulaic language and idioms”	<i>I record the happy feelings I had</i> (from “recordar” meaning “remember”)

Lexical density and lexical sophistication were measured through the VocabProfile online tool (VP-Compleat v 2.1.), which can be found in Tom Cobb's Compleat Lextutor website (<https://www.lex tutor.ca/vp/comp/>). Lexical density was computed dividing the number of content words in a text (nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs) by the total number of words a participant had used. Therefore, if a participant had written a 280-word essay, 115 of which were content words, their lexical density would be 0.41. All this information was provided automatically through the Vocabprofile tool. Lexical sophistication consisted of a comparison of words from different frequency levels. In particular, this measure compares the use of basic (more

frequently occurring) and advanced (less frequently occurring) vocabulary (Tracy-Ventura, 2017). In sum, the goal in the present paper was to observe whether participants used more low or high frequency words after the stay. A participant would be considered to be more sophisticated if s/he started using more words from a low frequency level (from the 5K level or higher). On the contrary, participants who still used words from high frequency levels after the stay (1K or 2K) would not be considered to have improved in terms of lexical sophistication. Again, the VocabProfile provided this data automatically (see Appendix 5 for an example).

3.5.3. General L2 proficiency

The L2 proficiency level of the participants was calculated through the OPT and it consisted of the total number of correct answers participants had in the test. There were 60 questions in total in this instrument; therefore, the maximum score that a participant could get was 60. Once a numerical mark was given to each student, their CEFRL level was calculated. Participants' level could range from A1 (lowest) to C2 (highest) depending on the amount of items they answered correctly in the test: A1 (0-17), A2 (18-29), B1 (30-39), B2 (40-47), C1 (48/54), and C2 (55-60).

3.5.4. L2 engagement

The online questionnaire was employed in order to determine the extent to which participants used their L2 while abroad. More specifically, the objective was to examine the amount of formal English instruction participants received, and their language use while abroad (which was the language used the most, language use at home, language use at university, and language use at social events).

As stated above (see section 3.4.5. the questionnaire), only the group of university students responded to the questionnaire. Therefore, this measure does not apply to all participants in the present study. In sum, the questionnaire was used to answer the last research question of the present

dissertation (RQ6: To what extent do learners use the L2 while abroad in a traditional SA setting and in an ELFSA one?), which is included in last paper of the dissertation (see 4.4. in the results section). Moreover, some of the questions were used in order to help the researcher explain the outcomes of the stays.

Table 9. Summary of the instruments and measures

Domain	Measure-Test	Formula
General proficiency	OPT	Raw score /60
Reading fluency	WPM - reading text	A2 text $\rightarrow 504 \cdot 60 / \text{Total seconds taken to read the text}$ B1 text $\rightarrow 707 \cdot 60 / \text{Total seconds taken to read the text}$
Reading comprehension	comprehension - reading text	A2 text \rightarrow Raw scores /13 B1 text \rightarrow Raw scores /11
Receptive vocabulary	UVLT	Raw scores /150
Productive vocabulary	Lexical fluency - written essay	Total number of tokens
	Lexical accuracy - written essay	Number of lexical errors/tokens
	Lexical density - written essay	Number of content words/tokens
	Lexical sophistication - written essay	Comparison of the percentages from words of different frequency levels
L2 engagement	Questionnaire	answers from the questions

When examining the learners' outcomes, in the post-test higher values were expected for both reading measures (comprehension and fluency), since they would reveal that learners understood the texts better and read them faster. Higher values were also expected for lexical fluency and lexical density, and this would imply that learners wrote longer and denser texts. The same holds true in terms of the OPT: higher scores would mean that participants improved their proficiency level. On the other hand, lower scores in the post-test were expected for lexical accuracy because lower values in this measure indicate that participants had made fewer lexical errors in their post-test writings. Finally, when examining lexical sophistication, a lower percentage of words from the 1000 frequency level and a higher percentage of words from the higher frequency levels (4000, 5000, and higher) would mean that participants produced more sophisticated texts by the time their stay ended.

3.6. Procedure

This project has a longitudinal nature that attempts to examine L2 development after a SA experience. Therefore, the study had a pre/post-test design. The procedure was the same at all data collection points and with both groups of participants (teenagers and undergraduates). Nonetheless, two slight differences exist in the procedure of both groups. First, before starting the pre-test data collection, participants in the teenage group completed a personal information form, which was needed in order to gather background information about them. On the other hand, participants in the university group were asked to complete an online questionnaire after the pre-testing and, hence, it was not necessary that they filled the personal information form. It must be noted that, despite the fact that two questionnaires were involved (pre and post-test), the pre-test survey was simply employed to collect participants' background information. Only the post-test questionnaire, which contained information about the amount of engagement participants had with the L2 while abroad and their perceptions towards the stay and their L2 practice and learning, was used for investigation purposes.

Finally, in order to avoid any task-repetition effects, participants were not informed about the second data collection time or the objective of the study.

The second difference between the teenager and the undergraduate data collections has to do with the place where the testing took place. On the one hand, students performing their SA experience in Ireland (short SA) completed both data collections in-situ. That is, the testing happened at the Irish school where they attended classes for three weeks during their sojourns. Participants arrived in Ireland on a Sunday, hence, there were no classes and they spent the day getting to know their host families. Similarly, classes did not start on Monday but different activities were organized so that students met the rest of the participants and became familiarized with the teachers, the school and their new environment. Hence, the pre-test was administered on the third day into the SA programme. The post-test was run two days before the students' departure. On the whole, although their sojourn lasted for 3 weeks, the time elapsed between the pre- and the post-test was 15 days.

On the other hand, the undergraduates participating in the present project completed both data collections at their home universities. The pre-test took place in June 2018, before the students finished their classes at university because they were starting their SA experiences at different points during the summer (some left by the end of July whereas others did not travel to their host countries until September) and, hence, this allowed the researcher to administer the tests to a wider range of students. Participants were from different universities and different classes, hence, the pre-test was carried out on three different days during June 2018. The post-test took place in February 2019, once all participants had come back from their sojourns. Following a similar pattern, the testing happened on three different days (one for each university/group). Nevertheless, some participants were not in class on the day of the post-test and, it was considered appropriate to conduct an extra data collection so that those students who could not participate in the first post-test had the opportunity to be included in the study. The data collection was repeated different times at all universities during the same and the

following week to make sure that the dates did not differ much and in an attempt to not lose many participants.

Regarding the administration of the tests (which was the same for all groups of participants), first, students were given a reading passage and they were informed that some comprehension questions would follow the reading. They were asked not to rush and to read the text once at a normal speed which allowed them to understand the content as much as possible, so that they would be able to answer the comprehension questions without the text before them. Thus, they read the text and, once they finished, they were asked to write down the amount of time they had spent reading it in minutes and seconds (a chronometer was projected on a big screen). Then, they raised their hands and the researcher took the passages and handed them the comprehension questions. This process was then repeated with the second text. It is important to highlight that half the class started reading the A2 text whereas the other half did so with the B1 one to make sure that results would not be affected by text order. For the same reason, those students who started reading the A2 text during the pre-test, also started reading the A2 text during the post-test, whereas those who started with the B1 passage at the pre-test, began with the B1 at the post-test. The readings were followed by the written task, for which participants were given about fifteen minutes. Once they finished, they gave their compositions to the examiner and they were asked to complete the UVLT. In order to prevent students from guessing, the examiner asked them to leave items unanswered if they did not know their definition. Finally, the UVLT was followed by the OPT. Participants were allowed to leave the room when they finished this last test. In total, the data collection lasted for around 90 minutes. It is important to note that none of the students received any economic compensation for taking part in this study.

3.7. Overview of the study

Motivated by the different gaps within SA research, the present study attempts to shed light on some rather under-researched areas so that more robust conclusions can be drawn around the SA field. Therefore, this study

examines L2 reading (comprehension and fluency) and L2 receptive and productive vocabulary development after different SA experiences, the relations between initial proficiency level and gains in the aforementioned measures, and the amount of L2 exposure participants received while abroad. In particular, the present dissertation examines three different SA experiences: a short (3-week) summer programme in Ireland, a semester-long SA in an English speaking country (traditional SA), and a semester-long SA in a non-Anglophone country (ELFSA). Participants, a group of teenagers and two groups of university students, were administered five tests before and after their sojourns: two reading passages, the UVLT, a written task, and the OPT. From these instruments, eight variables were extracted: reading comprehension, reading fluency, receptive vocabulary, lexical fluency, lexical accuracy, lexical density, lexical sophistication, and proficiency level. Moreover, the group of teenagers participated in a semi-structured interview and the two groups of university students completed an online questionnaire in order to gather information about the amount of L2 exposure and practise they received during the stays. As a summary, seven dependent variables (namely, reading comprehension, reading fluency, receptive vocabulary, lexical fluency, lexical accuracy, lexical density, and lexical sophistication) and three independent variables (that is, initial proficiency level, initial vocabulary level, and L2 engagement) were taken into account in the present dissertation.

3.8. Data analysis

This study mainly examines the impact of learning context on students' L2 reading and vocabulary development. Changes in the participants' L2 skills have been explored from a quantitative perspective in order to determine whether performing a stay in a foreign country will enhance learners' L2 skills.

In order to conduct the different analyses, a matrix with the data from the different tests was created with an IBM SPSS 24 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences, version 24) database. To do so, the researcher corrected all

the tests (reading passages, UVLT, and OPT) and entered the results for reading comprehension, reading fluency, receptive vocabulary and proficiency level into the database. Then, the writings were transcribed and coded into CLAN (MacWhinney, 2000) to facilitate measures of lexical fluency and lexical accuracy. In the same manner, the VocabProfile online tool (Cobb, 2016) was used to compute lexical density and lexical sophistication (See section 3.5 for more information on how each measure was computed). Once the database was completed, all quantitative data were analysed for descriptive statistics in order to determine means and standard deviations, and to check whether there were any initial changes in the learners' L2. Normality was examined for all the measures analysed before conducting any analysis, and decisions on which test to use when examining each variable were made for each of the research questions and studies. Finally, all statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS and the significance level (also known as alpha level) was set at .05. It is important to highlight that, given that the present dissertation follows a 4-paper format, each study provides specific information about the analyses that were performed and the decisions that were made when answering each of the research questions. Thus, in the following chapter the different papers will include information about the assumptions of normality and the battery of tests used in order to answer each of the research questions in the present dissertation. Altogether, answers to the first research question can be found in the first paper, the second paper provides answers to the second and the fourth research questions, the third study evolves around the third and the fourth research questions and, finally, the last paper answers the last two research questions.

Chapter IV

Results

As mentioned in the previous section, the present dissertation follows a 4-paper format; therefore, the results section is going to be divided into five main parts that include the four papers and a final conclusion. Part one includes the first paper, a state-of-the-art entitled “Re-examining the impact of study abroad on L2 development: a critical overview”. This study aims at answering the first research question of the study: “RQ1: Which are the areas that need further research within the literature of study abroad?” Altogether, this paper provides an overview on the effects that SA experiences have on L2 learning, and, subsequently, it highlights those areas that need further research within the SA field.

Part two consists of the second published paper: “L2 reading and vocabulary development after a short Study Abroad experience”, which provides an answer to the second research question: “RQ2: Will a short (3-week) SA experience have a positive impact on a group of teenagers’ L2 reading comprehension, reading fluency, and receptive vocabulary and productive vocabulary?” Therefore, this paper explores the effects that a short (3-week) SA experience had on a group of teenagers’ L2 reading and L2 vocabulary. Moreover, it investigates the possible correlations between gains in L2 reading (in terms of comprehension and fluency) and initial L2 vocabulary knowledge and proficiency level, (RQ4).

The third paper can be found in part three: “Investigating the impact of a semester-long study abroad programme on L2 reading and vocabulary development”, which provides an answer to the third research question “RQ3: Will a traditional semester-long SA experience have a positive impact on a group of undergraduates’ L2 reading comprehension, reading fluency, receptive vocabulary and productive vocabulary?”. As its title suggests, this paper examines the development of a group of undergraduates’ L2 reading and L2 vocabulary as a result of a semester-long SA experience in an

Anglophone country. An additional objective of the study is to determine whether gains in participants' L2 reading or vocabulary (if any) were related to their initial L2 proficiency and L2 vocabulary level (RQ4).

The fourth part of this section includes the last paper: "Is L2 development in an ELF context comparable to L2 development in a traditional SA setting? The case of reading and vocabulary". This study provides an answer to the last two research questions: "RQ5: Will a semester-long traditional SA experience provide the same outcomes as an ELFSA one in terms of L2 reading and L2 vocabulary?" and "RQ6: To what extent do learners use the L2 while abroad in a traditional SA setting and in an ELFSA one?". This study examines the development of L2 reading and vocabulary after a semester-long SA programme. Nonetheless, in this case there are two groups of undergraduate participants: the first one performed a traditional SA experience (i.e. in an English speaking country), and the second one did so in an ELFSA context (i.e. in a country where English was used as a *lingua franca*). Therefore, the first objective of the paper was to examine whether a semester-long ELFSA experience and a traditional one would lead participants to comparable outcomes in terms of L2 reading and L2 vocabulary. A second objective of the study was to determine to what extent participants used their L2 while abroad in both contexts.

Finally, the last part of this chapter will serve as a summary of the main findings in each study.

4.1. Paper one: Re-examining the impact of study abroad on L2 development: A critical overview

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The present article offers a review of the existing literature on L2 gains arising from participation in a study abroad (SA) experience. The purpose of this article is (1) to provide a general overview of research findings on the influence of time abroad on L2 development and (2) to identify the areas which need further research within the SA literature. This article provides an update on Llanes' (2011. *The many faces of study abroad: an update on the research on L2 gains emerged during a study abroad experience. International Journal of Multilingualism* 8, no. 3: 189–215) state-of-the-art article, focusing on studies published between 2011 and the beginning of 2018. We identify the following as important areas for future research: age of participants, duration of SA programmes, learning contexts and social networks.

Keywords: Study abroad; L2 development; learning context; review

Introduction

The study abroad (SA) context is believed to be one of the most favourable contexts for second language (L2) learning as Kinginger (2008: 1) has remarked:

An in-country sojourn is often interpreted as the highlight of students' careers, the ultimate reward for years of hard labour over grammar books and dictionaries, when knowledge of a foreign language becomes immediately relevant and intimately connected to lived experience. Students who go abroad are assumed to find unlimited access to language learning opportunities and to return home with dramatically enhanced communicative abilities.

Study abroad (SA) appears to offer a wide range of opportunities for target language practice and in particular, frees classroom learners to explore language use in the wider world. SA participants come out from the boundaries of traditional classroom talk and connect to lived language

learning experiences (Kinging 2008). With programmes such as ERASMUS, study abroad has become a reality for many students at least within Europe, and an opportunity to improve their second language skills. However, research on SA experiences and linguistic outcomes has not always confirmed the positive picture generally assumed; hence the importance of regular research overviews such as this one.

The present article updates Llanes' (2011) narrative synthesis which summarised the research literature on L2 gains from SA experiences, and identified gaps in the SA literature. This update is timely not only because a great deal of SA research has been conducted since 2011 (see, for example, Marijuan and Sanz 2018; Isabelli-Garcia et al. 2018), but also because publications on SA and L2 development reached a historical peak between 2011 and 2014 (Tulloch and Ortega 2017), and a new journal focusing specifically on SA (Study Abroad Research in Second Language Acquisition and International Education) was launched in 2016.

The definition of SA adopted in this study is that provided by Kinginger (2009: 11) and used by Tulloch and Ortega (2017): 'A temporary sojourn of pre-defined duration, undertaken for educational purposes'. Following Isabelli-Garcia et al. (2018), we have selected for this overview only studies focusing on language learning as a result of a SA experience (as already defined above), where students take courses in the L2. Studies involving changes in participants' sense of identity, perspectives or beliefs were not included. Further, given the specific status of English as a global lingua franca, only studies in which English was the target L2 were included. An exhaustive search through different databases (ERIC, LLBA) was performed in order to find studies that met these criteria. Forty studies were identified, published between 2011 and early 2018, and these are all summarised in Table 1 below. Only a selection of representative studies are discussed in any detail in the text of this article. In what follows, we focus first on the recent research findings relating to the linguistic outcomes of SA, and then on the areas for future research.

Empirical evidence on SA and language gains

General L2 proficiency

The impact of SA on general L2 proficiency has been widely studied (Serrano, Llanes and Tragant 2016). Much of this research has investigated language gains in connection with social networks; that is, they attempt to show whether the social relationships developed during SA are linked to overall L2 gains. This more socio-cultural area, which, as Sanz and Morales-Front (2018) note, has only recently been investigated in the SA context, seems to be key to making sense of students' L2 improvements during SA. Many researchers have made the fairly logical claim that the more communities participants join while abroad, the more they tend to practise the L2 and, therefore, the more they are likely to develop their L2 skills. Some of these studies, however, do not provide quantitative evidence of actual development (Sanz and Morales-Front 2018); instead, they often focus on self-perceived development and ethnographic data (Kalocsai 2014; Nam 2018). More research is thus needed to provide robust empirical evidence of the effects that social networks and out-of-class contact may have on L2 skills development during SA. Furthermore, it should also be noted that with the exception of Nam (2018), all the studies examining the impact of social networks on L2 skills development investigate participants whose target L2 is not English.

Oral skills

Oral skills are, understandably, the dominant focus of the SA literature and much research has been conducted in order to examine the impact of SA in this area (e.g. Llanes 2012; Juan-Garau 2014; Valls-Ferrer and Mora 2014), as highlighted in Juan-Garau's (2015) review of SA research. These studies, however, have used a variety of different measurements. Juan-Garau (2014), for example, conducted research on oral accuracy. She examined a group of Catalan-Spanish bilinguals who first received formal instruction at home (AH), and then participated in a SA programme abroad for three months. The author administered a role-play task and a questionnaire in order to examine

which context was superior in terms of oral accuracy and native-like speech. She also investigated to what extent gains made while abroad were maintained; which participants benefited more from the stay (lower vs. higher oral accuracy level pre-departure); and the SA contact variables (such as listening and writing in the L2 or how often participants studied with someone else) that predicted L2 oral accuracy development. Her results showed that the SA setting was superior to AH both in terms of oral accuracy (measured by errors per T-unit and errors per clause) and participants' greater approximation to native speaker (NS) norms, although differences between NSs and non-native speakers (NNSs) were still significant after the SA. This research established that the gains in oral accuracy were long-lasting, as they were maintained fifteen months after the sojourn; that those participants with lower-level pre-departure oral accuracy skills benefited more from the SA experience and that listening and writing during the sojourn were good predictors of success in terms of increased oral accuracy.

Research has also focused on oral fluency. Valls-Ferrer and Mora (2014) analysed the oral fluency of 27 Catalan/Spanish bilinguals who first received formal instruction (FI) AH and then undertook a 3-month SA experience. Similarly to Juan-Garau (2014), they investigated the role of participants' pre-departure fluency level and the impact of SA contact variables. The authors concluded that most gains in oral fluency (in terms of speed and breakdown measures) were found after SA, but they asserted that the FI during the AH period was also beneficial as it developed L2 knowledge which was then reinforced while abroad. Thus, they concluded that although SA appeared to be the more beneficial environment for oral fluency development, it was in fact the combination of FI at home followed by SA that was most productive. Valls-Ferrer and Mora (2014) found a relation between participants' pre-departure fluency level and their L2 fluency gains, suggesting that those with a lower fluency level before the sojourn benefited more from the SA context. Finally, in terms of language contact, the authors found, fairly predictably, that those who spent more time with English speaking people and/or watching TV in English showed greater gains after

SA and that those who reported improvement in their L2 speaking skills also obtained higher fluency scores.

Pronunciation has been another specific focus in SA research on oral skills. One of the most common instruments used to capture gains in pronunciation has been the oral interview. An example of a study using semi-structured interviews to elicit data is Muñoz and Llanes (2014). They compared four groups on measures of accentedness: a group of children and a group of adults in both a SA and an AH context (N= 55). A panel of NSs of English rated the accentedness of the interviews for all participants; the SA groups were perceived to have less accentedness in the post-test than their AH counterparts. The authors also established that children benefitted most from the SA experience in terms of pronunciation, and they also spent more time in contact with NSs. The authors found that, generally, those participants who spent more time with NSs, speaking English or in class benefitted the most from the SA experience.

Based on Muñoz and Llanes' (2014) study, SA seems to promote significant gains in pronunciation; however, other studies had less positive findings. Avello, Mora and Pérez-Vidal (2012), for example, analysed the L2 English phonological development of 23 Catalan-Spanish bilinguals in terms of oral accuracy and accentedness. While the authors found improvement in participants' oral accuracy, no significant gains were detected in participants' degree of foreign accent. They concluded that a stay of three to four months may have a positive effect on oral skills but longer stays are needed for participants to show really significant improvement in terms of accentedness. These apparently contradictory findings could be explained by the participants' age or the different designs of the programmes.

Vocabulary

The existing literature suggests that SA has a positive impact on L2 vocabulary since all recent studies find gains in one or more aspects of lexical development. Barquin (2012), for example, analysed vocabulary development in terms of lexical diversity, sophistication and cohesion with a

group of Catalan/Spanish undergraduates. She concluded that her participants developed greater diversity in their word choice after SA. Zaytseva (2016) examined different variables of written lexical development: fluency, density, diversity, sophistication and accuracy. She compared the vocabulary acquisition of a group of Catalan/Spanish bilinguals receiving formal instruction AH first, and then participating in a mobility programme abroad. She found that the SA context was superior for four of the vocabulary measures analysed (written fluency, density, diversity and accuracy) but that lexical sophistication did not improve significantly in any of the contexts. Moreover, she determined that that less skilled learners experienced greater gains.

Grammar

The development of L2 grammatical competence as a result of SA has been investigated in conjunction with vocabulary, but not many authors have focused attention specifically on grammar. Juan-Garau, Salazar-Noguera and Prieto-Arranz (2014), for example, examined development in lexico-grammatical competence (by means of cloze tests and sentence rephrasing tests) with a group of Catalan/Spanish bilinguals (N= 57) first in their AH learning environment, and then after three months' SA. The results were mixed. On cloze tests, although participants showed a slight improvement during the FI period at home, gains were only significant after SA. Results from both AH and SA learning contexts showed comparable gains on the sentence rephrasing tests. In general, results point to gradual improvement over time, with the SA context leading to most gains. However, it is important to highlight that the AH context also promoted learning. Hirakawa, Shibuya and Endo (2019) examined which context (AH vs. SA) would have a more positive influence on the acquisition of adjective ordering restrictions in a group of 56 Japanese students. The authors concluded that explicit instruction in the AH context was more beneficial for the acquisition of adjective ordering restrictions than 'natural' exposure (i.e. SA). As Table 1 shows, comparatively little research has been conducted on the effect of SA on L2 grammar development, and the few existing studies seem to have

contradictory findings. This is thus an area where more research is urgently needed.

Listening

Similarly, few studies have focused on the impact of SA on listening skills (Rodrigo 2011; Llanes and Prieto Botana 2015), and even fewer have analysed the development of listening comprehension with participants whose target L2 was English. To the authors' knowledge, only one such study has been conducted since 2011. Beattie, Valls-Ferrer and Pérez-Vidal (2014) examined a group of Catalan/Spanish university students (N= 75), who first received some formal instruction AH and then studied abroad for three months. The participants' listening comprehension was tested based on three kinds of listening comprehension questions after listening to an authentic interview. The authors concluded that participants improved their listening comprehension skills significantly only after their SA experience. While all participants' listening skills benefited from the SA experience, participants with a lower level at the outset benefited more from the combination of FI and SA, although not overtaking the higher level learners. Despite these positive findings for the impact of SA on listening skills, the paucity of research in this area makes it difficult to draw robust conclusions, and like grammar, this is an area of language learning which requires further research focusing on the impact of SA.

Reading

Llanes (2011) noted that reading is the skill that has received the least attention in the SA literature, and this situation has not changed since 2011 because the impact of SA on reading skills remains little known. Only two studies published since 2011 look at reading skills: Kraut (2017) and Li (2014), and only one of these includes participants learning L2 English. Kraut (2017) investigated a group of Arabic and Chinese students learning English in the USA over eight weeks. She used four reading passages (two distributed in form A and two in form B, so each participant read two texts only), all similar in length and difficulty, in order to examine participants' L2 reading

speed before and after their SA. The texts were followed by a set of multiple-choice questions testing reading comprehension. The author found gains in L2 reading skills even after only an eight-week period abroad. Moreover, through a reading attitudes questionnaire, the author also found that participants' attitudes towards L2 reading changed during the SA period, with participants perceiving increased efficacy as English readers, being more willing to read out of curiosity and more willing to engage with more challenging texts. It should be noted that Kraut's participants were enrolled in an intensive English programme of at least 18 hours of English classes per week while abroad, and this FI probably helped them develop their L2 reading skills faster. More research is needed here, not least in order to tease out the relative impact of FI in promoting reading skills during a SA period.

Writing

The impact of a SA experience on written skills has received considerable attention, yet results are far from conclusive. On the one hand, some studies claim that SA is highly beneficial for writing. Barquin (2012), for example, studied the writing complexity, accuracy and fluency of a group of 30 Catalan/Spanish undergraduates, and concluded that SA was advantageous, especially for written fluency, with participants producing significantly longer essays after their time abroad. On the other hand, Serrano, Tragant and Llanes (2012) found that, although a few months abroad may be enough for learners to improve their L2 oral skills, the process of developing written production is much slower and positive improvements in this area take time to appear. They had examined the development of oral and written skills of a group of Spanish undergraduates (N= 14) during SA assessing fluency, lexical complexity and accuracy in both skills. They conclude that a minimum period of one semester is needed in order to show gains in writing skills. As Table 1 shows, results with respect to writing skills are ambiguous and more research is needed to ascertain more confidently the impact of SA.

Table 1. Summary of the literature on SA and L2 development				
Study	Learning Context	Participants	Focus	Results
1 Llanes and Serrano (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Catalan/Spanish undergraduates ($N= 46$) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Effects of different LoS on oral and written skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No differences in gains concerning LoS
2 Llanes, Tragantand Serrano (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Spanish undergraduates ($N= 24$) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Oral and written development ▪ The effects of individual differences (e.g. Participants' attitudes, perception of progress, L2 contact, living arrangement, among others) on L2 written and oral performance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA beneficial (especially for oral skills) ▪ Some individual differences (participants' attitudes, university degrees, self-perception of their L2 proficiency and L2 contact) have a decisive role when learning a language abroad
3 Pérez-Vidal and Juan-Garau (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA ▪ FI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Catalan/Spanish undergraduates ($N= 55$) ▪ NSs ($N= 19$) as baseline data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Oral and written development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA beneficial for oral skills (especially for fluency) ▪ SA beneficial for writing skills (especially for fluency and lexical complexity) ▪ SA fosters more native-like oral and written fluency although significant differences were still present between the NS and NNS

				groups
4	Sasaki (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA ▪ AH 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Japanese undergraduates ($N=37$) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Written development ▪ SA > AH
5	Serrano, Llanes and Tragant (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA ▪ AH intensive ▪ AH semi-intensive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Spanish undergraduates ($N=131$) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Effects of learning context on oral and written skills. ▪ AH intensive vs. SA: SA scores marginally higher but not significantly different ▪ AH semi-intensive vs. SA: SA significantly superior in fluency and lexical complexity but not in syntactic complexity and accuracy
6	Avello, Mora and Pérez-Vidal (2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Catalan/Spanish undergraduates ($N=23$) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Phonological development ▪ LoS ▪ Significant improvement in accuracy and stress ▪ Non-significant: 3 months not enough to find gains in overall pronunciation
7	Barquin (2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA ▪ AH 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Catalan/Spanish ($N=30$) undergraduates ▪ NSs of English ($N=28$) as comparative samples 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Writing ▪ Vocabulary ▪ SA beneficial
8	Llanes (2012a)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA ▪ AH 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Catalan/Spanish children bilinguals ($N=16$) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learning context and language gains ▪ SA > AH (oral skills not written) ▪ SA trigger long-lasting gains more than AH ▪ Oral gains remained stable 1 year after SA
9	Llanes (2012b)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA ▪ AH 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Catalan/Spanish children ($N=73$) and adults ($N=66$) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learning context ▪ Age ▪ Oral and written accuracy ▪ SA > AH ▪ Adults > children (in absolute gains) ▪ SA children > SA adults (in relative gains)

10 Mora and Valls-Ferrer (2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA ▪ FI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Catalan/Spanish undergraduates ($N= 30$) ▪ NSs of English ($N= 10$) as baseline data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Oral fluency, accuracy and complexity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA > FI ▪ SA beneficial (particularly in oral fluency)
11 Pérez-Vidal et al. (2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA ▪ FI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Catalan/Spanish undergraduates ($N= 29$) ▪ NSs of English ($N= 10$) as baseline data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Oral and written skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA > FI (in general) but combination of SA & FI = greatest gains ▪ NNSs > NSs in written skills ▪ NSs > NNs in oral skills
12 Serrano, Tragant and Llanes (2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA ▪ Longitudinal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Spanish undergraduates ($N= 14$) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Oral and written skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA positive for oral skills ▪ Written skills require more than one semester abroad to show gains
13 Llanes and Muñoz (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA ▪ AH 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Catalan/Spanish bilinguals ($N= 139$) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Age ▪ Learning Context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA more beneficial for children ▪ SA > AH
14 Avello and Lara (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Long SA ▪ Short SA ▪ AH 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Catalan/Spanish undergraduates ($N= 46$) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Phonological development ▪ LoS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Significant differences from NSs of English before & after SA (no significant improvement) ▪ No significant differences in gains regarding LoS
15 Beattie, Valls-Ferrer and Pérez-Vidal (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA ▪ FI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Catalan/Spanish undergraduates ($N= 75$) ▪ NSs of English ($N=25$) as comparative samples 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Listening 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA > FI ▪ Low level listeners benefited more from combination of FI and SA
16 Jensen and Howard (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ L1 French ($n= 10$) and L1 Chinese ($N= 8$) undergraduates, as an L2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Oral complexity and accuracy ▪ LoS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Individual variation = the variable that has the greatest impact in complexity and accuracy development during SA

17 Juan-Garau (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA ▪ AH 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Catalan/Spanish undergraduates ($N= 43$) ▪ NSs of English ($N= 18$) as comparative samples 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Oral accuracy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Significant benefits in SA in lower no. of errors per T-unit and Clause. ▪ The less you know, the more you learn ▪ Gains remain after some time
18 Juan-Garau, Salazar-Noguera and Prieto-Arranz (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA ▪ FI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Catalan/Spanish undergraduates ($N= 46$) ▪ NSs of English ($N= 19$) as comparative samples 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lexico-grammatical development ▪ Motivational development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA = overall gains ▪ Cloze exercises were better after SA ▪ Rephrasing good at both times
19 Llanes and Serrano (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA ▪ AH 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Catalan/Spanish bilinguals ($N= 197$) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learning context ▪ Age (children, adolescents and adults) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA > AH (mostly for oral skills) ▪ SA more favourable for children
20 Montero, Serrano and Llanes (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA ▪ AH 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Catalan/Spanish children bilinguals ($N= 95$) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learning context superiority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA significant positive effect on children in terms of CS ▪ SA > AH
21 Mora (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA ▪ FI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Catalan/Spanish undergraduates ($N= 66$) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Perceptual Phonological development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Gains appeared during FI and remained stable after SA
22 Muñoz and Llanes (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA ▪ AH 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Catalan/Spanish bilinguals ($N= 55$) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Degree of FA ▪ Age (children vs. adults) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA > AH ▪ Children experienced larger gains after SA
23 Pérez-Vidal and Barquin (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA ▪ FI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Catalan/Spanish undergraduates ($N= 73$) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA > AH ▪ Significant differences found in fluency, accuracy and lexical complexity but not in syntactic

				complexity.
24 Serrano, Tragant and Llanes (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA ▪ Intensive Instruction AH 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Spanish adolescents (<i>N</i>= 112) learners of English 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learning context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ L2 develops in a comparable way in both contexts. ▪ SA = Intensive Instruction AH
25 Valls-Ferrer and Mora (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA ▪ FI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Catalan/Spanish undergraduates (<i>N</i>= 27) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ L2 oral fluency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Combination of FI and SA is positive ▪ Majority of gains appear after SA
26 Briggs (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Different L1s (<i>N</i>= 241) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Vocabulary development ▪ Out-of-class contact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA beneficial ▪ The longer, the better
27 Lara, Mora and Pérez-Vidal (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Catalan/Spanish undergraduates (<i>N</i>= 47) ▪ NSs of English (<i>N</i>= 24) as baseline data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Effects of different LoS on oral production 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ NSs > NNs at pre- and post- test (significantly for accuracy and fluency) ▪ 3-month SA > 6-month SA in accuracy and fluency
28 Llanes, Tragant and Serrano (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Catalan/Spanish adolescents (<i>N</i>= 64) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Written development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA beneficial
29 Koylu (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA ▪ ELFSA ▪ AH 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Turkish undergraduates (<i>N</i>= 50) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ L2 proficiency ▪ L2 Contact & perceptions towards multilingualism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA & ELFSA greater gains in oral fluency → SA & ELFSA equally beneficial ▪ ELFSA more multilingual ▪ AH greater gains in writing
30 Llanes, Arnó and Mancho-Barés (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ELFSA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Catalan undergraduates (<i>N</i>= 39) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learning context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ELFSA beneficial

31 Llanes, Mora and Serrano (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA ▪ AH 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Catalan/Spanish adolescents ($N= 36$) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pronunciation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA > AH
32 Serrano, Llanes and Tragant (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA ▪ Intensive Instruction AH 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Catalan-Spanish adolescents ($N= 102$) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ General L2 proficiency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA = Intensive Instruction AH ▪ SA a bit more beneficial for lexical richness but not significantly.
33 Zaytseva (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA ▪ FI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Catalan/Spanish undergraduates ($N= 30$) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Vocabulary Acquisition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA > FI ▪ Lower level learners learn more
34 Alqarni (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ L1 Arabic students ($N= 24$) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lexical collocational knowledge after different LoS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA beneficial ▪ Those who stayed longer (4 years) outscored those who stayed only one year = the longer, the better
35 Kraut (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Intensive English Program (IEP) + SA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Students of different L1s ($N= 16$), 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reading ▪ Vocabulary breadth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Positive picture of L2 reading even after a short stay.
36 Maeder-Qian (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ELFSA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Chinese undergraduates ($N= 7$) learning English in Germany 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learning context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Participants perceived gains in their language development (vocabulary, listening and speaking) ▪ ELFSA positive.
37 Tavakoli (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Intensive SA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mix of different L1s ($N= 40$) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ L2 proficiency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Gains when combining language + SA ▪ Use of DMs more useful in dialogues
38 Martin-Rubió and Cots (2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ELFSA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Catalan undergraduates ($N= 6$) learning English in Denmark 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learning context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improvement both in oral accuracy and fluency ▪ ELFSA beneficial

39 Nam (2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ELFSA ▪ SA 	South Korean undergraduates (<i>N</i> = 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learning context ▪ Social interactions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SA > ELFSA ▪ Social interactions = extremely helpful for L2 practise and improvement
40 Hirakawa, Shibuya and Endonb (2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ NE (Natural Exposure = SA) ▪ Explicit Exposure (EI) ▪ Input Flood (IF) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Japanese L1s (<i>N</i>= 38 & <i>N</i>=44) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Grammar (adjective ordering restrictions) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ EI > SA & IF

Note: LoS, Length of Stay; ELFSA, English as a Lingua Franca Study Abroad; >, superior to; =, similar to

Directions for further research on SA

Over the years, researchers have expanded the literature of some SA subfields; however, others are still quite new within the SA. We identify below areas which seem to offer potential for further research.

SA participants

The majority of studies to date focus on undergraduate students participating in a SA programme. Isabelli-Garcia et al.'s (2018) recent state-of-the-art article, for example, summarises only the existing literature on SA by university students. Other age groups such as children and adolescents are neglected in the SA research despite them being among the most common participants in SA programmes, due in large part to summer courses abroad. Out of the 40 studies reviewed in the present article, only six examine the effects of SA experiences on children and just five do so with adolescents.

Llanes (2011) had already stressed the importance of conducting research with participants at younger ages since SA experiences are becoming extremely common nowadays not only for adults but for people of all ages, especially adolescents.

Duration of SA

Another topic that deserves further investigation is the duration of SA programmes or Length of Stay (LoS). LoS has proven to be a key determining factor in L2 development as a result of SA (Juan-Garau 2015) and there is much controversy with regards to how long students need to stay in the host country in order to show progress in their L2. Most of the research which has been carried out focuses on long periods of time (>8 weeks) with little research analysing the effects of shorter SA experiences (<8 weeks). The available evidence suggests that short SA experiences can be beneficial although longer stays tend to benefit learners more (Juan-Garau 2015). Nonetheless, more research is needed to be able to judge the optimum LoS for L2 learners studying abroad. Avello et al. (2012), for example, analysed a group of 23 Catalan/Spanish bilinguals who were abroad for three months and, although they found gains in their participants' oral accuracy, no significant gains were found in oral accentedness. The authors thus conclude that short stays of about three to four months do not lead to significant improvement of accent. However, other studies with the same LoS (Beattie et al. 2014; Juan-

Garau 2014) or even shorter (Stevens 2011; Grey et al. 2015; Schwieter and Klassen 2016) have shown positive gains in their participants' L2 skills, concluding that SA periods can be highly beneficial for L2 development even when the time spent abroad is short. However, none of these studies actually compared different LoS; they simply state whether short/long sojourns ended in gains or not. Indeed, very few studies (but see Llanes and Serrano 2011; Lara, Mora and Pérez-Vidal 2015) compare different LoS to see the effect that they may have on similar groups of participants. Therefore, this is still a prominent gap in the SA literature.

Different contexts for SA

The studies mentioned so far mostly compare the traditional SA context (i.e. studying abroad in a country where the L2 is the official language) to the AH one (i.e. studying a language in someone's country). However, other contexts exist apart from these. For example, a new SA context which has recently attracted research attention is the English as a Lingua Franca Study Abroad (ELFSA) (Koçlu 2016); in other words, studying abroad in a country where English is not the national language but where English is used for communicative purposes as a lingua franca. In Europe, for example, many university students participate in SA through the ERASMUS programme, and it is expected that they will develop their L2 (normally English) during this time. However, not all of them travel to English speaking countries such as the UK; some will go to countries where English is used as a lingua franca, particularly in academic contexts (Kalocsai 2014). This means that a SA experience in countries such as France, Italy or Finland may contribute to learners' English development even when English is not the country's official language. In fact, as Jenkins (2000) points out, English tends to be used more with other NNSs than with NSs. Kalocsai (2009, 2014) has started to research this emerging context which presents both problems and new opportunities for SA participants. In 2014 she conducted an ethnographic study analysing an Erasmus community (N= 142) studying abroad in Szeged (Hungary) for one or two semesters. Through interviews, field notes and observations, she established that participants (mostly NNSs of English) created their own linguistic resources to communicate and these increased the self-confidence of all the members in the community. The 'safe' environment created by the participants themselves made them feel more willing to engage in conversation, and this in turn fostered their self-confidence towards using English as an L2.

Notwithstanding the growing importance of ELFSA contexts, many SA participants still travel to English speaking countries due to their learning expectations. For them, English-speaking countries offer unique opportunities for language learning and for communicating with NSs, who are considered to offer the ideal communication for many L2 English students. As an illustration of this, Güvendir (2017) conducted a study with 31 L1 Turkish undergraduates who participated in a three-month SA programme in the USA. He sought to understand the reasons why the students had decided to undertake SA in an English-speaking country. One of the most popular reasons given was to improve speaking by interacting with NSs (61,29%, N= 19). Eighteen participants (58.06%) also emphasised ‘the need to live in a native speaker environment longer in order to witness major improvements in English’ (Güvendir 2017: 39).

Similar findings emerged from Borghetti and Beaven (2015), whose participants also provided evidence of the deeply rooted belief that NSs offer better opportunities for L2 practice and learning. The authors examined a group of 141 undergraduates with L2 English who had studied abroad in different non-English speaking countries. The majority of participants (60.3 %) asserted that the opportunities they had to engage in conversation with NSs were their best resource for L2 learning. They justified this position arguing that (1) NSs were able to correct and teach them more and (2) NSs pronounced correctly and provided more opportunities to learn idiomatic expressions. Nonetheless, many of Borghetti and Beaven’s participants were also positive about practising their L2 skills with NNSs, suggesting that NNSs did not judge them as much as NSs and this made them feel less embarrassed when using the L2. This highlights the benefits of sharing time with NNSs and using English as a lingua franca; learners feel under less pressure to communicate faultlessly and thus are more confident using the L2 and more willing to communicate. Overall, participants in Borghetti and Beaven (2015) mentioned more positive interactions with NNSs than with NSs, and these interactions seemed to allow them to develop their L2 skills and also reduced their anxiety while talking.

An example of a study investigating the possible linguistic benefits of an ELFSA context is Koylu (2016), who investigated the oral and written English (L2) proficiency of three groups of Turkish undergraduates in England (SA), in different countries such as Austria, the Czech

Republic, and Germany among others (ELFSA) and AH. She concluded that SA and ELFSA were equally beneficial in terms of L2 development, but that ELFSA made participants more aware of multilingualism and linguistic identity. Llanes, Arnó and Mancho-Barés (2016) examined a group of 36 Catalan/Spanish undergraduates studying abroad in ELFSA contexts. They found that the context was beneficial for participants' writing skills in terms of lexical complexity and for their overall English language proficiency (as measured through the Quick Oxford Placement Test).

All in all, the studies that have examined an ELFSA context suggest that it is highly beneficial for L2 proficiency development. L2 development through SA in lingua franca contexts has generally been overlooked and undoubtedly more research is needed given the importance these contexts are acquiring nowadays.

Social networks as a key factor for L2 learning while abroad

Coleman (2015) questions why SA researchers have taken so long to investigate the impact of individual differences in understanding how students' L2 development may benefit from SA. He suggests that by asking participants questions such as who they spend time or eat with, how many L2 friends they have, and the languages they use for communication, SA experiences could be understood in a deeper way. The Douglas Fir Group (2016: 30) also established that individual differences are important when analysing SA data as 'no two people, even those in the same classroom, will experience exactly the same social context of language or resolve them in exactly the same way'. For them, language learning begins with social activities and 'through L2 learners' repeated experiences in regularly occurring and recurring contexts of use, often characterized by interpersonal interaction with other social actors' (The Douglas Fir Group 2016: 27).

Many scholars have begun to pay attention to social relations and out-of-class contact because of the crucial role they arguably play in promoting learners' linguistic knowledge. The general conclusion, as mentioned above, is that the more communities learners join while abroad, the more they practise and, hence, the more they improve. Examples of such studies include Juan-Garau (2014), Muñoz and Llanes (2014), and Valls-Ferrer and Mora (2014), all mentioned above. Coleman (2015), in particular, has reviewed the research on 'social circles' and how these could provide significant information regarding the SA context. He concluded

that social networks play a pivotal role in the learning outcomes of study abroad, establishing that ‘they represent a major influence on the variability of study abroad experience: greater contact with the local community leads to greater gains’ (42). Coleman also stressed that while interacting with host nationals is essential for language learning, developing connections with co-nationals may lead to less contact with locals and, hence, less L2 practice and learning. In order to investigate the impact of social networks, a combination of quantitative and qualitative research is required. According to Isabelli-Garcia et al. (2018) although quantitative research can answer many questions about the effects of studying abroad such studies can only provide an incomplete portrait of SA, while qualitative research can give a better description of ‘the nature of the SA experience’ (7). Mitchell, Tracy-Ventura and McManus (2017) have provided one of the most important contributions in this area, but since their participants were Anglophones with Spanish or French, rather than English, as their target L2, this study has not been included for review in our review. It nevertheless offers exemplary research on the impact of social networks during SA.

Conclusion

Study abroad is popular with today's language learners not least because of the belief that it boosts L2 development. Most research conducted to date on SA has suggested that SA is beneficial and promotes the development of L2 skills. However, as our analysis above shows, consistent results have really only been provided for oral skills (and more specifically on speech rate) and vocabulary, while areas such as reading or listening still remain under-researched, and others like writing still show contradictory results. Research has additionally mainly focused on adults, with only a few studies to date analysing the effects of SA on children's or adolescents' L2 skills. We have also highlighted the need to go beyond the traditional SA and AH contexts, and examine the new emerging context of ELFSA. After all, we live in an increasingly multilingual and multicultural world where many different languages and cultures coexist, and students will not travel exclusively to countries where their L2 (English) is the native language, but will seek to learn from other less known cultures and study abroad in countries where English is used only as means of communication. Further research also needs to be undertaken on the optimum length of SA programmes (or LoS) as few studies have focused on comparing shorter to longer stays and their respective benefits,

and little research has analysed the linguistic outcomes of short (<8 weeks) sojourns. Finally, another key topic to be considered in future research is that of social networks. Although much research has been conducted in this area, a more searching perspective is needed to understand more precisely how social relationships developed during SA may impact on participants' L2 development. Much research on SA has appeared since 2011 with the aim of filling some gaps but there is much more to be done in order to understand how learners can derive optimum benefits from study abroad.

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4.2. Paper two: L2 reading and vocabulary development after a short Study Abroad experience

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This study explores the development of L2 reading and vocabulary as a result of a short (3-week) SA experience. Given the growing literature on Study Abroad (SA) research, this investigation attempts to shed some light on two rather under-researched areas such as L2 reading and vocabulary, and it does so with a group of adolescents (n= 52), a population often neglected by the SA research despite being one of the most common participants in SA programmes. Participants, Spanish learners of English (L2), were administered a placement test to determine their initial L2 level, a reading text (from which fluency and comprehension were calculated), the Updated Vocabulary Level Test to measure their receptive vocabulary knowledge, and a written essay to capture their productive vocabulary development in terms of lexical accuracy, fluency, density and sophistication. The results indicate that short SA experiences are positive for both reading fluency and comprehension as well as for receptive vocabulary development. Findings are not so positive in terms of productive vocabulary skills. Finally, results failed to show a direct relationship between gains in reading, and initial proficiency and vocabulary level.

Keywords: Study Abroad, reading development, vocabulary development, learning context, proficiency level

Resumen

Este estudio explora el desarrollo de las habilidades lectoras y la adquisición de vocabulario en una segunda lengua (L2) como resultado de una estancia corta (3 semanas) en el extranjero. Dado que se está dando mucha importancia a la investigación de las estancias en el extranjero, este proyecto pretende dar envergadura a dos áreas comúnmente ignoradas como son la lectura y el vocabulario. Lo hace con un grupo de adolescentes (n= 52), un grupo poco investigado en cuanto a la investigación de las estancias en el extranjero a pesar de ser unos de los participantes más comunes en éstas. A los participantes, españoles estudiantes de inglés como L2, se les administró un test para saber su nivel inicial en la L2, un examen de lectura (para saber su fluidez y comprensión), el Updated Vocabulary Level Test para medir su vocabulario receptivo, y una redacción para capturar su vocabulario productivo (en cuanto a precisión, fluidez, densidad y complejidad). Los resultados indican que las experiencias en el extranjero, aunque sean cortas, son positivas para la fluidez y la comprensión lectora y también en cuanto a vocabulario receptivo. Por lo que hace la mejora de vocabulario productivo los participantes sólo mejoraron significativamente su precisión a la hora de usar la L2. Finalmente, los resultados muestran que no hay una relación directa entre la mejora de la lectura y el nivel inicial, y el vocabulario inicial de los participantes.

Palabras clave: Estancias en el Extranjero, lectura, L2, vocabulario, contexto de aprendizaje, nivel de competencia

1. Introduction

Study Abroad (SA) experiences, especially those undertaken during the summer break, are gaining much popularity among nowadays population, probably because it is believed that they provide a language immersion that is essential to learn or improve a second or foreign language (L2) (Dewey, 2004; Kinginger, 2009).

Despite the growing importance of these short sojourns, little research has been carried out investigating their effects on L2 gains (Llanes, 2011), since most of the SA research has focused on the effects of semester-long SA programmes. Moreover, the vast majority of research on SA examines the effect of these stays on university students and research with adolescents is rather scarce (Evans & Fisher, 2005). Another remarkable fact is that the little research available on the impact of a short SA experience has focused on skills such as oral fluency or pragmatics (Llanes & Muñoz, 2009; Reynolds-Case, 2013), leaving other L2 areas such as reading and lexical development in a second place. Hence, although findings seem to be positive for some L2 areas such as oral fluency, some other areas are still rather under-researched. One such neglected area is L2 reading. The very few authors who have decided to examine the effects that SA programmes have on the development of reading skills have done so with participants engaged in a long (+ 8 weeks) SA experience (Dewey, 2004; Li, 2014; Kraut, 2016), and these studies include university students. To the authors' knowledge, there is no study focusing exclusively on the impact that a short SA overseas experience has on adolescents' L2 reading despite the fact that SA experiences lasting 2-3 weeks are the most popular among young adults and adolescents. This lack of research in reading is rather surprising considering that reading is one of the most important skills as it provides access to information (Grabe, 2009).

Another domain that plays a very important role in learning an L2 is vocabulary. As Nation (2006) and Schmitt (2008) claim, it takes much vocabulary to use a language well. This is particularly true for reading, "being the lack of lexical knowledge a major obstacle for successful comprehension even for advanced learners" (Zaytseva, 2016, p. 45). Previous research has shown that vocabulary knowledge is related to reading development (Grabe, 2009; Li & Kirby, 2014), so examining the impact that a SA experience has on lexical knowledge is necessary when analysing the SA impact on reading. Although some of the

studies that have analysed the effect that a SA experience has on vocabulary development have found positive results (Ife, Vives, Boix, & Meara, 2000; Briggs, 2015), these studies have explored the effects of longer SA experiences (3-4 months) and only very few studies to date have examined the effect that a short SA (3-4 weeks) experience has on vocabulary development. One of such studies is Llanes and Muñoz (2009), but the authors only included two vocabulary measures, namely oral lexical complexity and lexical errors. Therefore, studies examining more in-depth the impact that a short SA experience has on L2 vocabulary acquisition are needed.

All in all, given the popularity of short SA programmes and the paramount importance of L2 vocabulary and reading proficiency, the present study aims at examining whether a 3-week SA experience will lead participants to 1) improved reading comprehension and reading rate, 2) learn new L2 words and be able to use L2 lexicon more efficiently when producing a written task, and 3) to investigate if there is a relation between gains in participants' L2 reading skills (if any) and their initial vocabulary knowledge and proficiency level.

2. Literature review

2.1 SA and L2 reading development

Generally, students who participate in SA experiences travel to countries where they can be fully immersed in the language in order to practise the L2 and assuming the L2 will improve. However, SA research has revealed that not all L2 areas are positively affected after an overseas experience. Although many studies conclude that SA is a good weapon towards language improvement (Juan-Garau, 2014; Michell, Tracy-Ventura, & McManus, 2017), the same attention has not been given to all the L2 areas: There are many studies on oral skills (George, 2014; Llanes, Mora, & Serrano, 2016), but other areas such as reading crave for further investigation. As Kinginger (2009) stated “competence in reading is remarkably under-represented in the applied linguistics literature related to study abroad” (p. 61).

Apart from the lack of studies investigating the L2 reading development after a SA experience, another conspicuous problem is that the findings of these studies are unclear, which makes it difficult to draw decisive conclusions on whether SA has a positive impact on L2 reading. Dewey (2004), for example, analysed the L2 reading development of 30 North-

American students, learners of Japanese as an L2. Half of the participants enrolled in an Intensive Immersion (IM) course in the United States, while the other half joined a SA course in Japan. Although Dewey analysed reading comprehension using three different measures (free-recall protocols, vocabulary knowledge tests and self-assessment) significant differences between the SA and the IM group were only found regarding the participants' self-assessment. More specifically, the author found that learners in the SA programme felt more confident with their reading skills after spending 11 weeks in the target country than those students who participated in the IM course. These results indicate that SA may be positive for reading skills, nonetheless, results lie exclusively on students' perceptions and there is no data providing actual information that the SA students were in fact better at reading by the time they went back to the U.S.A. A year later, Evans and Fisher (2005) examined the impact that a short (6-11 days) SA experience had on a group of English secondary school students, learners of French as an L2 (n= 68). The authors attempted to provide evidence of the impact that participating in a school exchange programme had on the participants' French proficiency. They concluded that such a short period of time may provide significant gains in listening and writing skills but no meaningful influence was found in terms of L2 reading or speaking, suggesting that short SA programmes do not provide enough practise for learners to improve their L2 reading skills.

More promising results come from Li (2014), who investigated the L2 reading development of six groups of North-American undergraduates, learners of Chinese (n= 73), over an 8-week SA experience in China. Li's groups consisted of a beginner group at home (AH) and another one SA, an intermediate group AH and their SA counterparts, and an advanced group AH and their SA counterparts. The author examined the participants' reading comprehension skills and their use of strategies when reading in Chinese. Li found that, generally, the SA groups outscored those AH in all the measures analysed. Hence, the author concluded that SA was positive for both L2 reading comprehension and strategy use, with intermediate students showing the greatest gains. In a more recent study, Kraut (2017) examined a group of 16 Arabic and Chinese students, learners of English (L2), who were enrolled in an 8-week long Intensive English Programme (IEP) in the U.S.A. The author investigated the effects of SA on lexical inferencing abilities, vocabulary breadth, reading comprehension and reading speed, and participants' attitudes towards reading. Kraut's results show a positive picture for

participants' reading speed, willingness to read out of curiosity and students' perceived self-efficacy. It must be highlighted, though, that participants in Kraut's study participated in an IEP programme, which involves more hours of instruction per week (Kraut, 2017) than traditional SA programmes. Hence, the combination of the intensity of instruction and SA indicate that IEPs may provide greater chances for learning to occur.

All in all, the impact that SA programmes have on L2 reading skills is still somewhat blurred and no conclusions can be drawn to determine whether living in the target community aids the development of the reading skill. Moreover, most of the studies which have investigated this skill have a duration of +8 weeks and are conducted with undergraduate students. There is only one study to date analysing the effects that a shorter SA programme may have on the L2 reading development with group of adolescents (Evans & Fisher, 2005) and it does so in a very broad manner: it is not solely focused on reading skills but on L2 development in general, including listening, reading, writing and speaking). Therefore, it only provides an overview of the development of students in each area and, consequently, more studies investigating if short SA experiences influence L2 reading positively are needed.

2.2 SA and L2 vocabulary development

Several authors have claimed that readers need a large amount of vocabulary in order to understand a text well (Hu & Nation, 2000; Nation, 2006; Schmitt, 2008). Not knowing the meaning of certain words in a text can be a major obstacle for reading fluency since readers will not be able to read at their normal speed if they have to stop because of their lack of vocabulary knowledge (Beglar, Hunt, & Kite, 2012; Huffmann, 2014). Since previous studies on SA have found that vocabulary is one of the areas positively influenced after a SA, it is plausible to think that this improvement in L2 vocabulary (if any) could be reflected on the participants' reading skills.

A growing number of studies have examined the impact of SA on L2 lexical knowledge (Ife, Vives-Boix, & Meara, 2000; Foster, 2009; Pérez-Vidal & Barquin 2014; Zaytseva 2016). As an illustration, Barquin (2012) analysed the written vocabulary development of a group of 30 Catalan/Spanish bilinguals, learners of English as an L2 first AH and, then, abroad. She concluded that the period abroad was significantly favourable for productive vocabulary development. Another relevant study on SA and vocabulary is that by Briggs (2015), in which

the author attempted to explore if out-of-class activities affected gains in receptive and productive vocabulary. Participants in her study (n= 241) had different first languages and studied English in the UK for different periods of time (short = 6-10 weeks, medium = 11-15 weeks, long = 16-20 weeks). Briggs concluded that SA led to gains in vocabulary breadth although she found that these gains were not related to place or out-of-class contact. The author also claimed that length of stay was an important predictor of language gains: “the longer a learner spends in the study abroad context, the higher their gains” (2015, p. 137) with participants staying for 6-10 weeks improving their receptive vocabulary significantly but failing to show gains regarding productive vocabulary.

Another study that examined the impact of a SA experience on vocabulary is Tracy-Ventura (2017), who explored the lexical sophistication of a group of 27 L1-English learners of Spanish in Spain and Mexico. The author found that participants improved significantly their knowledge of low frequency words after their 9-month-long SA experience. Moreover, statistically significant changes were also found with regards to participants’ actual use of these words indicating that participants not only learnt low frequency words, but they also used them more. Altogether, this study provides positive evidence of SA and lexical knowledge. Noticeably, it can be stated that SA is beneficial for vocabulary development as there are many different examples which prove it. Nonetheless, as in the case of reading, none of them investigates the vocabulary development of teenagers as a result of a short overseas experience. Moreover, the few studies which have examined the effects of a short SA experience on L2 vocabulary (Llanes, 2012; Serrano, Llanes, & Tragant, 2016) do not focus exclusively on vocabulary (they examine different L2 domains) and, hence, no study has included a relatively wide range of measures of L2 receptive and productive vocabulary, which would provide more robust results.

There is evidence that short (≤ 5 weeks) SA experiences have a positive impact on several L2 areas, such as oral skills (Llanes & Muñoz, 2009), pragmatic development (Reynolds-Case, 2013), listening comprehension (Cubillos, Chieffo, & Fan, 2008; Rodrigo, 2011), pronunciation (Llanes, Mora, & Serrano, 2016), and writing skills (Evans & Fisher, 2005). However, there is no single study, to the authors’ knowledge, that looks at the impact that such a short SA experience has on L2 vocabulary, and there is only one that includes reading

development (Evans & Fisher, 2005), although learning vocabulary is usually among the short-SA participants' goals (Allen, 2010) and reading is one of the most important skills (Rasinski, 2003). There are reasons to think that both skills would improve after a SA experience. One of such reasons is the intensive exposure that SA participants experience while overseas, and previous research has found that intensive experiences are conducive to L2 gains (Muñoz, 2012). Another reason for potential gains in vocabulary is the ample opportunities for practise, and practise has been found to be a key factor when improving the L2 (DeKeyser, 2007). However, the impact that the SA context has on L2 reading development is especially interesting because this skill is hardly ever (extensively) practised while abroad, and simply being in the target country may not guarantee that students improve on this skill.

It is plausible to think that SA participants have chances of improving their L2 vocabulary repertoire because, apart from the amount of exposure and practise that characterize the SA context, participants use the L2 for real purposes, and this may result in an improvement in vocabulary. It is also reasonable to think that if there is an improvement in vocabulary, this improvement can positively affect reading skills, at least as far as reading fluency and comprehension are concerned. However, whether three weeks is enough for gains in L2 reading and vocabulary to occur is unknown. Previous studies examining the impact of a specific treatment on L2 vocabulary development (not necessarily in a SA context) have found gains in as short a period of time as three to six days (Beck & McKeown, 2007), two weeks (Kaivanpanah & Rahimi, 2017) or one or two semesters (Ife, Vives, Boix, & Meara 2000). Hence, it is likely that there is improvement in vocabulary after three weeks overseas. Nonetheless, the dearth of research in the area makes it difficult to draw robust conclusions on whether short SA experiences are positive for participants' L2 reading and vocabulary development.

Thus, in order to fill these existing gaps in the literature, the current study addresses the following questions:

1: Does a 3-week SA experience have a positive impact on L2 reading development in terms of comprehension and fluency?

2: Does a 3-week SA experience have a positive impact on L2 receptive vocabulary development (measured through the UVLT) and productive vocabulary development (measured through lexical fluency, lexical accuracy, lexical density and lexical sophistication)?

3: Are gains in L2 reading (in terms of comprehension and fluency) related to initial L2 vocabulary knowledge and proficiency level?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

Fifty-two teenagers (n= 25 males, n= 27 females), learners of English as an L2 participated in the present study. Their ages ranged between 12 and 17 years old (M= 15,35) and all came from different regions of Spain but one, who came from Andorra. All the participants started learning English at primary school and their levels by the time they started the SA experience ranged from A2 to B2 (A2 n= 31, B1 n= 17 and B2 n= 4). The students enrolled in a 3-week summer programme in Ireland which fostered communication in English. All the participants lived with a host family and attended classes Monday through Friday for 4 hours per day during the mornings. The teachers were all English native and the activities carried out in the classrooms were very dynamic and consisted of playing games, performing some debates, and completing some worksheets, among others. When classes finished, students were given one hour to have lunch and then they spent two more hours at the school carrying out different activities with the teachers: Irish workshops, Irish sports, arts and crafts, or visiting some tourist places. After the afternoon activities students spent the evenings with their host families, with whom they performed different activities.

3.2. Instruments

The Oxford Quick Placement Test (OPT) was used to examine participants' overall L2 proficiency. This test has been widely used by researchers (Llanes et al., 2016) and it has proved to be a reliable instrument to examine L2 proficiency. The test contains two sections, but only the "Use of English" one was used during the data collection. This part consisted of 60 multiple choice items with three or four possible answers, and one point was given per correct item.

Two texts of different proficiency levels were chosen to measure participants' reading fluency and comprehension. Following Kraut (2017), both texts were taken from the Reading Explorer, a book that contains texts of different lengths and diverse topics. The texts are followed by some comprehension questions. To make sure that the texts targeted different L2 levels and that they were suitable for the participants, their readability index was also calculated. The first was taken from the Reading Explorer 2, which contains texts of an A2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The readability test showed a 72.3 in Flesh reading ease, which means that the difficulty of the text was equivalent to texts generally used during the first year of secondary education. The second text was taken from the Reading Explorer 3, which contains texts of a B1 CEFR level. This B1 text obtained a 52.8 in Flesh reading ease, indicating that the difficulty of the text was similar to text read during the last years of secondary education and the A levels. Each text was followed by a set of multiple choice questions. Although most of the questions came from the Reading Explorer book, some were slightly changed and some others were added by the authors (the added questions were previously piloted). After determining the participants' initial proficiency level, it was decided that only the data of the A2 text would be considered for the present study given that previous research shows that one requirement to measure reading rates is text suitability: the text has to be well within the students' capability (Carver, 1990; Huffman, 2014).

Two instruments were used to gauge participants' lexical knowledge: the Updated Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT) (Webb, Sasao, & Balance, 2017) and a writing task. The Updated VLT measures receptive vocabulary and has been widely used in the research of L2 lexical knowledge (Briggs, 2015). This test is divided into five levels (K1, K2, K3, K4 and K5) and words are provided in sets of six words with three possible definitions; participants have to match the items with their proper definition (with the three remaining words as distractors). There are 30 definitions per level and five levels in total, which amounts to 150 definitions. The writing task measured productive vocabulary. Since researchers who have analysed vocabulary claim that much data can be gathered from a written text (Zaytseva, 2016; Tracy-Ventura, 2017) it was believed that this task would be a reliable tool to gather data for lexical knowledge and lexical error analysis. Participants were allotted fifteen minutes to write a text entitled "My life: past, present and future expectations" (Llanes &

Serrano, 2014) and no specific word limit was required. It must be highlighted that productive vocabulary was measured through a written test, but writing skills development (i.e. grammar, complexity or syntax) was not the focus of the present study.

In order to triangulate the data, the researcher who conducted the pre- and post- tests also spent some time observing the participants in their classes, afternoon activities, weekends and with their families. Moreover, the researcher also interviewed, informally, some of the teachers and students in order to have more information on the overall learning experience.

3.3. Procedure

This study has a pre- and post-test design. The tests were exactly the same for the pre- and post-test. However, participants were not informed about the focus of the research and that there would be a post-test so that this could not affect the results. Both tests were administered in Ireland: the pre-test was administered on the third day into the SA programme, and the post-test two days before the students' departure to Spain. Thus, despite the sojourn lasted 3 weeks, the time elapsed between the pre- and post-test was 15 days. The procedure was the same at both times, the only difference was that in the pre-test students were asked to fill out a personal information sheet before administering the tests. First, the two texts were administered. A chronometer was projected on the front screen of a digital board so that everyone could see it. Then, the participants were given a text to read and, once they finished, they were asked to look at the chronometer and write down the time they had taken to read it (minutes and seconds). Participants were informed that they could only read the text once, that they would not have the text when answering the comprehension questions, and that they were asked to read the text at their normal speed. In order to counterbalance any task-effects, half of the participants started reading the A2 text and the other half the B1 text (the students that started reading the A2 text in the pre-test also did so in the post-test, and the same was true for the B1 text). Afterwards, the texts were collected and the comprehension questions sheet was administered. The students were not given any specific time to answer the questions and the researchers waited until all of them had finished to start with the next exercise, the written essay. Participants were asked to write a composition under the title “My life: past, present and future expectations” and they were allotted a total of 15 minutes. After the writing task, the students were asked to fulfil the Updated VLT, for which they were

given a maximum of 20 minutes. Finally, participants were administered the OPT and they were given 30 minutes. Once they had finished the OPT, the data collection was completed and students were given permission to leave the room. The whole data collection procedure took approximately 90 minutes.

3.4. Measures

Reading fluency was measured through words per minute (WPM). The following formula was used to compute WPM: 504 (which is the number of words the text had) \times 60 seconds / total time in seconds students took to read the text. Concerning reading comprehension, the number of correct answers out of 13 was used to measure text comprehension.

As for receptive vocabulary, the updated VLT provided information about the participants' lexical knowledge in terms of receptive vocabulary knowledge. The test included 150 target words, so the raw score out of 150 was calculated. With regards to productive vocabulary, the measures in the present study were adopted following Zaytseva (2016). The Computerized Language Analysis (CLAN) software was used to measure lexical fluency and accuracy. The programme provided the total number of types, tokens and lexical errors the students had made in the texts and with this information the participants' lexical fluency and accuracy were calculated. Lexical fluency was measured through tokens (i.e. total number of words used to write the text) and lexical accuracy was measured by counting the amount of lexical errors in the text and dividing them by the total number of tokens. In order to calculate the participants' lexical density and sophistication the online tool VocabProfile was used. Lexical density consisted of the percentage of content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs) in the text. To measure lexical sophistication the number of "rare" words that participants used within the text (words from the 6000 frequency level or above) was used to see whether they used words from a higher frequency level (i.e. more sophisticated) in the post-test writings. Finally, the CEFR level of the participants was calculated by the total number of points they obtained from the OPT (see Table 1 for a summary of the measures used).

Higher values in the post-test were expected for all the measures except for lexical accuracy, since lower values in this measure would mean that participants had made fewer lexical errors in their post-writings. In terms of lexical sophistication, a lower percentage of words from the

1000 frequency level would also indicate that participants' texts were more sophisticated by the time they left the host-country.

Table 1: Summary of measures

Domain	Measure-Test	Formula
General proficiency	OPT	Raw score /60
Reading fluency	WPM - reading text	$504 \times 60 / \text{Total seconds taken to read the text}$
Reading comprehension	Comprehension - reading text	Raw scores /13
Receptive vocabulary	VLT	Raw scores /150
Productive vocabulary	Lexical fluency - written essay	Total number of tokens
	Lexical accuracy - written essay	Number of lexical errors/tokens
	Lexical density - written essay	Number of content words/tokens
	Lexical sophistication - written essay	Comparison of the percentages from words of different frequency levels

4. Results

When checking the normality of the data, most of the measures violated the assumption of normality. Therefore, non-parametrical tests were run to answer the first and second research questions. However, before running any tests, the data were coded independently by the first author of the present study and by another expert to ensure inter-rater reliability. The two codings were compared and they reached an agreement of 92.31%. Intra-rater reliability was also calculated, and the level of agreement was exactly the same (92.31%). Inter- and intra-rater reliability were only calculated for lexical errors given that it was the only measure that could vary depending on the rater.

The first research question asked whether a 3-week SA experience had a positive impact on L2 reading development in terms of comprehension and fluency. In order to answer this question, a Wilcoxon signed-rank test was run to observe if there were significant differences between the scores in the pre-test and those in the post-test. As shown in Table 2 below, participants improved on both measures of reading (WPM and comprehension) from the pre- to the post-test, and the Wilcoxon test indicated that improvement was statistically significant for both: WPM ($Z = -3.201, p < .001$), and comprehension ($Z = -2.902, p < .004$). The effect sizes for WPM and Comprehension were $d = 0.492, d = 0.55$, respectively, which indicate that this difference was medium (Cohen, 1988).

Table 2: Descriptive statistics

Measure	Pre-test		Post-test	
	M	SD	M	SD
OPT	29.25	6.90	30.65	7.05
WPM	118.65	33.29	134.60	32.73
Comprehension	6.73	1.87	7.54	1.83
VLT raw score	102.19	28.06	112.56	26.66
Lexical fluency	127.08	39.13	128.02	40.268
Lexical accuracy	.037	.024	.013	.014
Lexical density	.45	.043	.45	.045
1000 Frequency Level	90.69	4.25	91.71	3.66
>5000 Frequency Level	2.45	1.34	1.95	.75

The second research question addressed whether a 3-week SA experience had a positive impact on L2 lexical knowledge. Table 2 shows that participants improved their receptive vocabulary (VLT) and two measures of productive vocabulary (lexical fluency and accuracy). However, there was no improvement regarding lexical density and lexical sophistication. Again, a Wilcoxon signed-rank test was employed to see if these pre- to post-test differences were significant and it was found that their receptive vocabulary significantly improved from

the pre- to post-test ($Z = -5.132$, $p < .000$), but only one measure of productive vocabulary improved significantly, namely lexical accuracy ($Z = -5.689$, $p < .000$). Therefore, the data show that participants learnt new words and made significantly fewer lexical errors in their post-test essays. However, although there seems to be a slight tendency for learners to produce longer essays, there was no significant difference in terms of lexical fluency between the essays before and after the stay. The effect sizes indicated that the difference for the two measures that changed significantly was medium for receptive vocabulary ($d = 0.365$) and large for lexical accuracy ($d = 1.22$).

The last research question asked whether gains in reading (both in terms of comprehension and fluency) were related to initial L2 proficiency and initial vocabulary knowledge. In order to answer this question, bivariate correlations were run between initial L2 level (OPT pre-test scores), initial L2 vocabulary level (pre-test raw scores of VLT) and gains in reading comprehension and fluency (to calculate the gains in comprehension and fluency, the score in these measures in the post-test was subtracted from the score in these measures in the pre-test). No significant correlations were found between any of the independent variables and gains in reading.

5. Discussion

The aim of this study was to document the impact of a 3-week SA experience on adolescents' L2 reading and vocabulary development as well as to examine to what extent gains in reading and vocabulary (if any) were related to L2 initial proficiency level and initial lexical knowledge. It was found that participants improved the two measures of L2 reading significantly, namely fluency and comprehension. Hence, the answer to our first research question is affirmative. Although the participants did not explicitly engage (much) in reading activities, they were massively exposed to English. This exposure, although not being through reading explicitly, may have been helpful for the students' reading development. As Gautier and Chevrot (2015) claimed, "Learning in contexts where the target language is used is considered particularly beneficial because such an environment should provide access to language that is ample in quantity and diverse in quality" (p. 169). Therefore, this intensive immersion in the L2 may have fostered the improvement of the participants' L2 reading skills (Muñoz, 2012).

These results are in line with Kraut (2017), who found that an 8-week-long SA experience had a positive impact on L2 reading skills. However, the present study shows that even shorter SA programmes (3 weeks) impact positively L2 reading development in terms of comprehension and fluency. The positive outcomes found in the present study could also be explained because of the participants' proficiency level. Previous studies show that participants with an advanced proficiency level do not progress as much as participants with a lower proficiency level, suggesting that the lower the participants' initial proficiency level, the more chances they have to improve it (Juan-Garau, 2014). Since most of the participants in the present study had an A2 or a B1 proficiency level, there was plenty of room for improvement and the measures used may have captured these gains. Another possible explanation to the positive outcomes in terms of reading is the intensity of instruction and/or the nature of SA experiences, which is a combination of formal in-class learning with informal out-of-class learning (afternoon activities and interaction with the members of the family).

The second research question asked whether a 3-week SA experience had a positive impact on L2 receptive and productive vocabulary. It was found that participants improved their receptive vocabulary significantly from the pre- to the post-test, and that they improved significantly one out of the four productive vocabulary measures, namely lexical accuracy. Therefore, results suggest that short SA experiences are positive in terms of learning new words and reducing lexical errors, but results also suggest that three weeks are not enough for participants to improve their lexical fluency, density and sophistication significantly. Hence, findings in the present study suggest that 3-week-long sojourns are not enough for learners to write significantly longer, denser and more sophisticated essays. All in all, the answer to the second research questions is affirmative in terms of receptive vocabulary, but its effects on productive vocabulary are not so promising. The reason for finding significant improvement in some vocabulary measures (receptive vocabulary and lexical accuracy) and not in others (lexical fluency, density and sophistication) might be the short time elapsed between the pre- and the post-test. It is possible that measures such as receptive vocabulary and lexical accuracy were more susceptible to gauging gains than other measures such as lexical density or sophistication, which might need more time to develop (in line with Briggs, 2015). With regards to receptive vocabulary, the results in the present study support Kraut (2017), who

found similar results with her participants after an 8-week sojourn. In fact, a closer look to the VLT revealed that some participants learnt words such as ‘sheet’, ‘alley’ or ‘forbid’, which are likely to be countered in a SA experience. Likewise, the lexical accuracy of the participants was also examined more closely. Table 3 includes excerpts of productions from the same participants in the pre and the post-test, where examples of lexical accuracy development can be clearly appreciated. Some of the lexical accuracy improvements SA students made involve a) appropriate distinction between homophones (i.e. leave/live), b) reduction of made-up words (*tought/play), and c) more accurate lexical choice (travel/trip).

Table 3: Examples of lexical accuracy from the same students pre- to post-test

Student	Pre-test	Post-test
Student A	I leave in Palma. Before I leaved in Madrid.	I live in Palma. Before I lived in Madrid.
Student B	I tought the flut.	I play the flute.
Student C	I am the unic member of my family who...	I am the only member of my family who...
Student D	I am going to curse 3 rd of ESO.	I am going to do 3 rd of ESO.
Student E	I was waiting for this travel .	I loved this trip .

Other previous studies that have found gains in some of the productive vocabulary measures analysed in the present study are those by Pérez-Vidal and Barquin (2012) and Zaytseva (2016). These studies provide evidence that measures such as lexical fluency or density can be improved during a SA experience. Notwithstanding, there are three important differences between these studies and the present: the duration of the programmes, the participants’ age and their initial proficiency level. Participants in these studies engaged in a 3-month SA experience and they were university students with a higher initial L2 level. Previous research

in the field of vocabulary has found that high gainers on comprehension made significantly larger gains in vocabulary (Shany & Biemiller, 2010). Hence, it is plausible that for productive vocabulary learning, a higher initial L2 level could have had a more positive impact. Given that reading and vocabulary are two different skills and the nature of the tests that were administered was also different, it is possible that participants with a lower L2 level improved reading comprehension and fluency more than vocabulary, whereas participants with a higher L2 level improved more their vocabulary knowledge. A tentative explanation for this latter hypothesis is that participants with a higher L2 level could possibly allocate their attention to other aspects of the L2 such as vocabulary. Finally, in terms of lexical sophistication, findings in previous studies seem to suggest that long periods abroad are needed in order for participants to show significant changes with regard to the measure. Zaytseva (2016), for example, found no significant difference for the size of gains in lexical sophistication after participants in her study had been abroad for three months. However, Tracy-Ventura (2017) found that after nine months abroad not only did her participants improve their knowledge of low frequency words, but they also started using these words more in their written and oral discourses. These results provide further evidence that measures such as lexical sophistication need more time to develop than others such as lexical accuracy.

The third research question enquired whether L2 reading gains were related to initial proficiency level and initial lexical knowledge, and no significant correlation was found between these variables. Hence, the present study failed to find a direct relationship between initial vocabulary knowledge and proficiency level, and gains in reading, which suggests that all participants held the same chances to improve their reading skills regardless of their initial vocabulary knowledge and proficiency level. This finding does not support Nation (1993) and Li and Kirby's (2014) findings, who found a relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading skills which implied that being proficient in one of the skills was the factor that helped the most when attempting to improve the other. The present study suggests that SA adolescents improve their reading comprehension and fluency regardless of their initial L2 grammar or vocabulary knowledge. This finding indicates that a short SA is positive for teenagers' reading skills and not only for those who have a specific proficiency level or vocabulary knowledge. Nonetheless, it must be highlighted that the proficiency level of participants in the present study ranged mostly from A2 to B1 and that different results could

have emerged if participants had a more advanced level. Previous research has been a bit contradictory regarding the precise level that participants in SA need to hold before starting their stays (the threshold level). Some scholars such as Llanes and Muñoz (2009) and Juan-Garau (2014) state that ‘the lower, the better’. These researchers argue that participants with lower L2 skills have more room to learn and, hence, their improvement is easier to be detected. On the other hand, other authors such as DeKeyser (2007) and George (2014) claim that participants should possess a good command on the L2 before starting their sojourn in order to make the most of the SA. The present study is positioned in a central ground between these two groups of researchers since it shows that the initial vocabulary knowledge and the proficiency level of the participants are not related to gains in reading skills and that, therefore, the threshold level is not a variable that has a strong effect on L2 reading development. It is possible that factors such as motivation to learn, willingness to enhance in the sojourn, living with a host family, the type of programme or the personality of the participants among others are the constituents which have helped participants in the present study to improve their reading comprehension and fluency (Saito et al., 2018).

6. Conclusion

No previous studies exist on the L2 reading and vocabulary development of a group of teenagers engaged in a short SA experience. It was found that participants improved their L2 reading comprehension and fluency significantly, showing greater understanding of texts and a faster reading rate after the 3-week sojourn. Moreover, the results in the present study show that participants significantly improved their receptive vocabulary knowledge, which indicates that they learnt a significant number of new words during their time abroad, and their lexical accuracy, which indicates that 3-week-long sojourns help learners use L2 words in a more accurate way. No significant differences were found concerning the remaining three productive measures examined (lexical fluency, lexical sophistication and lexical density), suggesting that 3-week SA programmes are not enough for students to write longer, denser and more sophisticated texts. Although the findings of the present study suggest that some measures of productive vocabulary (fluency, density and sophistication) need more time to develop, results also suggest that short SA programmes can have a positive feedback on L2 reading and vocabulary development.

However, this investigation has some limitations. One of the limitations is that it does not include a control group learning the L2 at home (AH). Although the inclusion of control groups has been questioned in the SA literature because of the large differences between the participants engaging in an overseas experience and those remaining AH, it would be interesting that further research included a comparison group AH engaged in a course focused on reading. This way, the effects of exposure to the L2 could be compared to the effects of reading practise and more robust conclusions could be drawn. Another limitation is the lack of more precise information on the amount of input and practise experienced. In other words, it would be interesting to know the amount of time participants spent speaking, reading or writing in English and see if amount of time spent practicing the L2 explained gains in reading or vocabulary. Finally, although the researchers made an effort to avoid task-repetition effects (the inclusion of two reading tests, not informing the participants that there would be a post-test, and administering the reading texts at the very beginning of the data collection), it is still possible that using the same instruments in the pre- and post-test might have influenced the results. Despite these limitations, the present study is a unique contribution to the field of SA as it sheds light on the impact that a 3-week SA experience has on the L2 reading and vocabulary development of a group of adolescents.

Given that the present study shows that a 3-week SA experience has a positive impact on the L2 reading development and on some measures of vocabulary development, short SA programmes should be promoted among teenagers. Moreover, considering that teenagers who undertake summer SA experiences of this type usually do so via private institutions, these SA experiences should be affordable to teenagers so that they could participate and boost their L2 skills.

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4.3. Paper three: Investigating the impact of a semester-long study abroad programme on L2 reading and vocabulary development

This study investigates the impact that a semester-long study abroad (SA) programme has on the L2 reading and L2 vocabulary development of a group of Catalan/Spanish bilinguals learning English as an L2 (n= 30). Another objective is to determine whether gains in participants' vocabulary and reading (if any) are related to their initial L2 proficiency and L2 vocabulary level. Participants were administered 1) a reading text (from which fluency and comprehension were measured), 2) the Updated Vocabulary Levels Test, 3) a written essay, 4) a placement test and 5) an online questionnaire before and after their SA experiences. The results suggest that the sojourn was positive for participants' reading comprehension, receptive vocabulary and lexical accuracy, but not for reading fluency, lexical fluency, lexical density and lexical sophistication. It was also found that the students' initial L2 vocabulary and proficiency level were related to gains in receptive vocabulary and reading comprehension.

Keywords: Study abroad, L2 reading, L2 vocabulary, L2 development, learning context

1 Introduction

It is widely believed that living in a country where a second or foreign language (L2) is spoken will help the learner acquire a higher proficiency level in a relatively short time (Sanz 2014). Probably for this reason, among others, institutions from different countries have been promoting Study Abroad (SA) programmes by highlighting the many positive outcomes that these experiences may provide academically, personally and professionally.

The belief that spending some time abroad may boost students' L2 proficiency, together with institutions encouraging these visits, are the main reasons that have made SA become a reality for many students. Recently, there has been a massive increase in the number of students who participate in SA experiences: only through the ERASMUS programme in Europe, about 272,000 students travelled to a foreign country between 2013 and 2014, and more than 400,000 did so in 2017 (European Commission, 2018). This increase has created a growing interest in the impact that SA experiences have on L2 learning (Borràs and Llanes 2019).

Nonetheless, although interest in the field has grown, there are still different gaps in the literature, and the so-called benefits of these stays are rather unknown. For instance, it is not clear if SA promotes L2 aptitudes such as reading. Kinginger (2009: 61) stated that

competence in this skill “is remarkably under-represented in the applied linguistics literature related to study abroad”. Therefore, although there has been an increase in the body of SA research, there are still some areas, such as L2 reading, which need further research.

Another domain which is important to L2 learning due to its connection to all language skills is L2 vocabulary. Researchers have established that possessing an ample knowledge of vocabulary is needed in order to communicate in an L2 (Milton 2009). This is especially true when it comes to reading, “being lack of lexical knowledge a major obstacle for successful comprehension even for advanced learners” (Zaytseva 2016: 45). Milton (2009) suggested that in order to detect an improvement in students’ vocabulary and their autonomy when using an L2, learners need to be exposed to real input and that, for this reason, SA should provide the perfect environment for L2 development. Accordingly, investigating the impact that SA experiences have on L2 reading and vocabulary is crucial in order to determine whether participation in SA programmes fosters the development of these two domains.

To this aim, the present study attempts to shed some light on the impact that a SA experience has on L2 reading in terms of comprehension and fluency, and L2 receptive and productive vocabulary. Also, this study seeks to determine whether initial L2 vocabulary knowledge and initial L2 proficiency level are related to gains in L2 reading and L2 vocabulary (if any).

2 Literature review

For some years, researchers have provided evidence that learning context plays a major role when learning an L2 (Kinginger 2009). Previous research establishes that the SA one is one of the most effective learning contexts when it comes to L2 development because of the different opportunities that it renders to its participants, both in quantity and in quality (Sanz 2014). According to many scholars, living and studying a country where the L2 is spoken enables access to many opportunities to practise, and it is believed that this constant availability to L2 contact will boost learners’ L2 proficiency (Briggs 2015; Zaytseva et al. 2018). As Milton (2009: 231) claimed, SA “should provide ample exposure to the foreign language, as everyone will speak the foreign language, and all interactions will be carried out in it”. Nonetheless, research in the SA field has tended to focus on some areas such as oral

fluency and pragmatics, while some others have been left under-researched. Hence, it is uncertain whether a study visit abroad will positively influence all the areas of language (Borràs and Llanes 2019).

2.1 SA and reading

Reading (in an L2) is one of the least investigated areas in the SA literature (Kinging 2009), with only a few studies examining the effects that spending some time abroad have on the reading skill. This lack of research may be due to reading being something that many people do not pay particular attention to (Grabe 2009). However, it is believed that being a good reader is key to be successful in today's society, and an essential requirement for academic success (Li and Kirby 2014). Given that nowadays much information is available in English, being a good reader in English (L2) is essential for academic success and for the ability to access general information. Since the SA context is believed to be one of the most effective contexts to boost one's L2, this creates a need for more studies to investigate whether the SA context will boost the development of L2 reading. Researchers criticise that, generally, learners are not sufficiently exposed to written texts and that, for this reason, they lack valuable input which would help them to practise and develop their reading skills (Grabe and Soller 2002; Koda 2005). When living in a community where the L2 is the official language, sojourners are exposed to written texts, not only at university but also in their daily activities such as going to a restaurant, shopping, and reading the newspaper. Accordingly, it seems logical to believe that this exposure to L2 texts may cause some development on learners' reading skills. Moreover, constant exposure to the L2, albeit not in written form, may also result in improved L2 reading ability. However, as Iwasaki (2007) and Milton (2009) claimed, not all skills develop in the same way and it is possible that while students improve their oral skills when abroad, the same may not hold true for reading.

Some examples of the few studies which have investigated the impact of SA on L2 reading are those by Lapkin et al. (1995), Dewey (2004), Li (2014) and Kraut (2017). Lapkin et al.'s (1995) is one of the first multidimensional studies that were performed in the SA field. In their study, the authors examined the development of speaking, writing, listening and reading of a group of 119 English L1 adolescents, learners of French as an L2, who stayed in Quebec for three months. In terms of reading, they examined participants' comprehension and

perceptions towards their improvement and found that after three months in Quebec, participants improved their reading comprehension significantly, and they also perceived that, as a result of the immersion, they had full control of their reading skills. Some years later, Dewey (2004) studied the L2 reading skills of a group of North-American undergraduates learning Japanese as an L2. He compared how participants in two learning contexts (immersion at home (IM), n= 15, and SA, n= 15) perceived development of their reading skills. He concluded that those who spent 11 weeks in Japan felt significantly more confident reading in Japanese than those in the IM program. However, it is unknown whether participants improved their reading skills because this study is mostly based on self-reported data.

Another study that investigated the effects of SA on L2 reading is that by Li (2014). The author examined six groups of North-American university students (n= 73), learning Chinese as an L2. Li's (2014) groups consisted of a beginner, intermediate and advanced group for both AH and SA. The author aimed at comparing the SA context to the AH one, and at establishing how proficiency level can impact the reading development of the students. Results in the study showed that the SA groups were superior to those AH in terms of L2 reading comprehension and strategy use, regardless of participants' proficiency level. Nonetheless, Li asserted that those students who had an intermediate L2 level at the outset of the stay were the ones who benefitted the most from the experience.

Finally, one of the most recent studies on the topic is that by Kraut (2017). The author provided data of both reading development and participants' perceptions of a group of L1 Arabic and Chinese, students of English, who studied abroad in the USA for eight weeks. She found significant changes in participants' reading fluency, willingness to read out of curiosity and perceived self-efficacy. Therefore, she concluded that SA provided positive outcomes to reading skills because it helped participants to read faster as well as to have positive feelings towards reading. Nonetheless, it must be emphasized that participants in Kraut (2017) were engaged in an intensive English programme, which requested them to take part in English lessons from 18 to 22 hours per week. Therefore, her participants were part of a SA programme which provided much exposure to the L2 both in and outside the class, and this may have affected the results in her study.

On the whole, previous research suggests that the SA context may provide the necessary amount of exposure to the L2 that learners need to improve their reading skills or to, at least, feel more confident when reading. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, reading is still a much under-researched area within the SA field, and more studies are needed to determine whether spending some time abroad has a positive impact on the skill. As an illustration, Kraut (2017) is the only study which examines the development of two areas of reading proficiency quantitatively (comprehension and fluency) after a SA experience. Moreover, studies which examine the impact that initial levels of vocabulary and proficiency have on L2 reading development after a stay abroad are inexistent, which makes it even more necessary to conduct research on this area.

2.2 SA and vocabulary

Another aspect of language which is important when attempting to become proficient in an L2 is vocabulary, in that it takes much vocabulary to use a language well (Laufer and Goldstein 2004; Nation 2001). This is particularly true when it comes to reading in the L2 because low vocabulary knowledge leads to poor comprehension (Zaytseva 2016). In fact, one of the most significant differences between reading in the first language (L1) or the L2 is the limited knowledge of vocabulary that readers have on their L2 (McClean and Rouault 2017). As Grabe (2009) pointed out, a shared problem between L2 students is their lack of L2 proficiency, which makes reading L2 texts too difficult, especially when learners have poor control of the L2 vocabulary. Hence, it seems reasonable to speculate that the higher the students' L2 vocabulary knowledge, the better they will read.

L2 vocabulary development as a result of a SA experience has been previously studied with varying results (Barquin 2012; Briggs 2015; Ife et al. 2000; Zaytseva 2016). Generally, SA research seems to prove that spending some time in the target country will lead to improvement in receptive vocabulary. However, results have been inconclusive about productive vocabulary, with some studies finding gains in some measures and some others claiming that SA does not lead to gains in the area. One example of a study which provided positive results for vocabulary is that by Ife et al. (2000). The authors examined the development of the vocabulary breadth and depth of 36 British undergraduates studying Spanish abroad for one (n= 25) and two semesters (n= 11). Findings in their study show that

SA was significantly positive for both the three-word association and translation tasks. Some years later, Briggs (2015) examined the L2 receptive and productive vocabulary development of a group of English learners (n= 241) who performed a stay in the UK for different periods of time (6-10 weeks, 11-15 weeks, 16-20 weeks). She also explored whether the activities learners performed outside of class affected their vocabulary knowledge and whether the amount of time they spent abroad affected their L2 development. Briggs concluded that SA programmes help participants to improve their L2 receptive vocabulary, suggesting that the context helps participants to learn new words, regardless of the length of stay in the country. However, she asserted that Length of stay was of paramount importance regarding productive vocabulary because shorter stays abroad did not lead participants to develop L2 productive vocabulary. Lastly, she found no correlation between gains in vocabulary and the out-of-class-activities learners performed during the stay.

An example of a study which focused exclusively on productive vocabulary is that by Zaytseva (2016), who analysed a group of 30 Catalan/Spanish bilinguals, learners of English as an L2. She compared her participants' productive vocabulary development after six months of formal instruction AH and after a three months SA experience. She did so through an argumentative essay which was analysed in terms of lexical fluency, density, diversity, accuracy and sophistication. Although her findings suggest that the SA context is particularly beneficial for most of the measures she examined (fluency, density, diversity and accuracy), gains in lexical sophistication did not occur in any of the contexts. Hence, although Zaytseva's study generally yields positive results, it also implies that some productive measures may need more time to develop (as in Briggs 2015). Altogether, research seems to conclude that being immersed in the target country is beneficial for the L2 lexicon, especially in terms of receptive vocabulary. However, research on L2 vocabulary shows that not all measures develop at the same pace, and SA does not seem to play the same role in all areas of vocabulary. Therefore, despite the apparent positive effect of SA experiences on some areas of vocabulary, the impact that these stays have on L2 lexical knowledge is still unclear, and it needs to be examined more closely.

3 Method:

3.1 Research questions

Given the lack of research on the impact that a SA experience has on L2 reading and the inconclusive findings regarding vocabulary, the present study attempts to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Do L2 reading comprehension and fluency improve significantly as a result of a semester-long SA experience?

RQ2: Do L2 receptive and productive vocabulary improve significantly as a result of a semester-long SA experience?

RQ3: Are initial vocabulary knowledge and initial proficiency level related to gains in L2 reading and L2 vocabulary (if any)?

3.2 Participants

Participants in the present study were 30 Catalan/Spanish bilinguals (n= 25 females, n= 5 males), learners of English as an L2, with ages ranging from 19 to 23 (M= 19.67). Participants were either studying the degree of Translation and Interpreting or Primary Education at two different universities in Catalonia. Although in the questionnaire all participants declared that they started studying English in primary school, at the outset of the study they had different proficiency levels (n= 1 A2, n= 19 B1, n= 10 B2). Engaging in a SA experience was a requirement for participants from both universities. The sojourns consisted of living in an English-speaking country (n= 25UK, n= 5USA) for a semester and attending some classes at a host university. During their sojourn, some participants lived in flats shared with other students (n= 12) and some other in residence halls (n= 10) or with a host family (n= 4). Four students did not provide information on accommodation.

3.3 Instruments

3.3.1 Receptive and productive vocabulary

Participants were asked to complete five tasks to measure different aspects of their English competence. The Updated Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT) (Webb et al. 2017) was used to

measure receptive vocabulary. In this test, learners were asked to match words with their corresponding definition. This test is divided into five frequency levels (1K, 2K, 3K, 4K and 5K), and there are 30 definitions per level, which amounts to 150 target items. These provide a more representative picture of learners' L2 vocabulary than other in-depth tests because they examine larger amounts of words (Read 2000). Previous versions of the VLT have been widely used within SLA research providing reliable results and consistent information about learners' estimate vocabulary growth (Briggs 2015). Therefore, it was believed that using the Updated version of the VLT would be a trustworthy method when examining participants' vocabulary knowledge.

A written task was employed to examine students' vocabulary production in order to gather a more varied and complex understanding of learners' lexical knowledge. This task required participants to write an essay about their past experiences, their present and their expectations for the future. It was entitled "My life: past, present and future expectations". Participants were given about 15 minutes to complete this task, and there was no specific length required, although they were asked to write as much as possible.

3.3.2 Reading comprehension & reading fluency

To examine participants' L2 reading comprehension and fluency, a text was selected from the Reading Explorer 3 book by National Geographic Learning (as in Kraut 2017). This book contains texts of a B1 level. Moreover, its readability index was calculated, and the text showed a 53.8 in Flesh reading ease. The reading of the passage was followed by 11 comprehension questions which were either taken from the same book or created by the authors (these added questions were piloted before the data collection). After the pre-test, data collection participants did not get any feedback on whether their answers were correct. Moreover, the order of the questions was altered for the post-test data collection in order to minimize possible task repetition effects.

3.3.3 General proficiency

The Oxford Quick Placement Test (OPT) was used to measure participants' L2 proficiency level. The test is normally divided into two sections (Listening and Use of English); however, only one (namely Use of English) was used in the present investigation. This consists of a

battery of 60 vocabulary and grammar multiple-choice questions, which provide information about participants' grammatical and lexical knowledge. Hence, it portrays the participants' proficiency level and at which point of the learning they are. This study used the OPT because it has been widely used in SLA research, and it has been confirmed as a reliable instrument to examine L2 proficiency (Llanes et al. 2016).

Finally, an online questionnaire was distributed in order to gather some demographic information about the participants, and also to infer some knowledge about their relationships with the English language, their perceptions towards the stays and their language learning, the main activities they carried out while abroad and the social networks they created. This questionnaire was inspired by the Language Contact Profile (LCP) (Freed et al. 2004) and the Language Engagement Questionnaire (LEQ) (Mitchell et al. 2017). Nonetheless, some questions were added in order to collect more specific information concerning L2 reading and L2 vocabulary since these areas are the focus of the present investigation. It should be noted here, however, that in this paper the information gathered from the questionnaire is only used in order to interpret the results.

3.4 Procedure

This experiment had a pre/post-test design, and the tests were the same at both data collection points. Nonetheless, participants were not informed that there would be a second testing time in order to prevent any task-repetition effects. The tests were timed, and the whole battery of tests lasted for about 90 minutes in total. The data collection took place in exam-like conditions at their universities during one of their lessons before and after their stays abroad. The order of the tests was the following: first, the reading test was administered. Participants were given the text which they had to read once and at a normal speed. They were informed that there would be some comprehension questions after the reading and that they would not have the texts when answering these questions and that, for this reason, they should read at a normal speed that allowed them to understand the text as much as possible. A timer was projected on a big screen so everyone could see it. Once they had finished reading the text, they were asked to write down the number of minutes and seconds they had taken to read the text in the space provided. Then, they raised their hands, and the texts were substituted by a set of multiple choice questions. Once all the participants finished answering

the last set of comprehension questions, they were asked to perform the written task. This was followed by the Updated VLT, for which participants were given a maximum of 20 minutes. Finally, participants had 30 minutes to complete the OPT.

3.5 Measures

Reading comprehension was measured through the number of correct answers out of the total number of comprehension questions. The B1 text was followed by 11 questions; hence, the maximum score that participants could get was 11. Concerning reading fluency, the following formula was used to compute the number of words participants read per minute (WPM): the total number of words the text had times sixty divided by the total number of seconds students took to read the text.

From the updated VLT, the raw score out of the 150 target words was calculated to measure participants' lexical knowledge in terms of receptive vocabulary. Therefore, the maximum score attainable was 150. As for productive vocabulary, four measures were analysed: lexical accuracy, lexical fluency, lexical density and lexical sophistication (following Zaytseva 2016). The writings were typed, and the Computerized Language Analysis (CLAN) software (MacWhinney 2000) and the VocabProfile online tool were used to examine the four measures. The CLAN software was used to calculate the total number of words the students used in their texts, through which lexical fluency was computed. Similarly, CLAN was also used to calculate lexical accuracy, which was evaluated dividing the total number of lexical errors by the total number of words. In order to decide what a lexical error was, we followed Zaytseva's (2016: 254) error classification scheme: a) L1 transfer: "literal translation or direct borrowings of L1 words; false friends", b) word choice: "wrong or inappropriate lexical choice; mistakes with commonly confused words", c) non-words: "non-existent words based on L1 forms or resulting from erroneous morphology", and d) fixed expressions: "problems with formulaic language and idioms" (see Appendix for some examples). For this measure inter-rater and intra-rater reliability were calculated using Cohen's Kappa coefficient analysis in order to determine the level of consistency among raters.

The VocabProfile online tool (VP-Compleat v 2.1.) was used to calculate participants' lexical density and sophistication because it provided many details about participants' vocabulary that were useful for the present study. Lexical density consisted of the percentage of content

words (nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs) in the text divided by the total number of words used. Lexical sophistication was analysed by comparing words from different frequency levels. More specifically, the objective was to see whether participants used more low or high frequency words after their SA experiences. Finally, the proficiency level of the participants was calculated by the total number of correct answers in the OPT test (see Table 1 for a summary of the measures).

Table 1. Summary of the measures

Domain	Measure-Test	Formula
General proficiency	OPT	Raw score /60
Reading fluency	WPM - reading text	$707 * 60 /$ Total seconds taken to read the text
Reading comprehension	Comprehension - reading text	Raw scores /11
Receptive vocabulary	Updated VLT	Raw scores /150
Productive vocabulary	Lexical fluency - written essay	Total number of tokens
	Lexical accuracy - written essay	Number of lexical errors/tokens
	Lexical density - written essay	Number of content words/tokens
	Lexical sophistication - written essay	Comparison of the percentages from words of different frequency levels

Higher values were expected for most measures in the post-test for an improvement to have taken place. Lower values were expected in terms of lexical accuracy because this would mean that participants became more lexically accurate (i.e. made fewer lexical mistakes in their writings after the SA experience). Concerning lexical sophistication, lower use of words from the 1000 frequency level and higher use of words from the 5000 frequency level and above would mean that participants had become more sophisticated in their word-choice.

4 Results

The data were coded by two English language experts, one of them a native speaker of English, and then compared to ensure inter-rater reliability. This was done exclusively for the lexical accuracy measure because it was the only measure that could vary depending on the rater. The inter-rater reliability was found to be $\kappa = 0.63$ (95% CI, -0.1092 to .1876), $p < .001$. Intra-rater reliability was also calculated and the level of agreement was $\kappa = 0.75$ (95% CI, -0.1548 to -0.0021), $p < .001$. Parametric tests were run to answer the research questions because the normality of the data was calculated, and most of the measures were normally distributed.

The first objective of the present investigation was to determine whether SA experiences are positive for L2 reading in terms of comprehension and fluency. In Table 2, the mean scores from the pre-test and the post-test together with standard deviations can be found. Table 3 shows the gains in each measure, also with the standard deviations. As it can be observed in Tables 2 and 3, participants showed an improvement in their reading comprehension, but not in reading fluency. A paired-sampled T-test was performed to establish whether the differences between the pre-test and the post-test were significant. The T-test results showed that participants had improved their reading comprehension significantly from pre-test to post-test ($t(27) = -3.786$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.93$). The effect size for reading comprehension indicated that this significant difference in reading comprehension between the pre- and post-test was large.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics

Measure	Pre-test				Post-test			
	M	SD	Min.	Max.	M	SD	Min.	Max.
OPT	37.11	4.04	29	47	40.29	3.84	32	48
WPM	161.25	38.29	76.13	267.17	160.05	34.03	109.20	238.65
Comprehension	7.93	1.58	4	11	9.25	1.21	5	11
VLT raw score	123.21	15.05	81	142	136.75	6.69	123	147
Lexical fluency	195.79	59.24	118	303	216.60	55.00	115	341
Lexical	.028	.015	.008	.062	.00835	.007	.00	.022

accuracy								
Lexical density	.46	.036	.41	.57	.45	.035	.40	.52
1000K	86.49	4.40	74.80	94.03	87.29	4.23	76.50	94.40
2000K	7.60	3.02	1.61	14.74	7.56	2.78	2.90	12.80
>5000K	1.74	.99	.75	3.90	1.45	.72	.70	1.45

Table 3. L2 gains

Measure	Gains	SD
OPT	3.18	3.36
WPM	-1.20	39.62
Comprehension	1.32	1.85
VLT raw score	13.53	12.99
Lexical fluency	17.28	51.59
Lexical accuracy	-.02	.01
Lexical density	-.00	.05
1000 Frequency Level	n.a.*	
>5000 Frequency Level	n.a.*	

* it does not apply

The second objective of the study was to investigate whether SA experiences are positive for L2 receptive and productive vocabulary. As it can be seen in Tables 2 and 3, positive changes seem to appear in participants' receptive vocabulary (VLT), lexical fluency and lexical accuracy, whereas no amelioration was found in the other two variables of productive vocabulary (lexical density and lexical sophistication). Again, a paired-sampled T-test was run and it was found that only two measures showed a significant improvement: receptive vocabulary ($t(27) = -5.513, p < .001, d = 1.16$) and lexical accuracy ($t(27) = 5.706, p < .000, d =$

1.68). The effect sizes for both receptive vocabulary and lexical accuracy were large. Although improvement in lexical fluency approached significance, it did not improve significantly from time 1 to time 2 ($t(27) = -1.773, p < .088$).

The last objective of the study was to determine whether initial vocabulary knowledge and initial proficiency level had an impact on L2 reading and L2 vocabulary gains. Bivariate correlations were run between initial vocabulary and proficiency level and gains in reading comprehension, receptive vocabulary, lexical accuracy and lexical fluency (since these were the measures that showed gains after the stay). Initial vocabulary knowledge correlated significantly and negatively with gains in receptive vocabulary ($n = 28, r = -.896^{**}, p < .000$), but it correlated significantly and positively with gains in reading comprehension ($n = 28, r = .434^*, p < .021$). Finally, a significant, negative correlation was found between initial L2 proficiency level and gains in reading comprehension ($n = 28, r = -.381^*, p < .045$). Hence, the correlations found indicated that participants with a lower vocabulary knowledge at the outset of the SA experience were the ones to make more progress in receptive vocabulary but less progress in reading comprehension, and that participants with a lower initial proficiency level showed more gains in reading comprehension.

5 Discussion

The three main purposes of this study were to determine whether a semester-long SA experience had a positive impact on L2 reading and L2 vocabulary development, and if gains in these two areas were related to participants' initial vocabulary and proficiency level. The first finding was that learners improved their reading comprehension significantly, whereas no gains were found in terms of reading fluency. Therefore, participants were able to understand texts significantly better after their SA experiences, but they did not read faster. Previous studies have also found gains in reading comprehension (Lapkin et al. 1995; Li 2014), suggesting that SA experiences tend to favour this area of language. It seems that spending a semester in the L2 country provided participants with enough exposure to improve their reading comprehension and, hence, to be able to understand L2 texts significantly better. It is also possible that the improvement in participants' L2 receptive vocabulary had an impact on their reading comprehension processes. The results indicate that the participants in the present study learnt many new words during their SA and this could have had an impact

on their L2 reading comprehension since word knowledge is basic for successful reading comprehension (Grabe 2009; Grabe and Stoller 2002; Milton 2009).

Nonetheless, this advance in reading comprehension was not reflected in participants' reading fluency. Hence, the results of this study indicate that semester-long SA experiences do not necessarily promote faster reading in L2 students. This finding contradicts Kraut's (2017), whose participants improved significantly their reading rates after a shorter (8-week) SA experience. However, students in Kraut's study participated in an intensive English programme which required them to take 22 hours of English language classes per week, and it is possible that this more intensive immersion while abroad provided participants in Kraut (2017) more L2 practise and, possibly, more exposure to L2 print. Therefore, the lack of reading fluency development in the present study can be explained by the lack of practise that participants had in reading. In the questionnaire, none of the participants declared having taken part in a reading specific course, and, when asked which were the skills which they had practised the least while abroad, most of them mentioned writing (44.4%) and reading (40.7%). It seems to be the case that, for communicative purposes, the SA context tends to foster oral skills over the other skills, and it is then plausible to think that it may not provide enough practice for reading to become more automatic (DeKeyser 2007; Iwasaki 2007).

Moreover, previous research has established that in order to improve reading speed, students should read as much as possible (Grabe and Soller 2002), which implies that the more they read, the faster they will do so. Consequently, it is possible that reading fluency improves regardless of students' learning context by the mere fact of spending (more) time reading books or any type of printed text. Finally, a tentative explanation to the finding that participants improved reading comprehension significantly but not reading fluency is that they might have primed comprehension over fluency given that in their L2 classes at their home university they are typically tested for their reading comprehension, but never for their reading fluency.

The second research question evolved around gains in L2 receptive and productive vocabulary. The results indicated that whereas some areas of vocabulary benefitted from SA experiences, not all measures developed in the same way. Participants showed a significant improvement in their receptive vocabulary, demonstrating that they had learnt many new

words as a result of their sojourn. This is in line with previous studies that have investigated the effects of SA experiences on L2 receptive vocabulary (Briggs 2015; Ife et al. 2000), and it provides further evidence that these experiences are extremely positive when it comes to learning new L2 words. It seems that the intensive nature of the SA context fosters vocabulary learning, probably because learners are massively exposed to the L2 during their stays. Therefore, being in the target country boosts the learning of new words, probably because everything is written in the L2 and the L2 has to be used in various daily situations, from going to the university (formal) to going shopping (informal). Many researchers have referred to these positive outcomes, establishing that SA programmes offer an L2 learning experience that would, very unlikely, happen in the L1 context: “The volumes of interaction and the intensive nature of exposure that are possible on an overseas trip cannot possibly be recreated in the few hundred hours that may be available for foreign language classroom learning” (Milton 2009, 231).

The outcomes of the SA experience, however, are not so promising concerning productive vocabulary since participants only presented a significant improvement in one measure, namely lexical accuracy. Lexical accuracy gains can be explained in terms of improved receptive vocabulary and L2 general proficiency. Participants in the present study improved their knowledge of receptive vocabulary, and it is possible that this upgraded knowledge of the L2 lexicon had an impact on their lexical accuracy when using these L2 words. Secondly, as some authors have already remarked (Zaytseva et al. 2018), as learners become more proficient in the L2, their lexical accuracy will improve, and fewer lexical errors will be made. As portrayed in the results section, the students in the present study improved their L2 proficiency level during their stay, and this overall advance probably aided their lexical accuracy and helped students to make fewer mistakes in their post-test writings. On the whole, this finding is in line with Llanes and Muñoz (2009) and Zaytseva (2016) who also found that participating in a SA experience was significantly positive for the improvement of their participants’ lexical accuracy.

No significant improvement was found in the other productive measures examined. Although there is a slight improvement regarding lexical fluency, participants failed to show a significant improvement in this measure and no changes were found in their lexical density

and lexical sophistication. This lack of improvement in productive skills could be explained by the duration of the SA experience. Previous studies (Briggs 2015; Serrano et al. 2012) found that sometimes SA experiences are not long enough for participants to show gains in specific measures, and that while gains may be evident in measures such as lexical richness, gains in measures of production measured through written skills are slower to emerge. It is possible that the informal relationships that participants developed while abroad did not lead learners to develop the more advanced aspects of vocabulary. Hence, whereas the SA context favours certain aspects of vocabulary such as the learning of new words (possibly due to participants meeting new people and creating relationships which require a considerable amount of vocabulary), it may not always enhance learners' lexical sophistication or density when using their L2 vocabulary productively. On the whole, the findings in the present study point to the direction that spending only one term in the target country may not be enough for these productive aspects of vocabulary to show significant development.

Finally, the third question asked whether participants' initial vocabulary knowledge and proficiency level were related to gains in L2 reading and L2 vocabulary. A significant negative correlation was found between initial vocabulary knowledge and gains in receptive vocabulary, suggesting that those participants who had a lower initial vocabulary level were also the ones who recognized more words after the stay. This was not surprising because, as previous authors have stated, the lower the level at the beginning, the more room there is for improvement (Llanes and Muñoz 2009). Milton and Meara (1995: 25), for example, claimed that there was "a clearly marked tendency for students with small initial vocabularies to make a great deal of progress, while those with larger vocabularies show much smaller gains". Therefore, the fact that those participants who knew fewer L2 words at the beginning were also the ones to recognize more during the stay supports the theory "the lower, the better".

Nonetheless, the picture was different regarding reading comprehension, and a significant positive correlation was found between initial vocabulary knowledge and gains in reading comprehension, indicating that those participants who had a higher knowledge of vocabulary at the beginning of the stay were the ones to show more gains in their reading comprehension skills after the SA experience. It seems that, in this case, a higher initial vocabulary level affected the changes in participants' reading comprehension positively. One possible

explanation for this finding could be found in the widely established positive relationship between vocabulary and reading. As previous research has found, vocabulary aids reading comprehension (Grabe 2009) and, for this reason, it is plausible to think that those participants who knew more words at the outset of the SA experience were the ones who understood texts better at the end of the stay, possibly because they could focus on understanding the texts instead on decoding words or inferencing them by context. Moreover, even if they had to infer unknown words by context, it is possible that having a higher initial vocabulary level allowed them to do this inferencing more smoothly and, consequently comprehend better. Hence, although these results might seem contradictory, they are not because they involve two different L2 areas (knowledge of receptive vocabulary on the one hand and reading comprehension on the other hand). Furthermore, whether for one area (receptive vocabulary) having a lower initial vocabulary knowledge was more beneficial, for the other area (reading comprehension) the opposite was true because these two areas pose different demands on learners and tackle on different learning characteristics and mechanisms.

One last significant and negative correlation was found was between initial proficiency level and reading comprehension, implying that those participants with a lower L2 proficiency level at the beginning of the stay were the ones to show more gains in reading comprehension after the semester abroad. This finding is in line with previous studies that have found that initial proficiency level can be a predictor of gains in the L2. In Li (2014), for example, the participants who benefitted the most from the SA in terms of reading comprehension were not those who were at a more advanced level at the beginning of the experience, but those with an intermediate level, which indicated that having an intermediate level of the L2 was helpful for participants' L2 reading comprehension development. It is possible that lack of enough adequate proficiency prevented learners in the present study from gathering a deep understanding of the reading text at the pre-test and that, due to their improved L2 overall proficiency, they were able to comprehend the reading task better and provide more accurate answers to the comprehension questions at the post-test. Hence, this finding could be at least partially explained by the improvement in participants' L2 overall proficiency. Not only did the participants improve their L2 vocabulary, as shown by the updated VLT, but also their L2 grammar and vocabulary recognition skills, as measured by the OPT, and it is possible that

this amelioration had an impact on reading comprehension because it probably allowed learners to parse the sentences more efficiently. Altogether, the answers to the third research question establish different connections between initial L2 vocabulary and L2 proficiency level and gains in the L2, or lack thereof: it seems that not knowing as many words in the L2 before starting the SA experience provided participants with more room for improvement in terms of receptive vocabulary. Nonetheless, having a good command of the L2 vocabulary at the outset had a positive impact on the more complex aspects of the language, such as reading comprehension. Finally, a lower L2 proficiency level at the beginning of the sojourn seemed to lead to gains in L2 reading comprehension.

6 Conclusion

This study set out to examine whether spending a semester in the L2 country had a significant impact on students' L2 reading and vocabulary development and whether initial L2 vocabulary and proficiency level were related to gains (if any) in L2 reading and L2 vocabulary. Albeit participation in a SA programme was positive for learners' reading comprehension, receptive vocabulary and lexical accuracy, the other measures examined in this investigation (reading fluency, lexical fluency, lexical density and lexical sophistication) remained unchanged after a SA experience in an Anglophone country. Moreover, the present investigation suggests that the threshold vocabulary and proficiency level are related to gains in receptive vocabulary and reading comprehension.

Although the present study contributes to the SA field because it examines two critical aspects of language (L2 reading and L2 vocabulary), certain limitations must be acknowledged. One of such limitations is the lack of qualitative data from the participants, which would have helped the understanding of the findings and the drawing of more robust conclusions. Therefore, it would be interesting that future studies involved the more social aspects of SA in order to determine whether individual variables, such as the social networks created while abroad, have an impact on L2 development. Although comparing the L2 reading and vocabulary development of participants in a SA context to those in an AH context was out of the scope of the present paper, it would be interesting that future studies compared these two contexts in order to determine whether joining an English course at the home university could be beneficial for L2 learners.

On the whole, this study confirms that spending some time in a country where the L2 is the official language contributes significantly to the development of L2 reading comprehension, receptive vocabulary and lexical accuracy but that, at the same time, other measures may need more time and practise to advance. Hence, results suggest that SA experiences are favourable for some aspects of languages but that if the participants' objective is to improve more advanced skills (such as lexical sophistication), they should try other options such as engaging in longer SA experiences or participating in language-specific courses which promote extensive L2 practice. In any case, it must be taken into account that participants improved some of the measures significantly even though they did not engage in any reading or writing specific course and only spent one semester abroad. Therefore, although not all the measures analysed improved, the present findings reinforce the positive exposure that SA experiences provide and highlight that it can be advantageous to perform a SA experience during an academic degree, particularly when carrying a degree in languages. Roughly half of the participants in the present study want to become teachers of English as an L2, and the rest will become English translators. Hence, they are going to need the automaticity that the SA context can provide – that is, being able to use the language without having to focus on low-level details and allowing more automated habits. Studying abroad could help them to use the L2 more effortless and, subsequently, have an impact on their future job careers. For this reason, we believe that these sojourns should be made available to everyone. Enlisting in a SA programme tends to be rather costly and, hence, it is reasonable to believe that if more resources and funding were offered to SA participants, more people would benefit from the multiple advantages of SA programmes.

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Appendix. Example of lexical errors

<p>a) L1 transfer</p>	<p>- <i>I hope on the future I will be teaching</i> <i>idioms</i> (= languages) - <i>I finished the economics career 5 years ago</i> (= degree)</p>
<p>b) Word choice</p>	<p>- <i>There are many things that are important but people don't watch them on TV</i> (= important things are not screened on TV) - <i>...and to better my pronunciation</i> (= to improve; make my pronunciation better)</p>
<p>c) Non-words</p>	<p>- <i>...because of the dictature we had in Spain...</i> (= dictatorship) - <i>I could do a sofuri and help animals</i> (= safari)</p>
<p>d) Fixed expressions</p>	<p>- <i>I had clear that I wanted to study English</i> (= I knew that I wanted to study English) - <i>I choose economics because I consider it went better for me</i> (= suited me well)</p>

4.4. Paper 4: Is L2 development in an ELF context comparable to L2 development in a traditional SA setting? The case of reading and vocabulary

The present study compares how two different study abroad experiences (traditional SA and ELFSA) will affect the L2 reading (comprehension and fluency), and L2 vocabulary (receptive and productive) of a group of Catalan/Spanish undergraduates, learners of English as an L2. Moreover, it aims at determining whether the contexts provided similar opportunities for L2 use and practise. Participants were administered a reading text, the Updated Vocabulary Levels Test, a written task, and an online questionnaire before and after their sojourns. Findings indicate that both contexts provide similar outcomes both in terms of linguistic development and in terms of the opportunities for L2 practise.

Keywords: Learning context, L2 reading, L2 vocabulary, L2 use, SA, ELFSA

Introduction:

Study Abroad (SA) experiences are becoming extremely popular nowadays, with thousands of students performing sojourns abroad every year. In fact, their popularity has grown so extensively that these sojourns are no longer “just an exotic option” or something that only elite groups of people can perform (Teichler, 2004, p. 395). Many universities around the world have adapted to this trend and declared that participating in at least one international experience during students’ academic life is necessary (and should be a requirement) because of the different benefits that these experiences can render (Jenkins, 2014).

Some of the studies that have been carried out on SA describe the context as beneficial because of the immersion it provides (Llanes & Muñoz, 2013). Nonetheless, SA research has mostly focused on examining programmes in which participants travel to countries where the second language (L2) is the official language since they involve “L2 use in the authentic target culture and in classroom situations” (Tragant, 2012, p. 161). Nowadays, however, the role of English as the world’s *lingua franca* and the current internationalization of universities make it more common to perform SA experiences in non-Anglophone countries. As an illustration of this, the European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (ERASMUS) statistics show that in 2017 there were as many Spanish students in the UK as in countries such as Lithuania, Denmark, the Czech Republic or Finland (European Commission, 2017). Furthermore, globalisation and mobility have boosted multilingualism to

a great extent, even though for some people, becoming multilingual and transcultural occurs “later in life” (The Douglas Fir Group, 2016, p. 19). Nonetheless, this reality has been rather ignored by SA researchers, who still focus their research on contexts where English is the official language. As a result, the linguistic impact of performing a sojourn in a non-Anglophone country has been overlooked (Glaser, 2017), and this gap needs to be filled given that such SA experiences are common practice and they provide sojourners with the opportunity to learn English and, sometimes, the language the target country.

To this aim, the present study investigates whether differences exist between performing a SA experience in an English-speaking country (traditional SA) and in a country where English is used by means of communication but where it is not the official language (English as a lingua franca study abroad, ELFSA) (Köylü, 2016). In particular, the study attempts to look at L2 linguistic development in terms of L2 reading comprehension and fluency, and L2 receptive and productive vocabulary. Moreover, it examines the opportunities for practise that both contexts provided to interact with the language during the stay.

Literature review

The hypothesis that learning context is crucial when learning an L2 has been supported by many researchers who maintain that the SA setting is ideal in terms of L2 learning because of the numerous advantages it provides (Kinginger, 2008; Llanes & Muñoz, 2013). For some years, researchers have investigated the impact that SA experiences have on students’ L2 development, concluding that learning context is decisive when learning an L2, especially regarding oral fluency, pronunciation or pragmatics (Borràs & Llanes, 2019). Nonetheless, these studies have tended to focus on learners performing a stay in a country where their L2 was the official language (traditional SA). Nowadays, it is no longer necessary to travel to an Anglophone country in order to practise English. The amount of English-medium Instruction (EMI) courses in all universities around the world makes it unnecessary for universities to be located in an Anglophone country in order to be able to teach English or through English. Moreover, the number of international students enrolling in different universities around the world has increased largely, which creates many opportunities for informal interaction in English regardless of the destination (Jenkins, 2014).

The ELFSA context

The ERASMUS programme in Europe is an excellent example of this phenomenon. One of its goals is to enhance multilingualism and multiculturalism. Nonetheless, despite ELFSA programmes being as popular as traditional SA ones, the effects that they have on L2 development have been rather ignored. Only a handful of studies have investigated the effects of the ELFSA context (Borràs & Llanes, 2019), and most of the existing literature on the topic focuses on its more qualitative aspects and on students' perspectives (Kalocsai, 2014). This lack of research makes it difficult to draw any conclusions on whether this setting will provide any positive outcomes to L2 learners, and it makes it necessary to investigate the impact that the ELFSA context could have on L2 linguistic development.

Llanes et al. (2016) investigated a group of 39 Catalan/Spanish bilinguals, learners of English as an L2, who studied abroad in non-Anglophone countries for 15 weeks. They examined the development of participants' general proficiency and writing skills, and they concluded that this type of SA was positive for participants because they improved both their L2 proficiency and their L2 lexical complexity significantly. Likewise, Köylü (2016) compared three groups of L1 Turkish undergraduates, learners of English as an L2, after a traditional SA experience (n= 7), an ELFSA one (n= 24) and at home (AH) (n= 15). She examined participants' L2 oral and written development after a semester and concluded that the ELFSA context was as beneficial as the SA one in terms of linguistic development. Köylü stated that participants had the same chances to enhance their oral and written skills, regardless of type of stay. The main difference found between the ELFSA and the SA groups was found in the students' sensed identity, with those in the ELFSA setting claiming that during the stay they created an ELF identity that made them feel multilingual. This finding puts forward that ELFSA experiences can promote multilingualism and shape the learners' L2 repertoire and L2 use. Positive findings can also be found in Llanes (2019), who examined the oral skills of a group of 18 Catalan/Spanish bilinguals performing a stay in different non-Anglophone countries. She found that they improved their general proficiency, lexical complexity and oral fluency significantly.

As a whole, learners seem to benefit from this new SA landscape, not only in terms of L2 learning but also in terms of a perceived multilingual identity. Nonetheless, research on the

topic is scarce and, to the authors' knowledge, no study has examined the effects that the ELFSA context has on L2 reading or L2 vocabulary, nor compared them to the ones that a traditional SA provides. In fact, L2 reading has been rather under-researched even within the traditional SA context, and there is little research on the area (Borràs & Llanes, 2019). Consequently, more research is needed in order to be able to draw more final conclusions on the field.

SA and reading

Research on L2 reading development after a SA experience is scarce and the few existing studies are contradictory. An example of a study that did not find gains in reading skills after a SA experience is that by Kinginger (2008). The author examined the L2 development of a group of 23 North-American undergraduates, learners of French as an L2, who performed a semester-long stay in France. While significant gains were found in the rest of the areas examined, gains in L2 reading were only modest. For this reason, she concluded that the SA context does not necessarily help the improvement of L2 reading.

Two positive examples of studies on L2 reading are those by Li (2014) and Kraut (2017). The former investigated the L2 reading comprehension development of six groups of North-American undergraduates, learners of Chinese as an L2. Three of the groups went abroad (n= 35), and the other three stayed AH (n= 38). Participants had different proficiency levels (beginner, intermediate and advanced) in order to control for participants' threshold level. Results in Li (2014) suggested that the SA promoted development in reading comprehension to a greater extent than the AH one, however, the only group to show significantly higher gains was the intermediate SA one.

Three years later, Kraut (2017) examined a group of Arabic and Chinese university students, learners of English as an L2, who performed an 8-week SA experience in the USA. Findings in her study indicated that participants improved their reading fluency and increased their willingness to read out of curiosity and their perceived self-efficacy. Nonetheless, during their stay, participants in Kraut's study took part in an intensive English programme and received much more practice than regular SA participants do when they perform a typical SA, which probably boosted their L2 development.

Overall, there is an apparent gap in the research of SA and L2 reading, which makes it almost impossible to draw any conclusions on whether SA is positive for the development of reading in a L2. Moreover, no study has contrasted the reading outcomes emerging from a traditional SA experience and ELFSA one.

SA and Vocabulary

In contrast to reading research, a larger number of studies have explored the impact that SA experiences have on L2 vocabulary development. In general, research offers positive results in terms of receptive vocabulary (Milton & Meara, 1995) but mixed findings regarding its productive aspects (Briggs, 2015; Zaytseva, 2016). This may be due to the multi-faceted character of vocabulary (Schmitt, 2010). In fact, many researchers have argued that examining vocabulary can be a challenge and that no study could investigate all its aspects because it would be “extremely unwieldy and time consuming” (Schmitt, 2010, p. 80). This is probably why the studies that have investigated L2 vocabulary development as a result of a SA experience have either focused on receptive or productive vocabulary. One of the earliest examples of a study investigating vocabulary is that by Milton and Meara (1995). The authors examined a group of 53 European exchange students who studied at a British university for six months using the Eurocentres vocabulary size test. They found that the participants improved their receptive vocabulary significantly. Similar positive results on receptive vocabulary can be found in Dewey (2008), and Jiménez-Jiménez (2010) whose studies also establish that the SA setting boosts the learning of new words and, hence, leads to gains in L2 receptive vocabulary.

On the other hand, the more productive aspects of vocabulary seem to develop at different paces and authors have not reached an agreement on which will develop first, and how long it will take them to do so (Zaytseva, 2016). As an example, Briggs (2015) examined the development of both receptive and productive vocabulary of a group of L2 English learners (n= 241) who came from different countries and performed a stay in the UK for 6-10 weeks, 11-15 weeks, or 16-20 weeks. The results in her study indicate that the SA fostered the learning of new words and that participants improved their receptive vocabulary. However, in terms of productive vocabulary, findings were not so positive. Briggs concluded that, whereas even a short stay abroad can lead to gains in receptive vocabulary, productive vocabulary

needs more time to develop and the shorter sojourns did not lead participants to improvement in the latter. Previous research confirms Briggs' (2015) findings, since the general finding is that the more productive measures of vocabulary develop at a slower pace (Jensen & Howard, 2014; Serrano et al., 2012). Consequently, spending longer periods abroad may be necessary in order for these to improve (Zaytseva, 2016).

On the whole, research on L2 vocabulary and SA experiences suggests that SA is positive for word learning (receptive vocabulary) but that productive vocabulary requires more time to develop. Nonetheless, the exact amount of time needed remains uncertain and which measures are going to develop faster is still unknown. Furthermore, similarly to L2 reading, research is needed providing evidence of whether ELFSA experiences are going to provide the same outcomes to participants than traditional SA ones in terms of L2 vocabulary.

SA & L2 engagement

One thing many researchers agree on is that examining what participants do while abroad may help researchers to understand the different outcomes that SA experiences render (Coleman, 2013). Therefore, while SA has been often regarded as a context that offers learners limitless access to L2 exposure and host communities, this may not always be true. In fact, in order to comprehend what really happens when participants study abroad, the actual amount of exposure that participants get in the L2 should be carefully investigated “through dedicated analysis of the variables involved” (Watson & Ebner 2018, p. 226) since the mere fact of being in a foreign country may not render significant changes in the L2.

Generally, what seems to make one context superior to another is the quality of the interactions together with the efforts made to use the L2. Therefore, even though being abroad can speed the process, it is in the students' will or circumstances to truly engage in the L2. A project which not only investigated L2 development after a SA experience, but also the amount of practise and social networks that participants developed during their SA experiences is the LANGSNAP project (2011-2013). The description of the project and its results are presented in Mitchellet al. (2017). Overall, the project investigated the impact that a year abroad had on two groups of British undergraduates in terms of the CAF framework, general L2 proficiency and receptive vocabulary. Participants in one group were learners of French who performed a sojourn in France (n= 29). The second group consisted of Spanish

L2 learners, performing the stay in Spain (n= 18) or Mexico (n= 9). The authors stated that, subject to individual variation and task effects, the SA was generally beneficial for participants' L2 development. A second objective in Mitchell et al. (2017) was to investigate participants' L2 use and their in-sojourn language practises. The authors concluded that social relationships and L2 engagement played a pivotal role in the learners' development: "Whatever their starting point, the extent of learners' L2 gains should be affected by the extent of their investment in L2 learning during the sojourn" (p. 223).

Overall, since no two students, even within the same setting, will undergo the exact same experience, it seems that investigating how students actually spend their time abroad can provide a broader understanding of students' language learning.

Method

Research questions

The questions that guided this paper are:

RQ1: Will a semester-long ELFSA experience and a traditional SA one lead to comparable outcomes in L2 reading comprehension and reading fluency development?

RQ2: Will a semester-long ELFSA experience and a traditional SA one lead to comparable outcomes in L2 receptive and productive vocabulary development?

RQ3: To what extent do participants use their L2 while abroad in both contexts?

Participants

Participants in the present study were 51 Catalan/Spanish bilinguals, learners of English as an L2. They were either studying Translation and Interpreting or Teaching English in Primary Education at two different universities in Catalonia. There were 43 females and 8 male participants and their ages ranged from between 19 to 27 (M= 19.96). In the questionnaire all participants stated having started studying English in primary school, nonetheless they had different proficiency levels when the first data collection took place (n= 5 A2, n= 26 B1, n= 17 B2). During their SA experience participants lived in dorms (n= 20), in flats with other

students (n= 18), or with host families (n= 5). Eight participants did not provide information on accommodation.

The SA experiences

Participating in a SA experience was a requirement for all participants. These experiences consisted of living in a foreign country for a semester and attending some classes at a host university. All the participants in the present study but five (n= 46) were part of the ERASMUS programme.

The rest of the participants (n= 5) took part in a programme organised by their home university through which they studied abroad in the USA (also traditional SA). The exchange held the same conditions offered in the ERASMUS programme. Nonetheless, due to its more expensive nature, not as many participants decided to choose this option. All in all, participants in the present study performed either a traditional SA in the UK (n= 26) or the USA (n=5), or an ELFSA one in Belgium (n= 1), Denmark (n= 2), France (n= 4), Germany (n= 6), Hungary (n= 3), Poland (n= 3), and Prague (n= 1).

Instruments

In order to measure reading fluency and comprehension a text was selected from the *Reading Explorer 2* (Kraut, 2017), a book which contains A2 level texts according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The readability index of the passage was calculated and it showed a 72.3% in Flesh reading ease, which meant that participants in the study would find the text fairly easy to understand. Since previous research shows that one requirement to measure reading rates is text suitability (i.e. the text has to be well within the students' capability), it was decided that the level of the chosen text was appropriate for the participants in the present study. The *Reading Explorer 2* book offered some comprehension questions after the passage, most of which were used in the present study. However, some questions were slightly changed and some others were added by the authors (these were previously piloted).

Two tests were used in order to measure L2 vocabulary development. The Updated Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT) (Webb et al., 2017) was used to measure receptive vocabulary. This test uses a form-recognition matching format in which students need to match the target words with their corresponding definitions. It is divided into five different frequency levels (1K, 2K, 3K, 4K and 5K). Each level has ten clusters and each cluster is provided in sets of six words and three possible definitions (hence, three words work as distractors). There are thirty target definitions per level, which amounts to 150 items being examined. It was decided to use a size test because researchers have often claimed that they provide a broader picture of vocabulary development, whereas more in-depth tests can only examine a handful of words (Read, 2000). Nonetheless, previous research also highlights the need to use more than one test when investigating vocabulary because of its multifaceted nature (Webb, 2005; Schmitt, 2010). As Webb (2005) claimed, using both receptive and productive tests “may give a much more accurate assessment of the degree and type of learning that has occurred” (p. 504). Consequently, a written task was used in order to measure participants’ productive vocabulary. The participants were given fifteen minutes to write an essay entitled “My life: Past, present and future expectations”. As the title suggests, learners had to explain their past and present experiences and what they wanted to do in the future. No specific word limit was given but they were asked to write as much as possible.

Finally, participants completed an online questionnaire in Catalan. This questionnaire was based on the Language Contact Profile (LCP) (Freedet al., 2004) and the Language Engagement Questionnaire (LEQ) (Mitchellet al., 2017). However, some questions were added in order to gather additional information on L2 reading and L2 vocabulary. In total, it included 39 open- and closed-ended questions which enquired about participants’ relationship with the English language, their L2 use while abroad, their perceived L2 development, and their insights and reflections on the experience. For the present investigation, only eight questions were used (See appendix 1), and it must be noted that eight participants failed to return it. For this reason, the results for the second research question will only take into account those participants who answered the questionnaire.

Procedure

This study has a pre/post-test design and the procedure was the same at both data collection points. Nonetheless, in order to prevent any task-repetition effects, participants were not informed about the second testing time or the objective the study. The order of the tests was the following: first, participants were given the reading passage and were informed that there would be some comprehension questions after the reading, which they would have to answer without the text in front of them. Hence, they were asked to read the text once and at a normal speed, which allowed them to understand the text. Once they finished reading the text, they were asked to write down the time they had spent reading it in minutes and seconds (a chronometer was projected on a big screen). Then, they raised their hands and the examiner took the texts and gave them the comprehension questions. The reading was followed by the written task, for which participants were given a maximum of about fifteen minutes. Once they finished, they were given the Updated Vocabulary Test. Participants could leave as soon as they finished the last test. Next, they were informed that they would receive an online questionnaire and that they should complete it as soon as possible.

Measures

Two measures were analysed from the reading passage: reading comprehension and reading fluency. Reading comprehension was measured by the amount of correct answers participants had in the multiple choice questions. The text consisted of 13 questions; hence, the maximum score that participants could obtain was 13. Reading fluency was computed by the amount of words that participants had read per minute (WPM), which was calculated following the formula: $\text{number of words the text had} \times 60 / \text{total number in seconds students took to read the text}$.

The raw score out of the 150 items in the Updated VLT indicated development (or lack thereof) in receptive vocabulary. Four measures of productive vocabulary were analysed through the written task: lexical fluency, lexical accuracy, lexical density and lexical sophistication. On the one hand, students' writings were typed into the Computerized Language Analysis (CLAN) software (MacWhinney, 2000) in order to compute lexical fluency and lexical accuracy. Lexical fluency consisted of the total number of words (i.e. tokens) students used in their texts and lexical accuracy was measured by dividing the number

of lexical errors by the total amount of tokens used. Lexical errors were classified following Zaytseva (2016):

- 1) L1 transfer (E.g. *I am **actually** doing Translation and Interpreting*, from “actualmente” meaning “currently”)
- 2) Word choice (E.g. *I hope I have a stable **work***, meaning “job”)
- 3) Non-words (E.g. *It required effort and **constance***, meaning “perseverance”)
- 4) Fixed expressions (E.g. *I **record** the happy feelings I had*, from “recorder” meaning “remember”)

On the other hand, lexical density and lexical sophistication were calculated through the VocabProfile online tool (VP-Compleat v. 2.1.). Lexical density consisted of the number of content words used (nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs) divided by the total number of tokens. Lexical sophistication was a calculation of the proportion of words from different frequency levels. The goal was to check whether participants had started using more infrequent or “rare” words after being abroad or whether they continued using more frequent words (from the 1K or 2K levels).

Finally, the questionnaire provided information on learners’ L2 use while abroad. (See table 1 for summary of the measures)

Table 1. Summary of the measures

Measure	Test	Formula
Reading fluency (WPM)	reading text	$504 * 60 / \text{Total seconds taken to read the text}$
Reading comprehension	reading text	Raw scores /13
Receptive vocabulary	Updated VLT	Raw scores /150
Lexical fluency	Written essay	Total number of tokens
Lexical accuracy	Written essay	Number of lexical errors/tokens
Lexical density	Written essay	Number of content words/tokens

Lexical sophistication	Written essay	Comparison of the percentages from words of different frequency levels
L2 use	Questionnaire	Analysis of the students' answers

Results

The written data were coded by two linguists, experts in the English language, one of them a native speaker of English. Subsequently, the codings were compared to calculate inter-rater reliability and they reached an agreement of 90.90%. Intra-rater reliability was also calculated, reaching an agreement of 92.31%. The proficiency level of the participants was also compared after the pre-test to check that there were no significant differences between the subjects and it was confirmed that they were comparable. Finally, the normality of the data was checked and it was found that most of the measures were normally distributed. Therefore, parametric tests were used to answer the research questions.

The first two research questions inquired whether outcomes of two different types of SA experiences (traditional vs. ELFSA) were comparable. Concerning the first research question (L2 reading), the descriptive statistics in Table 2 show that while both groups improved their reading fluency to some extent, only participants in the traditional SA group improved their reading comprehension. A paired-samples T-test showed that changes in participants' reading fluency were not significant for any of the groups (traditional SA: $t(27) = -.221, p < .826$, ELFSA: $t(19) = -1.443, p < .165$). However, reading comprehension was significant for the traditional SA group ($t(27) = -2.482, p < .020, d = 0.49$). In order to check whether these differences were significant between groups, a one-way ANOVA was run with reading comprehension and reading fluency as the dependent variables and the type of stay as the independent variable. No statistically significant difference was found between the SA and the ELFSA groups in terms of reading comprehension ($F(1, 46) = 2.22, p < .142$) or reading fluency ($F(1, 46) = 2.64, p < .111$), suggesting that both learning contexts provided similar outcomes in terms of L2 reading.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics

	SA_pre	SA_post	ELFSA_pre	ELFSA_post
Reading comprehension	7.61	8.54*	7.85	7.80
Reading fluency	142.06	143.85	126.61	176.84
Receptive vocabulary	123.21	136.75*	115.70	132.45*
Lexical accuracy	.028	.00*	.03	.01*
Lexical fluency	196.86	217.45	195.79	196.60
Lexical density	.46	.45	.46	.44
Lexical sophistication	86.39 1K 1.47 5K	87.30 1K 1.17 5K	84.24 1K 1.27 5K	85.59 1K 1.38 5K

With regard to the second research question (L2 vocabulary), the descriptive statistics show that both groups improved their receptive vocabulary, lexical accuracy and lexical fluency and none of the groups enhanced their lexical density or lexical sophistication (See table 2). A paired-samples T-test showed that improvement between the pre- and post-test was significant for both groups in terms of receptive vocabulary (traditional SA: $t(28) = -5.513$, $p < .000$, $d = 1.16$; ELFSA: $t(19) = -6.842$, $p < .000$, $d = 1.72$) and lexical accuracy (traditional SA: $t(29) = 5.712$, $p < .000$, $d = 1.16$; ELFSA: $t(19) = -5.268$, $p < .000$, $d = 1.61$), but not in terms of lexical fluency (traditional SA: $t(28) = -1.833$, $p < .078$, $d = 1.80$; ELFSA: $t(19) = .464$, $p < .648$). Again, a one-way ANOVA was run to determine whether there were any differences between the groups and no statistically significant differences were found in any of the variables: receptive vocabulary ($F(1, 46) = .811$, $p < .372$), lexical accuracy ($F(1, 46) = .340$, $p < .563$) or lexical fluency ($F(1, 46) = .566$, $p < .456$). These results suggest that participants' L2 vocabulary knowledge developed in a comparable way for both groups of participants, regardless their SA learning context.

Finally, in order to determine whether one context triggered the use of the L2 more than the other, the third research question asked to what extent participants used their L2 during their

sojourns. Out of the 45 participants who responded to the questionnaire, 28 were from the traditional SA group and 17 from the ELFSA one. As Table 3 yields, participants in the traditional SA group received more classes in English than those in the ELFSA contexts because some learners in the ELFSA group took some classes in the official language of the country. Likewise, participants in the traditional SA group declared using mostly English in their oral conversations and everyday life, whereas those in the ELFSA group stated that the language of the country was also used largely. Similar findings were found when looking at the amount of English used at social events and parties. Overall, it can be argued that English was more used by participants in the traditional SA group than by those in the ELFSA one because the latter group also practised a second foreign language (generally, French or German).

However, participants made similar use of English in their living arrangements, probably because many (46.5%) lived in student halls where they shared rooms and common spaces with other international students, including native and non-native speakers of English. Hence, it seems that all students tended to use English largely in their living accommodation, regardless of destination country.

Finally, Table 3 shows that most of the participants in both groups only read in English when they had homework, although four students in the traditional SA group highlighted the fact that they read more because they enjoyed it. Similarly, most of the participants declared that they had not engaged in any reading or writing course.

Table 3.Summary of students’ language practises abroad

	Traditional SA	ELFSA
Lessons in English(h/week)	Less than 1 = 11.11% 1-3 = 18.51% 3-5 = 48.15% 5 + = 22.22%	Less than 1 = 23.53% 1-3 = 35.29% 3-5 = 23.53% 5 + = 17.65%
Language used at university	English = 100%	English 53% French/German = 47%
Hours speaking	1-5 = 50%	< 1 = 29.41 %

English/week	+ 5 = 50%	1-5 = 47.06% + 5 = 23.53%
Language used the most	English = 57.7% L1 = 30.76% English & L1 = 11.54%	English = 23.5% Language of the country = 29.41% L1 = 11.8% English & L1 = 11.8 % English&French = 11.8% Other = 11.8%
Language used at social events/parties	English = 84% L1 = 16%	English = 41.18% French = 29.41% L1 = 17.6% other = 11.8%
Language used at home	English = 65.38% L1 = 34.62%	English = 76.47% French = 11.76 % L1 = 11.76%
Time spent reading	About an hour a day = 16% Only when I had homework/work = 68% + 3h/day because I like it = 16%	About an hour a day = 17.6% Only when I had homework/work = 82.4%
Specific English reading/writing course	No = 80.8% Yes, writing = 7.7% Language course not necessarily focused on reading or writing only = 11.5%	No = 64.7% Yes, writing = 11.8% Language course not necessarily focused on reading or writing only = 23.5%

Discussion

The research questions in the present study evolved around differences in the learning outcomes and the opportunities for practise provided by two types of SA experiences: traditional vs ELF. Results showed no significant differences between groups in terms of L2 reading and L2 vocabulary development, suggesting that both types rendered comparable outcomes in participants' L2 development. Therefore, the results of the present study suggest that practising English in an ELFSA country is as (dis)advantageous as doing so in an English-speaking country (in line with Köylü, 2016; Llanes et al., 2016).

With regard to L2 reading fluency, none of the groups showed significant differences from the pre to the post-test. This lack of significant changes from the pre to the post test could be explained by the scarce amount of reading practice learners received during the stay. In the questionnaire most participants declared that they only read in the L2 when they had homework (traditional SA= 64%, ELFSA = 82.4%) and, as previous studies have shown, learners need much practice in order to develop their reading skills, especially when reading in the L2 (Huffman, 2014). Hence, it seems that reading fluency is not a by-product of studying abroad possibly because the context does not necessarily provide many opportunities to read extensively in the L2. This is in line with those investigations which have established that being abroad will not foster participants' development unless they make an effort to perform different activities in the L2 (Freed et al., 2004; Isabelli-Garcia, 2006). Overall, as portrayed in the post-test questionnaire, participants in the present study did not engage in many reading activities while abroad, which is possibly why they did not show great changes in this measure.

Interestingly, despite differences between groups not being significant, it was found that in terms of L2 reading comprehension participants in the traditional SA group improved significantly, whereas participants in the ELFSA group did not. This was an unexpected finding because, as mentioned above, participants in the present study did not engage much in reading activities. Nonetheless, some differences were found in participants' use of English at university and the amount of instruction each group received while abroad, which may explain why participants in the traditional SA group improved their reading comprehension significantly while those in the ELFSA one did not. Most learners in the traditional SA

context had 3-5 hours of English instruction every week. Additionally, 22.22% received more than 5 hours of classes weekly and all of them declared that English was the only language used at university. Therefore, it seems plausible to believe that the combination of more formal L2 instruction together with the predominant use of English in this more formal aspect of their stay affected participants' reading comprehension positively. On the other hand, participants in the ELFSA context tended to have fewer classes in English (less than 1 = 23.53%, 1-3 = 35.29%), and their English use at university was half the amount (53%) indicated by participants in the traditional SA context (100%) because of their willingness to learn/practise a third language (generally French or German) among participants based in France or Germany. The few(er) hours of formal instruction combined with the fact that their reading skills were not practised much could justify why learners in the ELFSA group did not show any significant changes in their reading comprehension.

Regarding L2 vocabulary, mixed results were found. Participants in both groups significantly improved their receptive vocabulary, implying that during their time abroad they learnt a significant amount of new words. This supports the theory that the SA context boosts receptive vocabulary development and this could be due to the accumulation of multiple incidental encounters with L2 words that usually occurs in a SA setting (Grabe, 2009). Moreover, participants showed a significant improvement in terms of lexical accuracy, which suggests that learners were more accurate in their use of L2 vocabulary after the sojourn. On the other hand, no significant changes were found concerning lexical fluency, lexical density or lexical sophistication. This indicates that some skills need more time to develop, whereas some other skills are more sensitive to capturing development (Briggs, 2015; Llanes, 2019).

Gains in receptive vocabulary and lexical accuracy could tentatively be explained by the Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1981), which posits that interacting in the L2 and having to negotiate meanings with other speakers fosters L2 development. Participants in the present study reported having constant interactions with native and non-native speakers of English, and being continuously exposed to English. Moreover, while abroad, learners found themselves constantly negotiating meanings with the people they met in order to get their messages across. To the same aim, they presumably needed to use their vocabulary as accurately as possible when having conversations with other students, teachers, and other

interlocutors in order to avoid any misunderstandings and get meaning across. Hence, participants were required to have a certain control of the L2, which could have fostered their receptive vocabulary and lexical accuracy improvement. However, interactions tended to be oral, which may explain why participants did not show significant improvement in their written skills. Additionally, most of these interactions were with other international students who might not have used complicated (or sophisticated) vocabulary in their speech. Accordingly, this could have led participants to generally engage in informal conversations, which could be the reason for their lack of improvement in lexical density or lexical sophistication.

No differences were found between the two SA experiences in terms of L2 vocabulary development, with participants in both groups presenting similar results (i.e. improvement in receptive vocabulary and lexical accuracy and lack of thereof in terms of lexical density, fluency and sophistication). It seems, therefore, that participants had the same opportunities to improve in both contexts. Again, this could be explained by the fact that regardless of their type of stay participants in both groups engaged in different activities where they used English (e.g. at social events, in their accommodation, etc.). As many authors have asserted, SA experiences provide unique opportunities for learners to interact in the L2 (Llanes & Muñoz, 2013). Moreover, learners must adapt to formal and informal contexts and integrate their explicit knowledge into everyday situations, which leads to much L2 practice (Collentine & Freed, 2004). Nonetheless, it is the learners' choice to make an effort and actually engage in the L2 community and this will be key to the development of participants' L2 (Isabelli-Garcia, 2006). It seems that participants in both types of experiences persevered in the use of the L2 and this helped them to develop some areas of the L2. Not surprisingly, those areas that were not much practised did not show the same benefits. Finally, it must be highlighted that some participants in the ELFSA group also practised an additional language (namely French or German), and the practice of an additional language did not run counter to the English development. In other words, improvement in an additional language was not at the expense of English development.

The last research question posed whether participants in both contexts would use the L2 to the same extent or whether one would render more opportunities for L2 practise than the other. In

general, participants in both groups used English to a similar extent, which led learners in both groups to learn English in a comparable way. In terms of formal instruction, none of the participants enrolled in an L2 reading course. In fact, most of them did not enrol in any English language course. Only a few declared attending some language classes, in which all language skills were practised to a similar extent; nonetheless, learners' responses established that more attention was generally given to oral skills. Hence, this shows that all students received a comparable amount of L2 instruction.

When it came to English classes and English use at university, differences existed between the groups because those in the traditional SA only had lessons in English, while half of the ELFSA participants declared to also have some classes in French or German. Therefore, the exceptions in the use of English as an L2 while abroad rely on the fact that some participants in the ELFSA group also tried exercising an additional language, which they also had been learning for some years. This was the case for 6 participants who had French (n= 4) or German (n= 2) as an additional language and took advantage of their location (France, Belgium or Germany). Therefore, in some cases the use of an additional language led to less use of English (e.g. English use at university). Nonetheless, in other situations, traditional SA participants used Catalan/Spanish more than those in the ELFSA group did, which counterbalances the fact that ELFSA students had the French or German interference. As an illustration of this, when asked about which language they used the most at home, 34.62% of the traditional SA participants declared using their "L1" whereas only 11.76% of the participants in the ELFSA group stated doing so (they used English (76.47%) or French (11.76 %) instead).

The present study is in line with Kalocsai (2014) and Jenkins (2014) who claimed that, even though an additional language was present in the ELFSA context, participants still employed English in most of their social encounters due to the role of the language as today's lingua franca. In terms of speaking in English, participants' answers show that half the participants in each group communicated in English for more than five hours. Interestingly, some participants in the ELFSA group reported more English interactions than participants in the traditional SA group (who showed a greater use of their L1), especially at home. On the other hand, ELFSA participants declared some use of a language different to English at parties and

social events, whereas 84% in the traditional stays established that English was the only language they used at these events. Again, the results in the present study suggest that even when an additional language comes into play during a SA experience it does not prevent learners from still practising and improving their English L2. Overall, no large differences exist between the uses of English in both contexts.

Conclusion

The present study provides evidence that traditional SA experiences and ELFSA ones are quite comparable in terms of L2 development and use. This study suggests that, more than the destination country, what really makes a difference when performing a SA experience is the amount and type of activities in which participants engage while abroad, together with their willingness to interact with the L2. In this manner, the results obtained here support the theory that the mere fact of being in a foreign country (either Anglophone or non-Anglophone) will not foster L2 development unless skills are practised which, to a great extent, depends on the sojourners' willingness to do so. Findings show that the SA context speeds the learning process but it will not do so unless learners use the L2.

The present study offers an original contribution to the SA field since it examines some rather under-researched areas and a context to which not much attention has previously been paid (namely ELFSA). Nonetheless, there are some limitations to be considered. First, it would have been suitable to include a group AH in order to determine whether the different areas analysed could have improved in that context since it seems that what helps learners improve L2 reading and productive vocabulary is not learning context, but the amount of practice received. Therefore, it seems reasonable to believe that enrolling in an L2 reading/writing course AH could help learners improve these skills. Another limitation of this study is that it only looks at L2 reading and vocabulary development. Participants abroad tend to practise other areas of the language to a larger extent (e.g. oral skills); therefore, it would be interesting to investigate whether there are differences between contexts in terms of pronunciation or pragmatic development, for example.

In the present study, development of an additional language was not examined, even though some of the participants in the ELFSA context claimed that they had used the local language a great deal. Consequently, it would be interesting that further research examined whether

participants in an ELSFA setting show some enhancement in the local languages. Finally, something that should be researched is whether outcomes in the ELFSA context could change depending on the destination country. In other words, whether travelling to countries in Northern Europe (e.g. Denmark or Sweden) is more or less beneficial in terms of L2 development than travelling to countries in Southern Europe (i.e. Italy or Greece). All of this would provide important information, which could be used by universities and international offices to ameliorate their practices and help SA participants enhance their experiences abroad.

On the whole, the findings in the present study are positive in that they show that there are no significant differences in the outcomes that traditional SA and ELFSA experiences provide, at least when it comes to L2 reading and L2 vocabulary, and the amount of opportunities for L2 use that both settings provide. Taking into account that nowadays many students cannot study in Anglophone countries, this investigation gives support to those students who decide to undertake a SA experience in a country where English is not the official language. Hence, confirming that travelling to an Anglophone country will provide comparable outcomes to going to a country where English is used as a lingua franca.

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Appendix A. Summary of the questions used from the questionnaire

Variable	Question
Formal English instruction	How many hours of English classes per week did you have while abroad?
Oral communication in English	How many hours did you spend speaking English?
Language(s) generally used	In general, which language did you use the most?
Language(s) at home	Which language was more used at home?
Language(s) at university	Which language did you use more at university?
Language(s) at social events	Which language did you use more at social events/parties?
Amount of reading	How much time did you spend reading while abroad?
Formal reading & writing practise	Was any specific English reading/writing class done while abroad?

4.5. Summary of the results

The present dissertation had different objectives which were investigated in a 4-paper format. In this section the different research questions and results have been presented separately. To sum up, the first paper identified five main gaps in the SA literature, which set the bases for the present investigation. These gaps were: 1) lack of research on L2 reading development, 2) mixed-results in terms of L2 vocabulary and lack of research examining both receptive and productive vocabulary within the same study, 3) low number of studies including young(er) participants, 3) low number of studies including short SA experiences, 4) scarce research on the ELFSA setting, and 5) little research on the impact of social networks on L2 development. For this reason, the three other the papers attempted to shed some light on the aforementioned gaps.

Findings in paper two indicate that teenagers who participate in summer programmes abroad take advantage of the setting in terms of L2 learning. More specifically, participants in paper two performed a 3-week summer stay in Ireland and they showed significant gains in L2 reading comprehension and fluency, receptive vocabulary and lexical accuracy. Thus, this paper indicates that SA experiences can be beneficial even when short. Another finding that arises from this paper is that neither learners' initial proficiency level nor their initial vocabulary level were related to the gains they showed after the stay. Hence, this paper suggests that all learners had the same chances of improving their L2.

Paper three presents the outcomes that a group of undergraduate students showed after a semester-long in an English-speaking country. Significant development was found in terms of reading comprehension, receptive vocabulary, and lexical accuracy, but not regarding reading fluency, lexical fluency, lexical density, or lexical sophistication. Concerning the relationship between initial proficiency and vocabulary level, some correlations were found in this study. These correlations seem to indicate that a lower level of vocabulary at the outset of the stay benefitted learners in terms of receptive vocabulary, but it was disadvantageous in terms of reading comprehension. One final correlation showed that participants with a lower proficiency level before the stay were the ones to make more gains in reading comprehension.

Finally, findings in the last paper indicate that performing a stay in a traditional SA context is as (dis)advantageous as doing so in an ELF country since no significant differences were found between the groups in any of the measures analysed. Thus, the last paper indicates that learners have the same opportunities to enhance their L2, regardless of the destination of their stay. Nonetheless, it is important to highlight that, although differences between groups were not significant, the students in the traditional SA context improved their reading comprehension significantly from pre- to post-test, whereas those in the ELFSA one did not.

Altogether, it seems that participating in a SA experience can help L2 development, at least to some extent. Nonetheless, outcomes vary depending on the group and measure under-study. In terms of reading comprehension, for example, significant improvement was found in the group of adolescents who performed a 3-week stay in Ireland and in the group of university students who travelled to the UK and the USA. However, no amelioration was found in the third group, namely those students who performed their stay in an ELF country. Concerning reading fluency, although the three groups started reading somehow faster, only the teenage group enhanced their reading fluency skills significantly after their stay, whereas the remaining two did not show any significant improvement in this measure. More uniform findings were discovered in terms of L2 vocabulary development since all groups enhanced their receptive vocabulary and lexical accuracy significantly. At the same time, the three groups showed a slight improvement in their lexical fluency, and none of the groups strengthened their lexical density nor their lexical sophistication. Table 10 below summarizes the results in the three empirical studies.

Table 10. Summary of the findings in the empirical studies

Measure	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3
	Three-week SA by teenagers	Semester-long SA in an Anglophone country by undergraduates	Semester-long traditional SA vs. ELFSA by undergraduates
Reading comprehension	✓	✓	- Traditional SA ✓
			- ELFSA ✗
Reading fluency	✓	✗	- No significant differences between ELFSA and traditional SA
			- Traditional SA ✓ (not sig)
			- ELFSA ✓ (not sig)
Receptive vocabulary	✓	✓	- No significant differences between ELFSA and traditional SA
			- Traditional SA ✓
			- ELFSA ✓
			- No significant differences

			between ELFSA and traditional SA
Lexical accuracy	✓	✓	- Traditional SA ✓
			- ELFSA ✓
			- No significant differences between ELFSA and traditional SA
Lexical fluency	✓(not sig)	✓ (not sig)	- Traditional SA ✓ (not sig)
			- ELFSA ✓ (not sig)
			- No significant differences between ELFSA and traditional SA
Lexical density	X	X	- Traditional SA X
			- ELFSA X
			- No significant differences between ELFSA and traditional SA

Lexical sophistication	<i>X</i>	<i>X</i>	- Traditional SA <i>X</i> ELFSA <i>X</i>
			- No significant differences between ELFSA and traditional SA

Chapter V

Discussion

This dissertation aimed at filling some of the existing gaps within the literature of SA. Accordingly, the purpose of the study was to gain a better understanding of the linguistic impact that different study abroad experiences have over L2 reading comprehension and fluency, and L2 receptive and productive vocabulary development. Three different SA experiences and two different age groups were included in the project: A group of teenagers performing a short (3-week) SA experience, and a group of undergraduate students who participated either in a traditional SA experience or in an ELFSA one. The present chapter reviews the findings in the previous section and it discusses them in light of the literature presented in chapter two. Following the structure of the results section, this chapter is organized around the four papers that have guided the dissertation. Finally, a general discussion of all the findings is offered as a conclusion of the section.

5.1. Gaps in the literature

The first paper, *Re-examining the impact of SA experiences: A critical overview* (Section 4.1), evolved around the areas that have received less attention within SA research. Hence, it aimed at answering the first research question (RQ1): “Which are the areas that need further research within the literature of study abroad?” This first paper had two main objectives: First, to provide an overview of the studies that investigated English L2 development as a result of a SA experience from 2011 to 2018. Second, to determine which areas needed further research within the SA literature. Five main gaps arose from this first study: studies including young(er) participants and short(er) experiences (< 5 weeks), the new ELFSA context, the impact that social networks and L2 contact can have on L2 development, and more consistent studies on L2 reading and L2 vocabulary.

When reviewing the literature of SA experiences, it becomes apparent that research has tended to focus on undergraduate students travelling abroad for one or two semesters. Therefore, while there is much research on the impact that semester-long sojourns have on university students, little is known about the effects of short SA experiences and how being

abroad affects younger learners such as children or teenagers. The fact that undergraduate students have been the focus of most of the studies may be because this population generally participates in sojourns organized by public institutions or programmes; hence, they are relatively easy to track. On the other hand, when it comes to younger age groups, participants are more difficult to find because many times they perform stays abroad through private institutions. As an illustration of this, data from the ERASMUS programme (participants, results, and any other piece of information) are available online (European Commission), which allows researchers to access much information on university students travelling abroad within the European Union.

However, when attempting to find similar information on other populations, the task becomes nearly impossible because no public or private institution offers such data. Overall, the lack of research on younger age groups may be a consequence of the fact that tracking these groups is more difficult than doing so with university students. Consequently, younger age groups have been left under-researched, as is the case of children and teenagers (Llanes & Muñoz, 2013). In addition, it is important to note that university students have traditionally been the most common population of SA. To have children study abroad is a rather recent phenomenon, which has been gaining popularity during the 21st century. This may be because university students have access to more scholarships than younger learners. As an example of this, in Europe the ERASMUS programme offers grants to over four million people to train or study abroad (European Commission, 2020c). Moreover, many universities offer specific funding in order to encourage students to perform a stay abroad. Altogether, the fact that university students have traditionally been the main population of SA may explain the fewer number of studies on the younger populations.

In her state-of-the-art, Llanes (2011) already raised awareness of this gap by saying that there was a clear lack of research on younger learners. She stated that of all the studies in her article only one (Llanes, 2010) had examined the effects of SA on children and just a few had done so with adolescents. The author claimed that it was crucial for further research to invest efforts in filling the age gap because SA experiences are becoming extremely common nowadays not only for adults but for people of all ages. Thus, it is necessary to know to what extent these experiences can affect children and adolescents. More recently, the author and

her colleagues carried out more research on the topic in an attempt to fill the gap (Llanes, 2012; Llanes et al., 2012; Serrano et al., 2014; Serrano et al., 2016). As a consequence, nowadays more studies are found regarding the topic compared to the five provided in Llanes (2011). Nonetheless, in the first paper of this dissertation, out of the 40 studies reviewed, just six investigated a group of children and only five did so with adolescents. Hence, even though a few studies have appeared during the last years, it is clear that these age groups have not received much consideration by SA researchers.

Similarly, most of the studies within SA research investigate the impact that one or two semesters (longer SA) sojourns have on L2 development. This may be because some researchers believe that short experiences abroad may not provide learners enough time to develop their L2 skills. However, when reviewing the literature, the general finding is that short SA experiences are positive for the learners' L2 (Evans & Fisher, 2005; Llanes & Prieto, 2015; Rodrigo, 2011). Especially within the European context, when referring to short programmes abroad, the most popular option are language programmes that take place during the summer and generally last for two to four weeks (Llanes & Muñoz, 2009). Nonetheless, as mentioned before, these programmes are normally organized by private institutions, which makes it more difficult to track them. Therefore, a plausible explanation to the insufficient amount of studies examining shorter sojourns may rely on the fact that they are more difficult to find and, consequently, researchers choose to explore longer ones.

The third gap that arose from the state-of-the-art was ELFSA experiences abroad. The fact that ELFSA programmes have not been investigated to the same extent as traditional SA ones may be due to the fact that the former are a rather new trend. In the past, SA studies compared the traditional SA context to the AH one (Pérez-Vidal, 2014), or simply students who travelled to a country where the L2 was the official language (Mitchell et al., 2017). The ELFSA context is quite a recent phenomenon to which researchers had not previously paid attention. Therefore, the fact that there are only a few studies investigating its effects on L2 development may rely on its rather recent nature (Köylü, 2016). Another explanation may be that the general picture for SA participants is that Anglophone countries offer the opportunity to communicate with native speakers of English, who are thought to be better role models than non-native speakers (Borghetti & Beaven, 2015; Güvendir, 2017). Findings in Güvendir

(2017) illustrate this belief since, when asked about why they chose to perform their stay in the USA, his participants declared that their main reasons were to interact with native speakers. Moreover, they emphasised the need to speak to Anglophone speakers in order to improve their L2. In sum, the deep-rooted belief that native speakers offer more opportunities to practise and improve English as an L2 could explain why researchers have tended to focus on traditional SA rather than on ELFSA experiences.

Generally, the few existing studies on the topic suggest that ELFSA experiences can be as beneficial as traditional SA ones in terms of L2 development, which provides a positive picture for the context. Moreover, especially within the European context, this is a very positive finding since it suggests that travelling to an English-speaking country is no longer necessary in order to improve one's English skills. As it is known, some of the countries where participants tend to perform their stays are under a quite uncertain situation. As an illustration of this, the United Kingdom going out of the European Union and, possibly, will stop being part of the ERASMUS programme will make it more difficult for European and other international students to study abroad at a British university. Another example is the new immigration policies in the United States, which are resulting in a slow growth in the numbers of SA participants going into the USA (Campus France, 2020). Altogether, the fact that learners of English can benefit from an ELFSA experience is a remarkably positive finding, especially for those students who are learning English as an L2. Furthermore, the investigation of this emerging context could lead to the understanding of the unexplored link between English as a lingua franca and multilingualism, which could be extremely positive since our world is becoming increasingly multilingual every day.

The fourth gap that emerged from the first paper is the role that social networks and L2 use play on L2 learning while abroad. For many years, researchers have provided evidence on the L2 development that learners present after having performed a stay abroad. However, they did not take into account the activities that students performed while living in the target country, or the connections they acquired with other people. Coleman (2015) raised the question of why researchers have taken so long to investigate learners' social networks in order to understand the results that emerge from the testing. The author stated that asking participants questions such as who they spent time with, how many friends they had while abroad, or

which language they used for communication would provide a better insight into SA experiences. In the same line, Isabelli-Garcia et al. (2018) claimed that such quantitative studies “can give only an incomplete picture of SA” (p. 445) and that investigating learners’ individual differences would allow researchers to create a more consistent picture for SA. Accordingly, it seems that investigating what students do while abroad, the languages they use with the people they spend time with, or the activities they get involved with could provide a strong insight on SA experiences and help researchers understand their outcomes. Therefore, considering the relevance of taking into account the relationships created and the opportunities for L2 use while abroad, it was considered necessary to raise awareness on this topic so that researchers start using more detailed information when explaining their findings.

One last gap was highlighted in the first study of this dissertation. After conducting an exhaustive review of the SA literature, two areas were identified because they needed further research: L2 reading and L2 vocabulary. First, when reviewing the previous studies on SA, the lack of research on L2 reading becomes apparent. Some authors have already raised awareness on this gap by saying that reading was and continues to be the least investigated area within SA research (Isabelli-Garcia, et al., 2018; Kinginger, 2009; Llanes, 2011). A possible explanation as to why this occurs may be due to the design of SA programmes and the expectations that participants have towards the development of their aural skills rather than written or reading ones (Dufon, & Churchill, 2006; Isabelli-Garcia et al., 2018). That is to say, many times students assume that their aural skills will improve to a greater extent simply by being abroad and using the L2 for communication. On the other hand, the rest of the skills may not be practised to the same extent, which could partially explain why researchers have investigated these areas before others, as is the case for reading. Altogether, the lack of research on L2 reading makes it necessary to perform some studies on this skill in order to determine whether SA would promote the development of the learners’ reading abilities. As Iwasaki (2007) said, even though oral or listening skills may show an enhancement after a SA experience, the same will not necessarily hold true for other skills such as reading.

Additionally, one last objective that emerged from this state-of-the-art was the need to examine L2 vocabulary development with a more consistent methodology in order to provide

a uniform picture to the area. Generally, research on L2 vocabulary in a SA context has offered different findings depending on the measure under analysis. On the one hand, studies on the topic seem to agree on the fact that learners will increase their receptive vocabulary knowledge, that is, they will learn different new words as a result of the stay. However, when it comes to productive vocabulary research has brought mixed findings to the area, since some scholars claim that some measures of productive vocabulary will develop after a stay abroad, and others stating that this development will not happen unless a certain amount of time and practise is performed while abroad.

Altogether, the inconclusiveness in these findings, especially those concerning productive vocabulary, makes it necessary for future studies to conduct research that investigates the impact of SA experiences on L2 vocabulary. Moreover, vocabulary is an essential aspect of the language that is needed to perform any task in the L2. As Milton (2009) claimed, vocabulary is of paramount importance when learning a second language or an aspect that can be disposed, which exposes why it is necessary to investigate the impact that stays abroad may have on L2 vocabulary development. During the years, vocabulary has been studied to a larger extent than reading, nonetheless, because of its multifaceted nature it is difficult to measure different aspects of the lexicon within the same study and, hence, previous research has tended to focus on either receptive or productive vocabulary (Schmitt, 2010). Accordingly, it seems essential that future studies attempt to investigate both dimensions in order to provide a broader picture on the area. Using texts to examine both receptive and vocabulary will allow researchers to test multiple aspects of knowledge and, as Webb (2005, p. 504) declared provide “a much more accurate assessment of the degree and type of learning that has occurred”.

In sum, after discussing the conclusions that emerged from the first paper, it was decided that the aforementioned gaps would be examined in terms of L2 reading and vocabulary development. Consequently, the following empirical studies (papers two, three and four) had the following objectives:

- To investigate L2 reading comprehension and fluency, and L2 receptive and productive vocabulary after different SA experiences

- To determine the impact that short SA have on a group of teenagers in light of the aforementioned measures
- To compare the traditional SA context to the ELFSA one, both in terms of linguistic outcomes and opportunities for L2 use
- To account for learners' individual differences by establishing whether initial proficiency and vocabulary level are related to the gains presented after the stay (if any)

The following sections will discuss the empirical findings in the present dissertation.

5.2. Short SA and teenagers

Taking into account the previously noted gaps within the SA literature, the second paper, *L2 reading and vocabulary development after a short Study Abroad experience*, aimed at answering the second research question (RQ2): “Will a short (3-week) SA experience have a positive impact on a group of teenagers’ L2 reading comprehension, reading fluency, receptive vocabulary and productive vocabulary?” Accordingly, this paper investigated whether a group of teenagers would benefit from a short (3-week) SA experience in terms of L2 reading (comprehension and fluency) and L2 vocabulary (productive and receptive). An additional objective was to determine whether learners’ initial proficiency or vocabulary level would have an impact on their L2 gains (if any) in order to account for learners’ individual differences. Hence, this paper provided an answer to the fourth research question (RQ4): “Are initial vocabulary knowledge and initial proficiency level related to gains in L2 reading (if any)?”

Findings in this paper showed that even a short SA experience can have a positive impact on L2 reading comprehension and fluency, and on receptive vocabulary development. Nonetheless, results were not so promising in terms of productive vocabulary since participants only showed significant gains in terms of lexical accuracy. Finally, no correlations were found between learners’ initial proficiency and vocabulary level and the gains they showed in reading comprehension and fluency, which suggested that all the participants, regardless of their initial L2 level, had the same opportunities for improvement.

As mentioned above, learners in the second study improved both reading measures significantly, which suggests that a short SA experience can be positive for L2 reading development. This finding is in line with previous research that suggests that reading will develop after a stay abroad (Brecht et al., 1995; Kraut, 2017; Li, 2014). What is interesting from this study is that the length of stay in the target country was as short as three weeks, which adds to the value of short SA experiences abroad. Furthermore, participants in the study improved both their reading comprehension and their reading fluency; therefore, they not only understood L2 texts better after the stay, but also they were able to read them faster.

Altogether, the answer to the first research question in the paper is remarkably positive. A tentative explanation to this finding lies on the intensive immersion that the SA programme offered to its participants (Gautier & Chevrot, 2015; Muñoz, 2012). Learners in the study were massively exposed to English during the three weeks they spent in Ireland. They spent their mornings and afternoons in class or performing different activities with teachers who were native speakers of English. Additionally, they lived with a host family, with whom they spent every evening and the weekends. It is also important to note that neither the teachers at the school nor the host family spoke the students' L1; consequently, the students were forced to use the L2 continuously by means of communication. Overall, it is possible that this extensive exposure to the L2 helped learners to enhance their reading skills.

Furthermore, previous research provides evidence that the combination of formal instruction and informal opportunities to practise the language offers the optimal conditions for L2 development to take place (Kinginger, 2009; Llanes & Muñoz, 2013). Hence, it is possible that the combination of L2 lessons, the afternoon activities and living with a host family affected their L2 reading development. Finally, it is important to note that, when the teachers were informally interviewed, they stated that all areas of language were extensively practised during the morning classes and that, although more emphasis was put on oral skills and vocabulary activities, there was some L2 reading practise involved. In particular, the students completed different reading comprehension tasks that consisted of reading a text and answering some comprehension questions, and they used different L2 passages to learn vocabulary (i.e. find a word with a specific meaning, synonyms, etc.).

The second research question asked whether learners would improve their L2 receptive and productive vocabulary after a short SA experience. It was found that the students improved their receptive vocabulary significantly, but only one measure of productive vocabulary, namely lexical accuracy. The fact that students improved their receptive vocabulary is consistent with the previous literature, which suggests that studying abroad will increase the learners' knowledge of new words (Ife et al., 2000; Jiménez-Jiménez, 2010; Milton & Meara, 1995). In fact, a closer look into the receptive vocabulary test suggests that the students learnt words that are likely to be encountered in the SA context (e.g. 'sheet', 'alley', 'forbid'), which suggests that the stay offered the students the opportunity to be exposed and learn everyday English vocabulary (as in Dewey, 2008).

On the other hand, previous studies on productive vocabulary suggest that learners need long(er) periods abroad in order to show significant gains in their productive lexicon and that, sometimes, even one semester abroad may not be enough for certain aspects of the lexicon to develop (Briggs, 2015; Jensen & Howard, 2014; Lara, 2014). Hence, it is possible that while the amount of exposure learners received while abroad was enough for them to learn the meaning of new words and consequently show improvement in receptive vocabulary, it was not enough for learners to show significant gains in terms of productive vocabulary. Interestingly, one aspect of productive vocabulary did improve significantly, namely lexical accuracy. Initially, this was a bit unexpected because previous research has found that learners show an improvement in their lexical fluency before they do so in terms of lexical accuracy (Barquin, 2012; Pérez-Vidal & Juan-Garau (2014), at least when productive vocabulary is examined through written tasks. In fact, some investigations have found that three months abroad may not be enough for participants to become more lexically accurate (Pérez-Vidal & Juan-Garau, 2014).

Nonetheless, as mentioned before, the learners in this study learnt many new words and received much L2 practise both formally and informally, and this could have affected their lexical accuracy significantly. When looking at the students' writings in the pre- and post-test, it was found that students started making appropriate distinctions between homophones (e.g. leave/live), they reduced the amount of made-up words (e.g. tought vs. played the flute), and they made more accurate lexical choices (e.g. I went on a travel vs. I went on a trip) (see

Paper 2 for more examples). Therefore, when examining the texts it became apparent that the words that students were using more accurately had probably been encountered at the language school or with their host families who, as stated by the students, usually corrected them when they made a lexical or grammatical mistake.

One last finding from this paper is that gains in reading (comprehension and fluency) were not related to the learners' initial L2 proficiency or vocabulary level. This finding suggests that all the students had the same chances to improve their reading skills while abroad regardless of their lexical or grammatical level at the outset of the stay. This finding is interpreted as positive since it suggests that SA can be positive for all teenagers, not only for those who have a specific level at the beginning of the stay. That is to say, learners will have the same opportunities for improvement irrespective of their initial proficiency and vocabulary level, at least when it comes to reading development. Albeit this result being positive, it seems to contradict previous studies that have found that the threshold level can have a strong impact on the amount of L2 advancement after the visit (Brecht et al., 1995).

Generally, studies have found that the lower the level at the beginning of the visit, the higher the gains produced by the learners, possibly because there is more room for improvement (Llanes & Muñoz, 2009; Juan-Garau, 2014). Nonetheless, some studies have declared that learners need to have a certain control over the L2 before going abroad in order to capture gains during the stay because a higher level will allow them to access more materials and have a stronger access to the language and culture (DeKeyser, 2007; Li, 2014). Overall, the relation between the students' threshold level and their L2 gains depends, to a certain extent, on the skill under study. To date, no study has examined the effect that the threshold level can have over L2 reading gains when the participants under study are teenagers. Moreover, the only study that has investigated the relations between threshold level and gains in L2 reading (Li, 2014) held three clearly distinguished proficiency groups (beginner, intermediate and advanced), whereas most of the students in the present investigation had a beginner level and only a few an intermediate one. Hence, a plausible explanation to why initial proficiency or vocabulary level did not affect the students' reading gains may rely on the rather low level all student had at the outset of the stay.

The level of the students in this study ranged between an A1 and a B1, with most of them having an A2 level (n= 31), hence, it is possible that the fact that all of them had a rather low level at the beginning did not allow threshold level to really affect their reading gains. A closer look into the students who improved reading comprehension the most shows that their proficiency level varied between an A1 and an A2: 22/60 (A2), 20/60 (A2) and 11/60 (A1), and their vocabulary knowledge was quite low: 46/150, 61/150, and 87/150. At the same time, the students who improved reading comprehension the least also had a rather low proficiency and vocabulary level at the beginning of the stay: 25/60 (A2) and 94/150 (vocabulary), 27/60 (A2) and 66/150 (vocabulary). The same holds true in terms of reading fluency improvement, with the student who improved the most having a B1 proficiency level (34/60) and a high vocabulary knowledge (130/150), followed by a student who held a much lower proficiency level (A1: 17/60) and a 116/150 vocabulary knowledge. Similarly, the students who developed their reading fluency the least had an A2 proficiency level (28/60) and 113/150 vocabulary level, and an A2 level (28) and 114/150 vocabulary knowledge. Therefore, a closer look into the students' results reflects how proficiency and vocabulary level seemed not to really account for gains in reading comprehension, which is in line with other studies that also found no correlation between students' threshold level and gains in their L2 (Ife et al., 2000).

It is possible that other factors such as motivation or willingness to use the L2 and learn from the experience had a stronger impact on this group of students rather than their initial proficiency level. Previous studies have in fact found that these emotional aspects of the individuals can have a strong impact on L2 development (Dewaele, Comanaru, & Faraco, 2015; Trenchs-Parera & Pérez-Vidal, 2014). As an example, Saito, Dewaele, Abe and In'nami (2018) provided evidence of the strong influence that motivation, emotion and experience profiles had on a group of English learners, which illustrates that students' feelings towards the SA experience could have a strong impact on their L2 development. In the informal semi-structured interviews that were performed with a sub-sample of the group, all the students described the experience with very positive feelings, stating that they had learnt from the experience (both personally and academically), and that the fact that they were surrounded by the English language and culture continuously had been very positive for their L2 development. Moreover, all of them remarked that their host families had been excellent

and understanding, which created a very friendly environment that allowed them to use the language freely and be willing to talk to them. One student even said that she had felt an inflection point one night when she was making a video call with her parents in Catalonia and introduced them to her host family. She said that she spent thirty minutes translating what everyone was saying so that there could be some communication, and that, in that moment, she really felt that she was improving her English. Nonetheless, examining these rather qualitative aspects of the experience was beyond the scope of this paper. Therefore, although it is possible that such aspects had an impact on the students' L2 development, this was not part of the project and it remains unknown.

5.3. Semester-long SA and undergraduate students

The third paper, *Investigating the impact of a semester-long study abroad programme on L2 reading and vocabulary development*, held the same objectives and similar research questions to the second one. However, for this third study the participants were undergraduate students who studied abroad for a semester. Overall, the paper attempted to answer research question three (RQ3): “Will a traditional semester-long SA experience have a positive impact on a group of undergraduates' L2 reading comprehension, reading fluency, receptive vocabulary and productive vocabulary?” Thus, the first objective was to determine whether a semester-long SA experience would have a positive impact on the learners' L2 reading and vocabulary development. Moreover, participants' initial proficiency and vocabulary levels were taken into account to investigate whether they were related to the gains (if any) shown by learners. Hence, this paper also provided an answer to the fourth research question (RQ4): “Are initial vocabulary knowledge and initial proficiency level related to gains in L2 reading and/or L2 vocabulary (if any)”.

Results in the third study showed that learners improved their reading comprehension, receptive vocabulary, lexical accuracy, and lexical fluency. However, no development was found in terms of reading fluency, lexical density, and lexical sophistication. Concerning the correlations between initial proficiency, vocabulary level and L2 gains, it was found that those students who had a lower vocabulary level at the outset of their sojourn were the ones to make more progress in receptive vocabulary, but less gain in reading comprehension. Furthermore, a third correlation was found between learners' initial proficiency level and

gains in reading comprehension, which could indicate that learners with a lower level at the outset developed their reading comprehension to a larger extent than those who held a higher proficiency level before participating in the experience.

The first objective of the third research paper was to examine the impact of a semester-long SA experience in an Anglophone country on the L2 reading development of a group of university students. Results showed that, although participants improved their reading comprehension significantly, the same did not hold true in terms of reading fluency, which remained practically the same after the stay. This implies that learners were able to understand the reading passages to a greater extent after the stay, but they did not read the texts faster. Previous research also indicates that reading comprehension will benefit from a stay abroad (Lapkin et al. 1995; Li 2014). Therefore, the present study is in line with those that assert that performing a sojourn in the target country will boost the learners' reading comprehension skills. This finding can be explained in light of the students' enhanced proficiency and vocabulary (Grabe, 2009; Milton 2009; Zaytseva, 2016). As explained above, the students in the present study improved their receptive vocabulary significantly and it is possible that this larger knowledge of L2 words aided the students when reading a text in English. Moreover, although this was not a research question of the project, the students also improved their proficiency level (as indicated by their scores in the OPT) significantly, showing a greater general control over the L2. Altogether, this developed lexical and grammatical command of the L2 could have been positively reflected on the learners' reading comprehension skills.

Nonetheless, the same does not hold true in terms of reading fluency since, generally, the students did not read the texts faster after the stay. Therefore, it seems that in terms of reading fluency, an increased general control over the L2 did not help the students to increase their reading speed. This finding contradicts Kraut (2017), the only study that has investigated reading fluency after a stay abroad so far. A possible explanation for the differences between Kraut's study and the present may rely on the participants' L1. Traditionally, Chinese and Arabic learners represent the two largest groups who join an IEP course while abroad (Kraut, 2017), which may be due to their lower level and their need to be involved in a language course in order to have a successful stay. Learners in Kraut (2017) were Arabic (n= 15) and

Korean (n= 1), which suggests that they may have needed these extra classes in order to enhance their English level. As an example of this, the alphabets between the participants in Kraut's study and English are different in nature, which may imply that it may be more challenging for learners to read and decode L2 texts. Likewise, Arabic is read from left to right, whereas English (as well as Catalan and Spanish) is read from right to left. Overall, it seems that these differences between the participants' L1 in Kraut and the present study could at least partially explain the differences in the learners' outcomes.

Nonetheless, participants' in Kraut (2017) were part of an intensive programme abroad that promoted the practise of the four skills to a large extent. Students in Kraut's study spent twenty-two hours a week in an English course, which provided them the combination of the naturalistic context and the intensive exposure of participating in a language course while abroad, and this probably aided their reading fluency significantly. On the other hand, most students in the present study did not take part in any English language course (80.1%), and the few that stated taking part in one claimed that oral skills were practised far more than the rest of the skills. Therefore, the amount of exposure to L2 print in Kraut's (2017) and the present study received differs greatly, which could explain why the studies do not provide the same findings. In fact, what appears to promote reading fluency is extensive practise (Huffman, 2014). Accordingly, research suggests that what is needed in order to acquire a faster speed is to actually read much in the L2. As an example, some authors have already established how lack of practise can become a problem when reading in the L2, simply because L2 readers are not exposed to enough L2 print (Grabe & Stollen, 2002; Hudson et al., 2005).

At first, it may seem that during a SA experience the students will have many opportunities to find L2 texts and that this will help their reading fluency development. Nevertheless, it seems that they will not do so unless they actually try to read L2 texts extensively. That is, although the SA setting may provide students with more opportunities to be exposed to L2 print, this does not seem to be enough for the students to improve their reading skills in the L2. As an illustration of this, in the questionnaire, the students stated that they did not make any efforts to read in the L2 while abroad, and that reading, together with writing, was the skill that they practised the least. In fact, when asked about their perception towards improvement in reading

comprehension and fluency, the students seem to be more positive towards comprehension improvement than fluency. As an example of this, most of students believe that they improved comprehension greatly (50%) or to some extent (46.2), but only some (30.8%) think they read faster after the stay, and one even declared not feeling any improvement at all.

Finally, it is important to mention the fact that, traditionally, in countries like Spain, reading is assessed by means of comprehension (i.e. how well the student understands something). That is, reading fluency is not generally examined in language classes, which may make learners not be aware of the fact that fluency is an important aspect of reading. Consequently, students in the present study may have primed comprehension over fluency, which could explain the absence of gains in the latter. In sum, it seems that reading comprehension is more susceptible to capturing gains after a stay abroad and that it might be a by-product of a SA. However, it seems that much practise and attention are needed for fluency to be significantly improved.

Findings in relation to the second research question, which asked whether a semester-long stay in an English-speaking country would have an impact on L2 receptive and productive vocabulary, suggest that the SA experience is significantly beneficial in terms of receptive vocabulary, but not so much for productive vocabulary. In line with previous studies on the topic, the present study provides evidence of the fact that students will learn many words after participating in a sojourn abroad (Dewey, 2008; Ife et al., 2000; Jiménez-Jiménez, 2010; Milton & Meara, 1995). It seems that the naturalistic nature of the SA context offers its participants enough exposure and/or practice of the L2 to enhance this aspect of language. Therefore, it appears reasonable to believe that studying abroad will boost the knowledge of new words by the mere fact that learners are surrounded by the L2 both in formal and informal situations. In fact, many researchers have already stated that the extensive exposure that naturalistic contexts provide could never happen at an AH setting. As an example of this, Milton (2009, p. 231) said that: “The volumes of interaction and the intensive nature of exposure that are possible on an overseas trip cannot possibly be recreated in the few hundred hours that may be available for foreign language classroom learning”.

In addition to this, Long’s Interaction Hypothesis (1985) may also explain the rapid increase in receptive vocabulary. Negotiation of meaning is a dominant feature of L2 conversations, where two speakers interact with each other and negotiate meaning in order to understand the

other and to be understood. Students in SA contexts possibly feel the need to learn new words and structures in order to be able to communicate with other people, and Long's theory states that these meaning negotiation situations will aid the learning. Therefore, it seems reasonable to believe that meeting new people (either native or other non-native speakers of English) will help L2 development, at least when it comes to receptive vocabulary. Nonetheless, this assumption should be taken with caution since it is unknown whether participants in the present study constantly interacted with native speakers or whether they did so with advanced L2 users. Moreover, the students were not asked about the kind of feedback they received during their L2 conversations while abroad, so it can only be assumed that some feedback took place and it raised the students' awareness towards their self-production and errors.

Results are not so clear in relation to productive vocabulary since improvement was found in half of the measures examined (lexical accuracy and lexical fluency), and only one improved significantly (lexical accuracy). Findings with regard to productive vocabulary have always been rather inconclusive, with some authors finding gains in some measures and others doing so in different ones. Nonetheless, there is some consensus in saying that the more productive aspects of vocabulary take longer than receptive ones to develop (Briggs, 2015). As a matter of fact, some studies have even confirmed that one semester abroad is not enough and two semesters in a foreign country are needed for productive measures to really enhance (Jensen & Howard, 2014; Lara, 2014, Laufer & Paribakht, 1998, Pérez-Vidal & Juan-Garau, 2011; Serrano et al., 2012).

Other studies have concluded that, similar to reading fluency, what is needed for these measures to develop is extensive practice, something that may not always happen during a SA experience. As an example of this, Laufer and Paribakht (1998) compared a group abroad to one AH and they established that, although the group abroad increased their receptive vocabulary to a larger extent, no big differences were found between the groups in terms of productive vocabulary. In fact, the only difference between these two groups favours the AH group, which significantly outscored the SA one in terms of lexical sophistication. This suggests that to improve their productive vocabulary, learners need extended practise rather than to just be immersed in the L2 world. Therefore, it appears that the mere fact of being in a

foreign country exposed to the L2 will not boost the learners' productive vocabulary unless an effort is made to actually practice this aspect of the language.

Altogether, the present paper is in line with previous research that finds that productive vocabulary, especially when examined through a written task, takes longer to develop than receptive vocabulary (Briggs, 2015; Laufer & Paribakht, 1998). Nonetheless, it contradicts those studies that mention that lexical fluency is more susceptible to gains and it will develop faster than other measures (Barquin, 2012; Lara, 2014; Pérez-Vidal & Juan-Garau, 2011). That is to say, previous research seems to establish that, of all productive measures of vocabulary, lexical fluency is more likely to be enhanced in a SA context. Hence, learners will write longer texts after the stay. In the present paper, the students did write longer texts after the stay; however, the changes in the number of words used in the pre-test were not significant. A possible explanation to this finding may rely on the topic of the writing task: "My life: Past, present and future expectations". It seems obvious that the topic of the task is not very complex, since it asks participants to describe their life. Therefore, although this task has been widely used within SA studies, it is possible that it did not allow learners to show their complete knowledge. In other words, it is possible that the differences in lexical fluency from the pre- to the post-test had reached significance if another prompt had been used to examine productive vocabulary.

On the other hand, this prompt was enough for learners to show their significantly enhanced lexical accuracy. This is in line with Zaytseva (2016) and Zaytseva, Miralpeix and Pérez-Vidal (2019), who also stated that SA participants become more lexically accurate after the stay. A possible explanation to this finding relies on the students' strengthened proficiency level and vocabulary knowledge. As previously mentioned, the students in the present study improved their receptive knowledge significantly and this could have impacted their accurate words of the new and the old words. Moreover, the participants also improved their general proficiency significantly and, as previous research remarks, as learners become more proficient, they will make fewer mistakes and become more accurate (Zaytseva et al. 2018). Overall, it is possible that improvement in receptive vocabulary and proficiency level aided the students' enhancement in lexical accuracy.

Another explanation may be related, again, to Long's Interaction Hypothesis (1985) and, in particular, with his reformulation of the hypothesis where Long proposed that during meaning negotiation negative feedback facilitates L2 learning (1996). In other words, when having a conversation in the L2, learners are many times made aware of their mistakes because other people "correct" them in order to understand their message. This feedback, together with negotiation of meaning, fosters a more accurate use of L2 words. Consequently, meaning negotiation and the interaction hypothesis could possibly explain gains in the students' lexical accuracy. As an example of this, when looking at the participants' writings, we find words or phrases such as: *idioms* (meaning languages), *career* (meaning degree), *dictature* (meaning dictatorship), *it went better for me* (meaning 'it suited me more'). Although some of these words may be understood by context, and in particular if you are a Catalan or Spanish speaker, native speakers of other languages may find it difficult to understand these items, and they may need some clarification which will possibly lead to the students to realize that they are not using the word correctly and, consequently, rectify.

Finally, the last research question in this third paper asked whether there were any relationships between initial vocabulary and proficiency knowledge and gains in reading, and vocabulary (if any). Three significant correlations were found after the analysis. The first one was a negative correlation between initial vocabulary knowledge and gains in receptive vocabulary, indicating that learners with a lower knowledge of the lexicon at the outset of the experience were the ones to learn more words after the stay. This finding is in line with those studies that indicate that the lower the level at the beginning, the more they are going to learn (Llanes & Muñoz, 2009; Juan-Garau, 2014). In terms of vocabulary, it was not surprising that those learners with a more advanced knowledge of vocabulary at the beginning of the stay learnt fewer words, since they had less room for improvement. As an example of this, the three students that had the highest knowledge of the lexicon at the pre-test, knew 138/150 words, 137/150 and 136/150, respectively. In contrast, those that knew the fewest words scored 81/150, 88/150 and 97/150 words. Taken together, in line with Milton and Meara (1995), it seems that those learners with a lower vocabulary knowledge at the beginning of the stay had more room for improvement and, consequently, were the ones to show greater enhancement in their word knowledge.

The second correlation was a positive correlation between initial vocabulary knowledge and gains in reading comprehension, which suggests that, in terms of reading comprehension, a higher lexical knowledge before the stay was beneficial to the learners. If we look at the strong relationship between reading and vocabulary that previous research has established, it seems logical to believe that having a stronger command of the L2 lexicon will aid students' comprehension of the text when reading in the L2 (Grabe, 2009; Milton, 2009; Zaytseva, 2016). As Zaytseva (2016) claimed, lack of vocabulary knowledge is the biggest impediment when reading a text even when learners are at an advanced level. Similarly, Nation (2006) and Schmitt (2008) determined that much vocabulary is needed in order to be able to use a language well, which is particularly true for reading. All things considered, it seems coherent that those participants who knew more words were the ones to score higher in terms of reading comprehension, since their larger lexical knowledge probably aided them when decoding the reading passages.

Moreover, it is possible that knowing more words in the L2 helped learners to infer the meaning of the words they did not know by context. That is, it is highly possible that students did not know all the words in the text, but those with richer vocabularies could rely on their lexicon in order to infer the meaning of the unknown words in the text. On the other hand, those who had a lower level of vocabulary probably found it more difficult to understand the text and to guess the meaning of a word simply by context. Consequently, they spend more time with the lower level mechanics of reading such as decoding instead of being able to read effortlessly and focusing on higher aspects such as comprehension (Huffman, 2014; Meyer & Felton, 1999). Overall, although these first two correlations may seem contradictory, they involve two different areas of language (vocabulary and reading), which tackle different mechanisms and characteristics. Accordingly, despite a lower initial knowledge of vocabulary affects vocabulary learning positively (i.e. those who knew fewer words were the ones to learn more words), the contrary occurs with reading gains (i.e. a higher vocabulary knowledge at the outset of the experience is related to gains in reading comprehension).

One final negative correlation was found between initial proficiency level and reading comprehension, implying that a lower proficiency level at the beginning of the stay correlated with gains in reading comprehension. Strikingly, although a higher knowledge of vocabulary

is beneficial for reading comprehension, the contrary occurs when initial proficiency level is examined. Albeit this seemingly contradictory finding, it is in line with previous research that suggests that lower level learners will increase their L2 reading comprehension to a larger extent than those who have a more advanced level at the start of the sojourn (Li, 2014; Llanes & Muñoz, 2009; Juan-Garau, 2014). This correlation could be at least partially explained in terms of L2 proficiency level improvement. As measured through the OPT, the learners improved their grammatical and lexical skills significantly during their stay in the target country, which may have allowed them to parse the reading passages more efficiently. Possibly, having a low proficiency level prevented participants in the present study from showing their full potential when completing the reading tasks at the pre-test. However, the increase in their general L2 knowledge allowed them to perform significantly better during the post-test. Therefore, it can be speculated that the learners' increased proficiency helped them to provide more accurate answers in the comprehension questions at the end of the stay.

5.4. Semester long traditional SA experience vs. an ELFSA one

The last paper in the present dissertation, *Traditional study abroad vs. ELFSA: Differences and similarities in linguistic outcomes and L2 use*, provided an answer to research questions five (RQ5) (“Will a semester-long traditional SA experience provide the same outcomes than an ELFSA one in terms of L2 reading and L2 vocabulary?”) and six (RQ6) (“To what extent do learners use the L2 while abroad in a traditional SA setting and in an ELFSA one?”). Therefore, its first goal was to determine to what extent participants in a traditional SA and an ELFSA setting would develop their L2 reading and L2 vocabulary skills, and whether this development would be similar regardless of the type of context (traditional SA vs. ELFSA). Secondly, it compared the amount of L2 use learners described receiving in each of the contexts in order to determine whether there were major differences in the L2 exposure that participants obtained in both settings. In general, this last paper attempted to dig deeper into the qualities of the SA and the ELFSA contexts.

Findings in this study provide evidence that no significant differences exist between traditional SA settings and ELFSA ones in terms of L2 development, namely L2 reading and vocabulary. Therefore, results seem to support the hypothesis that learners will have the same opportunities for L2 development regardless of type of stay, at least when it comes to reading

and vocabulary. Nonetheless, although differences between groups were not significant, one dissimilarity was found in the participants' reading outcomes. This was located in terms of reading comprehension since the traditional SA group improved it significantly whereas students in the ELFSA group did not. Some differences also appeared in the amount of L2 use made by students in the different groups, although both settings offered similar opportunities for L2 interaction. The main difference is that some participants in the ELFSA context took advantage of their setting and attempted to practise an additional language (generally French or German). In turn, those in the traditional SA setting tended to use their L1 to a greater extent, especially in their living arrangements.

The answer to the first research question in this fourth paper is positive since no significant differences appeared in the participants' L2 regardless of their type of stay (traditional vs. ELF). Therefore, it seems that students improved to a similar extent, irrespective of whether they performed a stay in an English-speaking country or in a non-Anglophone one. This finding is in line with previous research that suggests that both contexts can be as (dis)advantageous (Köylü, 2016; Llanes, 2019; Llanes et al., 2016). As an example of this, Köylü (2016) confirmed that both settings were equally beneficial in terms of L2 development. Moreover, the only difference found between the groups favoured the ELFSA one in that learners in this group created an ELF identity that made them feel more multilingual. Therefore, not only findings in Köylü (2016) suggest that traditional SA and ELFSA experiences are comparable, but also that the latter can trigger aspects of the self to a greater extent (as in Martin-Rubió & Cots, 2018).

In a similar vein, other studies investigating the impact of ELFSA experiences confirm that the ELFSA context is as beneficial as the traditional SA one. As is the case within traditional SA experiences, not all measures develop at the same time and, while some are more susceptible to gains, others will need more time to develop. This general finding suggests that outcomes after ELFSA, like those emerging from a traditional SA experience, need to be examined carefully. Overall, the present study is in line with the previously described finding since, although differences between groups are not significant, gains are only found in few of the measures examined (as in Llanes et al., 2016).

The scarce amount of reading practise that both groups received during their stays (as suggested by their answers in the questionnaire) could partially explain their lack of significant gains in terms of reading fluency. As previous research suggests, although reading comprehension may be more susceptible to gains, reading fluency needs much L2 reading practise and large amounts of time spent reading, and this is particularly true when reading in the L2 (Beglar et al., 2012; Huffman, 2014). In the questionnaire, most participants in both groups declared that they only read in the L2 for homework purposes (traditional SA = 64%, ELFSA = 82.4%). Therefore, this finding suggests that reading fluency is not a by-product of studying abroad, and that unless learners make an effort to spend time reading, the mere fact of being abroad does not necessarily offer enough opportunities to be exposed to L2 texts and, consequently, development may not be significant. This finding suggests that being abroad may not offer enough opportunities to read in the L2 for students to increase their reading fluency. Hence, it is in line with those SA studies which establish that SA experiences will not boost L2 development unless the learners strive to find opportunities for L2 use and practise (Freed et al., 2004; Isabelli-Garcia, 2006).

Interestingly, however, although differences between groups werenot significant, the traditional SA group improved their reading comprehension significantly, whereas the ELFSA one did not. Therefore, although neither of the groups received much L2 reading practise, students performing their stay in an Anglophone country benefitted from the stay in terms of reading comprehension, while the others did not. When doing a qualitative analysis of the students' answers in the questionnaire, some information that might account for these differences was found in the amount of English exposure they received in both contexts. As an example of this, differences were found in terms of formal use of English (i.e. at university). On the one hand, most learners in the traditional SA context had 3-5 hours of classes in English every week and 22.22% declared they had received even more than five hours of classes per week. On the other hand, those in the ELFSA setting had fewer hours of instruction in English (less than 1 = 23.53%, 1-3 = 35.29%).

Moreover, all the students in the traditional SA context declared that English was the only language they used at university, whereas only about half the participants in the ELFSA group (53%) declared that they used English at university because of their willingness to

practise/learn a third language, especially among participants based in France or Germany. Overall, these differences could explain why traditional SA participants improved their reading comprehension significantly, whereas those in the ELFSA group did not. It seems reasonable to believe that the combination of more formal instruction in the L2, together with the predominant use of English at university helped the first group to enhance their reading comprehension skills. On the contrary, the fewer hours of L2 instruction combined with the absence of reading practise could be used as a justification for the ELFSA participants' lack of improvement.

In terms of L2 vocabulary development, no differences exist between the groups. Learners in both settings improved their receptive vocabulary, lexical accuracy and lexical fluency (although improvement in the latter was not significant for none of the groups), whereas they did not show any progress in terms of lexical density and lexical sophistication. This finding has been consistent in the different studies that concern the present dissertation: generally, participants learnt many new words in the L2 and made fewer lexical mistakes in their writing. Moreover, despite differences from pre- to post-test not being significant for any of the groups, they tended to write longer text after the stay. Nonetheless, it seems that a SA experience does not necessarily trigger the writing of more dense and sophisticated texts. Improvement in receptive vocabulary is in line with previous research that suggests that performing a stay abroad boosts the students' knowledge of new words (Dewey, 2008; Ife et al., 2000; Jiménez-Jiménez, 2010; Milton & Meara, 1995). Thus, it supports the hypothesis that the accumulation of multiple incidental encounters with L2 words during a SA experience triggers the learning of new vocabulary (Grabe, 2009). Similarly, some studies within the literature of SA have asserted that, as learners become more proficient, they will become more accurate in their use of L2 words (Zaytseva et al. 2018). Therefore, the fact that participants in this study became more lexically accurate could be explained in terms of their improved receptive vocabulary and proficiency level.

The fact that some aspects of productive vocabulary were enhanced during the stay whereas others did not is also in line with the SA literature. Accordingly, SA research generally suggests that some aspects of the lexicon (generally lexical fluency and lexical accuracy) are more susceptible to gains, whereas others (such as lexical density and lexical sophistication)

need more time to develop (Briggs, 2015; Jensen & Howard, 2014; Lara, 2014). As an example of this, students in Zaytseva (2016), who spent three months in the target country, improved their lexical accuracy and fluency significantly. However, they did not show any changes in terms of lexical sophistication. Consequently, Zaytseva (2016) stated that her results were in line with previous research that suggests that some vocabulary aspects take longer to develop, and that lexical sophistication was possibly the measure that needs more time to do so. On the other hand, findings in Tracy-Ventura (2017) suggest that lexical sophistication can be improved as a result of a SA experience. In fact, not only participants in her study increased their knowledge of low frequency words during their stay, but they also used them more. What is different between Tracy-Ventura's (2017) study and Zaytseva's (2016) or the present is the duration of the SA programme, since students in Tracy-Ventura (2017) participated in a "year-abroad" experience, which implies that they spent the whole academic year in the target country.

Therefore, it seems that the aspects that did not improve significantly in the present study could potentially be enhanced as a result of a SA experience if more time was spent in the target country (Laufer & Paribakht, 1998; Pérez-Vidal & Juan-Garau, 2011; Serrano et al, 2012). Finally, another issue that could have affected the results is the topic of the written task ("My life: past, present and future expectations"). This prompt asked the students to write a description of their life, and it may have been rather simple for students to write denser or more sophisticated texts. Consequently, it is possible that a different topic could have promoted the students' chances to show their complete vocabulary knowledge.

In sum, it seems that when it comes to L2 development, traditional SA contexts and ELFSA ones offer comparable outcomes, even though some differences exist between the groups (i.e. the traditional SA group improved their reading comprehension significantly, whereas those in the ELFSA one did not), which may be related to individual differences and how each individual approached their SA experience. As many authors have asserted, SA experiences provide unique opportunities for students to use the L2, suggesting that they offer the most optimal conditions for L2 development to happen (Kinging, 2009; Llanes & Muñoz, 2013; Pérez-Vidal, 2015; Sanz, 2014). Additionally, while abroad, learners must adapt to both formal and informal situations where the L2 is used, which creates the necessity to integrate

their explicit knowledge into everyday situations (Collentine & Freed, 2004). Accordingly, it is possible that this constant practise aids the students' *automatization process* and, consequently, the students start using their L2 more naturally and with much less effort (DeKeyser, 2007a). The present study suggests that the previously mentioned statements are also true for contexts where English is not the official language, but where it is used by means of communication (as in Köylü, 2016; Llanes, 2019; Martin-Rubió & Cots, 2018). Therefore, this study suggests that performing a SA experience in a non-Anglophone country will be as beneficial as doing so in an Anglophone one. It seems that what helps L2 development are the opportunities for L2 use of which learners take advantage; that is, as Isabelli-Garcia (2006) already established, what appears to promote L2 development is to make an effort to use the L2 while abroad rather than the destination country.

The second research question in this paper compared the amount of L2 use made by the two groups (ELFSA and traditional SA) while abroad. Therefore, the final research question asked whether the two contexts offered different opportunities for L2 use and practise to their participants. It was found that, in general, students in both groups made comparable use of English while abroad, which led them to show similar outcomes in the tests. As an illustration of this, participants in both groups stated that reading was the skill that they practised the least, and none of them claimed having enrolled in an L2 reading course. In fact, most of them did not enrol in any English language course. Only a few, in both contexts, declared attending some language classes where they practised their English skills in a very general manner. Therefore, when it comes to English language instruction, no differences were found between the groups. Nonetheless, some differences existed, especially when it came to the more formal contexts, such as English use at university, because of the fact that participants in the ELFSA group took advantage of their destination country to also practise a third language (generally French or German). Accordingly, while the students in the traditional SA group only had lessons in English, half of the participants in the ELFSA one stated that some of their classes were taught in French or German. Therefore, as mentioned before, the differences in the use of English while abroad rely on the fact that some participants in the ELFSA group attempted to exercise a third language. This was the case for eight participants who were located in France (n= 3), Belgium (n= 1) or Germany (n= 4).

However, it is important to note that, while some students in the ELFSA group made use of a third language, participants in the traditional SA one made more use of their L1, which counterbalances the fact that the ELFSA students had the French or German interference. To exemplify this, 34.64% of the participants in the traditional SA declared using mostly their L1 while at home, whereas only 11.76% used Catalan/Spanish in their living accommodation (they used English (76.47%) or French (11.76 %) instead). Finally, in line with Kalocsai (2014) and Jenkins (2014), the present study provides evidence that participants will employ English in most of their social encounters, even in settings where English is used as a lingua franca. Students in both groups declared using English largely in their everyday conversations. What is interesting is that some participants in the ELFSA group reported more English interactions than those in the traditional SA one who, as mentioned above, showed a greater use of their L1, especially in their living accommodation.

When asked about what language they used at parties and social events, 84% of the students in the UK and the USA established that English was the only language they used. On the other hand, those students in ELF countries made a more comparable use of English (41.18%) and the language of the country (29.41%) which, again, provides evidence that even when an additional language comes into play, learners can still practise and improve their L2. The answer to this research question is in line with studies like those by Dewey (2004) and Freed et al. (2004) which established that it is not necessary to participate in a traditional SA experience in order to practise the L2. Freed et al. (2004), for example, compared three learning contexts (SA, AH and IM) and they found that the group in an intensive immersion at home (IM) outscored the other two both in terms of L2 learning and L2 practise.

Overall, this paper suggests that no significant differences exist between traditional SA context and ELFSA ones since students in both groups showed comparable linguistic outcomes after their stay. Moreover, although some participants in the ELFSA group tried exercising a third language, learners in both groups showed a similar amount of English use while abroad because students in the traditional SA setting made more use of their L1. Overall, findings in this paper are positive in that they show that SA outcomes will not change depending on the destination country and the practise of an additional language does not seem to run counter to English development.

5.5. General discussion of the findings

The purpose of the present dissertation was to identify areas that needed further investigation within SA research and investigate them. Accordingly, the present study first located the gaps in the literature of SA and, subsequently, it explored them through three different empirical studies. Overall, this thesis explores the impact that three different SA experiences (short, traditional and ELF) have on the learners' L2 reading and vocabulary development. Additionally, it considers the connections between initial proficiency and vocabulary levels and L2 gains. Finally, it analyses the extent to which participants used their L2 while abroad in order to provide a deeper understanding of the outcomes that emerged from the last two SA experiences (traditional and ELF). In general, it seems that performing a stay abroad can help L2 development in terms of L2 reading and vocabulary, at least to some extent. However, this enhancement does not seem to happen across the board, and findings suggest that students need to make an effort to practise a skill in order to develop it. Accordingly, while some areas may be more susceptible to gains (e.g. receptive vocabulary), others need more practise and time in order to develop (e.g. reading fluency or productive vocabulary). Altogether, results vary depending on the type of SA experience and the measure under study.

In the case of reading, for example, it seems that comprehension is more susceptible to gains than fluency, which possibly needs extensive amounts of practise in order to develop. On the one hand, in terms of reading comprehension, participants in the short SA experience and in the traditional SA one (both staying in an Anglophone country) showed a significant improvement, whereas those in the ELFSA context did not. However, only one of the groups (namely the teenage group) showed a significant improvement in their reading fluency. Despite being a short programme, it was expected that participants in the short SA would improve their reading skills to a large extent because of the massive exposure they received during the three weeks they spent in the target country. Students in this group spent at least three quarters of their day using their L2 to communicate with their teachers and host family. Moreover, they attended some morning classes during which they practised all the skills, including reading. Consequently, it is possible that this extensive exposure aided their reading comprehension skills. On the contrary, it seems that semester-long SA experiences undertaken by university students do not foster reading to the same extent. Reading is a skill

that often people take for granted (Grabe, 2009); accordingly, students may not realize that they need to practise it in order to enhance it. The students in the short programme abroad were told what to do at all times, in contrast, the undergraduate students had more freedom to decide in which activities they wanted to participate. Moreover, although the latter attended some classes at the local university, these lessons were not language lessons but classes that were taught through English. Hence, the focus was not on the language but on the content, as in EMI courses. Overall, it is possible that these differences between the experiences helped learners in the short intensive context to improve their reading skills to a greater extent than semester-long stays did.

Nonetheless, one of the semester-long groups did improve their reading comprehension significantly (namely the traditional SA one), although the same did not hold true in terms of reading fluency, which none of the groups improved significantly. The main difference between the traditional SA group and the ELF one seems to be the official language of the country where the stay was performed. On the one hand, the traditional SA experience happened in an Anglophone country, whereas the ELFSA one took place in a non-Anglophone one. This could have affected the amount of L2 text available to the participants since for those students in the traditional SA group everything was written in English (at university but also in restaurants, shops or the cinema), whereas texts in the ELFSA one were generally written in the language of the country. Moreover, when taking a closer look into the students' practises while abroad, what also seems to be different between both groups is the fact that the traditional SA one received all their classes in English, whereas the other group also had some classes in the language of the country. It is possible that this variance in the amount of formal exposure received at university played a role in helping the students in the traditional SA group to improve their reading comprehension to a larger extent than those in the ELFSA group did, even though differences between the two groups were not significant.

Concerning reading fluency, the only group that showed a significant improvement was the one that performed a 3-week stay. This was quite an unexpected finding since the short stay lasted for three weeks, whereas the young adults stayed in the target country for a semester. Therefore, one could believe that a longer stay would have helped the learners' L2 more than a short one. However, the teenagers in the short SA programme performed different reading

activities during their stay in Ireland, and, as mentioned before, they were massively exposed to English during their everyday life (both formally and informally). The only access they had to their L1 was during the school breaks, when they played with their co-nationals, and when they called their parents back in their home country. Therefore, they were surrounded by English most of the time. This constant exposure to the L2 combined with the English lessons they received during the morning probably helped participants in this group to enhance their L2 skills to a larger extent than the other two experiences did, despite the last two having a longer duration. This suggests that, despite a SA experience being able to boost L2 learning, what really helps learners is to exercise their L2 skills while in the target country, not simply being there. Another plausible explanation to the fact that the short SA experience fostered L2 reading fluency development more than the semester-long ones may be the participants' initial proficiency level. The students that participated in the short SA experience in Ireland were all teenagers that had a rather low proficiency level at the outset of the stay (i.e. beginner), whereas those in the semester-long stays were young adults with a higher proficiency level (i.e. intermediate). Hence, it is possible that the lower level of the learners in the short stay hindered their fast(er) reading at the pre-test.

In terms of L2 vocabulary development, results are consistent through the three studies in the dissertation. Participants in the three groups improved their receptive vocabulary and lexical accuracy significantly. Moreover, despite not being significant, they showed a slight improvement in terms of lexical fluency. Finally, none of the groups developed their lexical density or their lexical sophistication. It seems that, in line with previous research, gains in receptive vocabulary appear rapidly (Milton & Meara, 1995; Ife et al., 2000; Jiménez-Jiménez, 2010). During a SA experience, the students find themselves in situations where they need to know more L2 words in order to get their message through, consequently, when interacting in the L2 they learn and put new words into use. Accordingly, Long's Interaction Hypothesis (1985), which suggests that in order to interiorize the L2 learners need to take part in different L2 interactions, could partially explain the students' gains in receptive vocabulary. Moreover, the fact that learners put this new knowledge into practise during their everyday interactions makes them use the L2 vocabulary to a much larger extent than they normally would if they were not in a foreign country. Hence, it seems that, as DeKeyser's

(2007a) skill acquisition theory suggests, the SA context leads to an automatization of the knowledge because of the extensive practise it provides.

At the same time, in order to have a fluent conversation in the L2 learners need to use words accurately, that is to say, if a mistake is made while having a conversation in the L2 that could impede understanding of what is being said. Consequently, it is possible that the aforementioned theories explained gains in lexical accuracy. Additionally, Swain's Output hypothesis (1995) could also explain the better control that the students had over their lexical accuracy. Swain's hypothesis establishes that producing output in the target language will help L2 learners to become aware of their problems, to reflect and analyse these issues, and to try using different structures with the objective of improving their output. Hypothetically, learners abroad constantly need to modify their output in order to make themselves understood and to have a fluid conversation, especially when their wording is not lexically correct. Hence, the fact that they need to adapt to the situation by trying to use new words and structures could possibly have helped them when improving their lexical accuracy.

On the other hand, the rest of the productive measures analysed in the present dissertation did not show an improvement in any of the groups or the contexts. This is in line with previous research that suggests that some aspects of the lexicon need more time to develop and that at least two semesters abroad are needed in order for these measures to improve (Jensen & Howard, 2014; Serrano et al., 2012). As Schmitt (2014, p. 920) suggests, productive mastery is far more difficult than receptive because "more word knowledge components are required and many of these components are contextual in nature". Finally, as mentioned in the previous sections, another explanation to the lack of development in these areas may rely on the prompt used in the study. The written task asked students to write a composition entitled "My life: Past, present and future expectations". Therefore, students had to describe their lives, and it seems that this topic may not have been enough for the students to show their full knowledge of the L2 vocabulary. In particular, it is possible that the simple nature of the prompt did not allow learners to show progress in their lexical density and lexical sophistication.

In terms of how initial proficiency and vocabulary level can explain gains in the learners' reading and vocabulary skills, different correlations were found when examining the group of

university students (see paper three). However, no correlation was found when the group under study was the teenage group (see paper two). A possible explanation to this may rely on the fact that more variance in the initial proficiency and vocabulary levels was found within the group of undergraduate students. In other words, although the proficiency level of both groups ranged from an A2 to a B2, most learners in the young adult group had a B1 (n= 19) or a B2 (n= 10), whereas most learners in the teenage group had an A2 (n= 31) level at the beginning of the stay. Hence, it is possible that the difference in the initial proficiency level of the two different age groups affected the identified correlations.

One final finding that emerges from this project is that regarding L2 reading and vocabulary development no significant differences exist between performing a SA experience in a traditional English-speaking context and doing so in an ELF one, although learners in the traditional SA group improved their reading comprehension significantly and those in the ELFSA one did not. Similarly, the amount of L2 use received after both contexts was quite similar, despite the group in the US and the UK using their L1 more than those in ELF countries and the latter exercising a third language (generally French or German). Again, this finding provides evidence that what aids L2 development is trying to use the L2 and making an effort to exercise a skill, rather than simply being in a foreign country (Isabelli-Garcia, 2006). Moreover, it suggests that being social when abroad can help learners to improve their L2 because the context provides much L2 input and interaction (Dewey, 2017).

Chapter VI

Conclusion

This dissertation has adopted a quantitative approach in order to answer the general question of how different study abroad experiences impact L2 reading and vocabulary development. In general terms, the main purpose of the present project was to gain a better understanding of how SA experiences affect the linguistic outcomes, namely reading and vocabulary, in the learners' L2. First, it acknowledged the different gaps that exist within the research of SA experiences. Subsequently, it examined these gaps and provided a new insight into the impact that three different study abroad experiences can have on L2 reading and vocabulary development. The results of this research provide supporting evidence that SA participants can benefit from spending some time in a foreign country. However, as the well-known aphorism says, "not all that glitters is gold" and results need to be examined carefully since gains do not always come automatically and the linguistic outcomes vary depending on the area under-study. Altogether, the present project has contributed to the SA literature by providing new insights about those areas that needed exploration within the SA field.

The first contribution emerging from this thesis is that those areas that needed further research within the literature of SA have been identified and subsequently investigated. The state-of-the-art presented as the first study of this dissertation highlighted some of the areas that have been left rather under-researched by SA scholars. This study was performed in an attempt to determine where to place our attention in future studies so as not to provide redundant information upon the topic but in order to offer new insights to the SA field. Moreover, it aimed at making researchers become aware of the mixed-findings that have emerged out of SA studies because of the differences in the populations examined and the methodologies used so that future studies can start being more consistent and, consequently, more uniform conclusions can be drawn upon the field of SA experiences.

In second place, this dissertation has contributed to the knowledge of how SA impacts reading development. As different researchers have highlighted at different points, research on this topic was especially scarce (Isabelli-Garcia et al., 2018; Kinginger, 2009). Only a few studies have investigated how performing a stay abroad will influence the students' reading skills,

and even fewer have examined reading exclusively. That is, most of the studies investigating reading development are multidimensional and examine different L2 skills. In an attempt to provide more information to the topic, the present dissertation has investigated how three different SA experiences (short, semester-long traditional SA, and ELFSA) affected L2 reading comprehension and fluency, contributing to the SA field by providing three different studies on the topic. Findings with regard to this skill show that reading is not a by-product of participating in a SA experience, but an ability that requires extensive practise. It seems that not all participants in the present study developed their reading skills to the same extent, and a plausible explanation to this finding relies on the intensity of each experience abroad and whether the SA programme required students to read extensively in the L2. Another finding that emerges with regard to L2 reading development is that comprehension seems to be more susceptible to gauging gains than fluency, possibly because a greater deal of practise is needed for readers to increase their reading fluency (Grabe & Stollen, 2002; Hudson et al., 2005).

The third contribution of the project has to do with vocabulary development. Generally, SA research has tended to focus on either receptive or productive vocabulary, and the methodologies of the different studies are so different in nature that conclusions on how SA affects L2 vocabulary are a bit blurred, which is particularly true concerning productive vocabulary (Schmitt, 2010). Findings in the different studies that concern the present dissertation are consistent and suggest that participating in a SA experience will be significantly beneficial in terms of receptive vocabulary and lexical accuracy, regardless of its length or destination country. Similarly, lexical fluency also seems to be enhanced during a stay abroad, although not significantly. Finally, participation in a SA programme does not seem to guarantee gains in the other two measures of productive vocabulary, namely lexical density and lexical sophistication. Overall, the results of the present project suggest that learners learn many new words while abroad and they use these new, and their old vocabularies, in a more accurate manner when writing in the L2; that is, they produce L2 texts with fewer lexical errors. Similarly, they will start writing longer texts after the stay. Nonetheless, their texts are not lexically denser and students do not seem to use more sophisticated or “rare” words after their stay, at least when such experience has a duration of one semester or less.

In fourth place, findings in the present project indicate that short SA experiences can be positive for L2 development, at least when it comes to L2 reading and vocabulary. The group of adolescents who travelled to Ireland for only three weeks increased their reading comprehension, reading fluency, receptive vocabulary, and lexical accuracy significantly, which implies that they significantly improved four out of the seven measures analysed in the study. Moreover, a slight advancement was found in their lexical fluency, although improvement was not significant. Therefore, only two measures did not show any amelioration after a 3-week stay in the target country, which provides quite a positive picture for short stays abroad. It must be highlighted, however, that this type of stay was remarkably intensive and that students combined their L2 informal interactions with much L2 formal practise at the language school, which may have helped them when practising and developing their L2. As was mentioned before, most of the skills examined in the present dissertation are not a by-product of participating in a SA experience but they need extensive practise in order to do so. Hence, it is possible that the intensive nature of the stay provided students with enough L2 formal and informal opportunities for practise, even though it was as short as three weeks.

The fifth contribution of the project is related to ELFSA experiences and, again, their impact on L2 reading and vocabulary development. For the purpose of determining whether performing a stay in a country where English is not the official language but used as a lingua franca can be positive for the students' L2, this project compared a traditional SA experience to one in an ELFSA one. Results suggest that both types of stays provide similar linguistic outcomes to the students. The only difference between the groups, which was not significant, was found in terms of reading comprehension, which was improved by participants in the traditional SA group but not by those in the ELFSA one. Different similarities were found in the amount of English use while abroad by students of both groups. Nonetheless, two main differences were also detected. First, some students in the ELFSA context took advantage of their location and tried exercising a third language both in formal and in informal contexts; in other words, ELFSA participants took some classes in the language of the country and they also used it during some of their everyday interactions. The second difference was found in relation to L1 use. It seems that in general the students in the traditional SA context used Catalan or Spanish to a greater extent than those in the ELFSA context, which could

counterbalance the fact that the latter practised a third language. In sum, the fact that more similarities than differences were found between the groups, both in terms of linguistic outcomes and opportunities for L2 use, provides a positive picture for ELFSA experiences since they seem to be at least as beneficial as traditional SA ones.

Finally, this dissertation suggests that the initial proficiency and vocabulary level of the students can sometimes have an impact on the outcomes they will produce as a result of a SA experience. Although initial proficiency and vocabulary level did not affect gains in the teenager group significantly, they seemed to impact outcomes in the traditional SA group. It seems that a low level of vocabulary at the outset of the stay benefitted learners in terms of receptive vocabulary, allowing them to learn new words. Contrarily, a low initial vocabulary level was disadvantageous for the students in terms of reading comprehension. Finally, it was found that a low proficiency level at the beginning of the stay helps learners to make more gains in reading comprehension. Altogether, it seems that the overall level and the vocabulary level that learners have at the beginning of a stay can sometimes have an impact on the outcomes they will render as a result of the stay.

Notwithstanding, the various contributions of this project to the SA field are not without limitations. A first potential limitation concerns the topic of the written task used in order to examine the students' productive vocabulary development. As it was repeatedly mentioned in the discussion section, the topic of the task ("My life: Past, present and future expectations") could have possibly been too simple for the students to be able to show their entire lexical knowledge. Therefore, it is possible that, if another topic had been used, different outcomes could have emerged in terms of the students' productive vocabulary. Consequently, a recommendation that emerges from the present project is to use a more complex topic when examining the students' productive vocabulary in future research, at least when the students are adolescents or undergraduate students, but at the same time this topic should be suitable for learners of different ages and proficiency levels.

A second limitation lies on the rather short time elapsed from the pre- to the post-tests, especially in respect of the teenage group. Although efforts were made to avoid task-repetition effects, it is still possible that using the same instruments at both data collection points influenced the results in the studies. This is particularly true concerning the teenage

group, for which the time elapsed between the pre- and post-test was very short. However, the students performed five different tasks during the data collection (two reading passages, a written task, the UVLT, and the OPT), they were not informed about the existence of a post-test, and they did not know the purpose of the tests, in an attempt to avoid any task-repetition effects. Therefore, it is unlikely that they remembered all the tests and activities they completed during the pre-test.

Finally, one last limitation that emerges from the present project is the fact that it mainly examines the SA context from a quantitative perspective and it only uses the more qualitative data for one of the questions in the last study. Generally, researchers have either adopted a quantitative or a qualitative methodology when investigating the SA context. However, the new “mixed-methods” approach is gaining much popularity among SA research because it is believed that it provides a more robust picture of the SA context that combines numbers, scores, statistics and the systematic analysis of the data, with a qualitative analysis of the students’ experiences. As Isabelli-Garcia et al., (2018) suggested a study that only examines data quantitatively and does not take the qualitative aspects of SA into account can only provide a small picture of SA “because SA experiences are so varied and complex, quantitative research alone cannot adequately examine them” (p. 445). The present project has used semi-structured interviews and an online questionnaire in order to interpret the SA outcomes provided by the different groups of students. Moreover, the last research question of the project attempted to compare the ELFSA context and the traditional SA in a qualitative manner by examining the amount of L2 use reported by students in both groups. Nonetheless, it seems necessary that future research takes the learners’ individual differences into account in a more profound way since, as established by many researchers within the SA field, they seem to be of paramount importance when understanding the SA context (Coleman, 2013; Kinginger, 2009).

In addition to the aforementioned limitations, it seems relevant to mention that when investigating productive vocabulary and reading development it would be interesting if future studies included a control group AH. Although this was out of the scope of the present dissertation because the latest SA studies suggest that SA outcomes should not be compared to those AH because the contexts are too different in nature (Coleman, 2013; Sanz, 2014), it

seems that in terms of L2 reading and L2 productive vocabulary it could have been interesting to hold a group in the L1 country. It appears that what determines whether the aforementioned areas develop is not learning context, but the amount to which they are practised. That is, L2 reading and productive vocabulary do not develop automatically and immersion abroad does not always translate into gains. Therefore, it is possible that learners could enhance their skills in these areas at an AH level by the mere fact of practising them. Consequently, at least when it comes to L2 reading and productive vocabulary, it seems reasonable to compare the SA linguistic outcomes to those that may emerge AH. Therefore, we suggest that future studies investigating outcomes in these areas hold a control group AH.

Moreover, another interesting topic to examine in future studies is related to the learners' initial proficiency level. The groups that have been studied in the present project are rather homogeneous when it comes to their initial proficiency level (as measured through their initial score on the OPT) and, despite having groups that are similar in nature is favourable when comparing them, it also seems interesting to have students of different levels in order to account for their threshold level. Therefore, in the future it would be stimulating to perform studies including students of different proficiency levels so that correlations can be made between initial proficiency and vocabulary level and gains emerging as a result of a stay. In this way, we would learn how different skills are affected by the students' threshold level, which could be helpful when preparing them for their stays.

Despite these limitations, the present dissertation suggests several theoretical and practical implications. For example, findings show that, although results vary depending on the area under-study, SA can have a positive impact on the students' L2. Hence, it seems important to encourage students to perform a stay abroad at least once during their academic lives. This seems to be particularly necessary for people majoring in languages, such as the undergraduate students in the present project, since they are going to need a strong English proficiency when they embark on the job market. All the university students who participated in the present project want to become English teachers or English translators, consequently, they are going to need the automaticity that the SA can provide (i.e. use the L2 effortlessly and acquire automated habits). For this reason, it is suggested that everyone should take part in a SA programme at least once, but first such programmes need to be made available to

everyone. Many times, enlisting in a SA programme can be exceedingly expensive and, thus, unreachable to many people who do not hold an economy that allows them to afford one of these stays. Consequently, it seems reasonable to believe that more resources and funding should be dedicated to SA experiences so that these were available and, consequently, a greater number of people in our society could benefit from the advantages of SA.

Another thing that should be considered by programme organizers, policy makers and stakeholders is to create pre-departure courses that informed students about what they are going to find during their SA experience. Not only such courses could avoid the possible unrealistic expectations that some students have prior their departure, but it could also help them to be aware that they actually need to use the L2 and practise all L2 skills in order for these to develop. Altogether, it seems that a pre-departure course could benefit SA participants in that they would be aware of what they need to do in order to increase their L2 skills. Moreover, the same course could be used for learners to know what to expect out of the stay, both with regard to the positive and the “not so good” aspects of the stay.

Finally, this study provides evidence that studying abroad in a country where English is not the official language but used as a lingua franca, such as Germany, Hungary, or the Czech Republic (ELFSA), can be as beneficial as doing so in an Anglophone country (traditional SA). Therefore, it seems important to make students aware of this fact, especially within the European Union and the ERASMUS programme. The uncertain situation of some of the countries that used to be popular destinations for SA participants (e.g. the UK or the US) make it more complicated to perform a stay in such countries, which sometimes leads to the difficult decision of where to perform a stay when you are an English learner. Moreover, travelling to Anglophone countries can be more expensive than doing so in other European countries; therefore, ELFSA experiences may be more affordable by worldwide students. Altogether, we believe that spreading the knowledge that performing a stay in countries other than the UK or the USA can also be beneficial could help SA participants when deciding where to perform their stay or even when deciding whether to participate in a SA programme.

Overall, although the generality of the current results must be established by future research, this study signals that performing a SA experience can contribute to an increased and more automatic knowledge of the L2. Consequently, we believe that SA should be promoted among

our societies since, despite sometimes modest, findings in the students outcomes offer an encouraging picture for language learning as a result of a SA experience. Finally, it must be highlighted that if SA participants were made aware of the importance of practicing and using the L2 while abroad in order to enhance their L2 proficiency, the outcomes of SA experience could be even greater. Hence, we consider that results in the present project could be amplified in the future if students were informed what (not) to do and what to expect out of their experiences.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Reading passages and comprehension questions

Appendix 1.1. A2 Text

A dangerous job

Since I was a boy, I have always looked down at open manholes with curiosity, so I welcomed the opportunity to explore and write about the world beneath New York City. With a group of 11 “sandhogs” – the nickname for the workers who build New York’s underground – I boarded a slow, shaky elevator lit by a single light bulb. Slowly we went down a shaft dug through 200 meters of rock. The sandhogs were Building a new tunnel to bring water into the city. The present tunnel System carries more than 5.6 billion liters of water every day. That’s enough water to fill more than 2,200 Olympic-sized swimming pools.

As we descended, it got dark and the air got cool. I looked up into darkness and down into deeper blackness, then the elevator stopped, and everyone got out. Then came the hard part, climbing another 10 meters down a long, slippery metal ladder. At the bottom, there was a dark tunnel filled with dust and smoke. Sandhogs were using explosives like dynamite to cut through the solid rock. The tunnel extends slowly – only four meters a day- and with each day new dangers come. Sandhogs live in constant fear of being hurt by sharp pieces of exploded rock. Their bodies are covered in such scars.

“Why do you do this work?” I asked Brian Gallagher, a sandhog for 16 years. Brian’s father was as sandhog, too, but it is not tradition that brought him here. “It’s the money”, he said. An experienced sandhog earns over \$100,000 a year. The rewards are well deserved. A sandhog’s chances of dying on the job are far greater than those of an above-ground construction worker, or even a New York City Police officer. “Everything down here can kill you”, one sandhog said. They know many more workers will die before the tunnel is completed.

A River of Sewage

On another trip below the city, sewer worker Jeff Kwami showed me how the city’s sewage is kept flowing smoothly. We went down a manhole wearing plastic bodysuits, gloves, and tanks of air. Everything around us was wet and slippery, as we climbed carefully down 12 meters and then stopped on a narrow concrete step. In front of me was a fast-moving river of sewage nearly two meters wide. It smelled awful. I asked Kwami, “What happens if you fall in and you’re not attached to a rope?” He said if you didn’t pull yourself out, you’d drown in the sewage. But unlike the dangers sandhogs face, such situations are rare. As we move through the sewer, Kwami seems calm and confident, but it’s still a terrifying thought.

Later, as we left the darkness and danger below, Kwami joked, “See any alligators?” Over the years, there have been stories about giant alligators living in the sewers. I tell Kwami that in 1935, the *New York Times* reported an alligator was pulled from a sewer. He still didn’t believe it, and we laugh together as we climb back to the surface.

TIME: (Example: 00:06:15) – hours, minutes, seconds -

_____ : _____ : _____

Appendix 1.2. A2 questions

Comprehension questions:

1. The writer of the passage is...:
 - a) Considering getting a job as a tunnel worker
 - b) Taking tourists into New York City's tunnels
 - c) Interested in what lies beneath New York City
 - d) Reporting on the benefits of working underground

2. Why does the author mention swimming pools in the first paragraph?
 - a) To state that it's nice to have a bath in the summer.
 - b) To state that there are a lot of swimming pools in New York City
 - c) To state the huge amount of water carried in the tunnel every day.
 - d) To state that you need a lot of water to fill a swimming pool

3. What danger that underground workers face is NOT mentioned?
 - a) Slipping
 - b) Drowning
 - c) Being cut by a rock
 - d) Elevators falling

4. Why does Brian Gallagher work as a sandhog?
 - a) He enjoys danger.
 - b) It's a family tradition.
 - c) The job pays well.
 - d) The work is easy to do.

5. Why are sandhogs compared to police officers?
 - a) Because they both work in New York City.
 - b) Because the jobs are similar.
 - c) To state that sandhogs have a very dangerous work.
 - d) To state that being a police officer is more difficult than being a sandhog.

6. Sewer workers probably carry tanks of air because...:
 - a) The smell of the sewage is bad.
 - b) The tunnel is filled with smoke.
 - c) They have to dive into the sewage.
 - d) They need to clean the air in the sewer.

7. Which of these is the most dangerous job mentioned?

- a) Sandhog
 - b) Sewer worker
 - c) Police officer
 - d) Construction worker
8. Which of these things about being a sewer worker is NOT mentioned?
- a) It's useful to wear a body suit.
 - b) It's easy to get wet.
 - c) The pay is very high.
 - d) A rope could save your life.
9. What is the worst thing mentioned about being a sewer worker?
- a) The bad smell of the underground.
 - b) That you can be drawn by sewage.
 - c) That an alligator bites you.
 - d) That alligators somehow hurt you.
10. Are there a lot of alligators in the sewers?
- a) Yes, they find one or two every day.
 - b) Not a lot, but the ones that live there are very big.
 - c) It doesn't say for sure.
 - d) No, that is an invention.
11. Why is the tunnel filled with dust and smoke?
- a) Because of the explosives used to make the tunnel.
 - b) Because there is a lot of debris
 - c) Because sewer workers smoke while they work
 - d) It is not mentioned.
12. The tunnel...
- a) Extends slowly, just a few meters a day.
 - b) Extends quickly, many meters a day.
 - c) Extends at a varying speed, sometimes many meters while sometimes not many meters a day.
 - d) It is not mentioned.
13. Which are the chances of falling in a river of sewage?
- a) Few
 - b) Many
 - c) Random
 - d) It is not mentioned

Appendix 1.3. B1 Text

Deadly contact

In September 1994, a violent disease erupted among a group of racehorses in a small town in Australia. The first victim was a female horse that was last seen eating grass beneath a fruit tree. One of her caretakers noticed that the horse didn't appear to be well, and brought the animal back to her stable for observation. Within hours, the horse's health declined rapidly. Three people worked to save the animal – the horse's trainer, an assistant, and a veterinarian. Nevertheless, the horse died two days later, leaving the cause of her death uncertain. Has she been bitten by a snake, or eaten something poisonous?

Within two weeks, most of the other horses in the stable became ill as well. All had high fevers, difficulty breathing, facial swelling, and blood coming from their noses and mouths. Despite efforts by the veterinarian, 12 more animals died. Meanwhile, the trainer and his assistant also became ill, and within days, the trainer was dead, too. Laboratory analysis finally discovered the root of the problem: The horses and men had been infected by previously unknown virus, which doctors eventually labeled Hendra. The virus passed from the bats to the horse, which then transmitted the virus to other horses and to people – with disastrous results.

The virus Threat

Infectious disease is all around us. Disease causing agents, such as viruses, usually have specific targets. Some viruses live in or affect only animals. Problems start when animal viruses are able to infect people as well, a process known as zoonosis. When an animal virus passes a human, the results can be fatal. Often, our immune systems are not accustomed to these viruses, and are unable to stop them before they harm us, and even kill us.

In the last three decades, more than 30 zoonotic diseases have emerged around the globe. HIV is an example; it evolved from a virus originally carried by African monkeys and later, chimps. Today, conservative estimates suggest that HIV has infected more than 70 million people in the past three decades, though this number may be higher. SARS, a type of flu that jumped from chickens to humans, is another type of zoonotic disease.

But how do these viruses – like Hendra, SARS, and HIV – pass from animals to humans? Contact is crucial. Human destruction of animal habitats, for example, is forcing wild animals to move closer to the places people live – putting humans at risk for exposure to animal viruses. The closer humans are to animals, the greater the risk of being bitten, scratched, or exposed to animal waste, which can enable a virus to pass from an animal to a human. Raising animals (for example, on a farm) or keeping certain kinds of wild animals (like monkeys) as pets increases the risk of exposure. Eating animals that are diseased can also result in a virus transmitted.

Worldwide Travelers

The factor that is probably most responsible for the spread of zoonotic diseases worldwide is international travel. In 1999, for example, a deadly disease – one that had never been seen before in the Western Hemisphere – appeared in the United States. There were several incidences that year of both birds and people becoming sick and dying in New York City, and doctors couldn't explain why. Subsequently, they discovered that deaths had been caused by the same thing: the West Nile virus, found typically in birds and transmitted by mosquitoes that live in parts of northern Africa. Somehow this virus – probably carried by an infected mosquito or bird on a plane or ship – arrived in the U.S. Now, birds and mosquitoes native to North America are carriers of this virus as well.

West Nile cannot be transmitted from person to person. However, a zoonotic disease which can spread from human to human by a handshake or sneeze could create a major medical emergency: It could potentially circle the world and kill millions of people before science can find a way to control it.

Today, researchers are working to create vaccines for many zoonotic diseases in the hope of controlling their impact on humans. Other specialists are trying to make communities more aware of disease prevention and treatment, and to help people understand that we are all – humans, animals and insects – in this together.

TIME: (Example: 00:06:15) – hours, minutes, seconds -

_____ : _____ : _____

Appendix 1.4. B1 questions

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is this reading mainly about?
 - a) The unexplained deaths of horses and humans.
 - b) The symptoms of zoonotic diseases seen in humans.
 - c) The effect of International travel on the spread of disease.
 - d) The rise in the spread of viruses from animals to humans.

2. What caused the Australian racehorses to get sick?
 - a) A virus spread by snakes.
 - b) A virus spread by bats.
 - c) A virus spread by humans.
 - d) A virus spread by a fruit tree.

3. The word fatal could be replaced with...:
 - a) Scary
 - b) Painful
 - c) Harmful
 - d) Deadly

4. Which virus is NOT mentioned in the passage as being zoonotic?
 - a) SARS
 - b) HIV
 - c) Flu
 - d) Hendra

5. Which of these is NOT given as a reason for the increase in zoonotic diseases?
 - a) Raising animals.
 - b) Destruction of habitat
 - c) Lower disease resistance
 - d) International travel

6. Which statement is best supported by the passage?
 - a) Zoonotic diseases did not exist more than 30 years ago.
 - b) Keeping but never touching a wild animal will keep you safe from zoonotic diseases.
 - c) You won't get a virus from eating a diseased animal if you cook the meat well.
 - d) People who regularly travel abroad are more likely to get a disease.

7. Who is at greater risk of contracting a zoonotic disease?
 - a) A nurse
 - b) A teacher
 - c) A chicken farmer
 - d) A police officer.

8. What could happen if zoonotic diseases spread?
 - a) Animals would die.
 - b) It would be the end of the world.
 - c) There would not be salvation for many people and animals.
 - d) People would go crazy.

9. Why is it difficult to cure zoonotic diseases?
 - a) Because they are almost impossible to cure.
 - b) Because no one knew about their existence before.
 - c) Because doctors don't want to study them.
 - d) Because animals are needed for testing the medicine and doctors don't want to hurt animals.

10. Which of these symptoms is NOT mentioned to explain Hendra?
 - a) Loss of weight.
 - b) High fevers.
 - c) Difficulty breathing.
 - d) Nose bleeding.

11. Which factor is NOT mentioned as responsible of provoking zoonotic diseases?
 - a) Travelling
 - b) Animal contact
 - c) Being a doctor
 - d) Having a farm

Appendix 2. The Updated Vocabulary Levels Test (UFLT)

Vocabulary Levels Test

This is test that looks at how well you know useful English words. Put a check under the word that goes with each meaning. Here is an example.

	game	island	mouth	movie	song	yard
land with water all around it						
part of your body used for eating and talking						
piece of music						

It should be answered in the following way.

	game	island	mouth	movie	song	yard
land with water all around it		✓				
part of your body used for eating and talking			✓			
piece of music					✓	

1,000 Word Level

	choice	computer	garden	photograph	price	week
cost						
picture						
place where things grow outside						

	eye	father	night	van	voice	year
body part that sees						
parent who is a man						
part of the day with no sun						

	center	note	state	tomorrow	uncle	winter
brother of your mother or father						
middle						
short piece of writing						

	box	brother	horse	hour	house	plan
family member						
sixty minutes						
way of doing things						

Post-test summer 2018

	animal	bath	crime	grass	law	shoulder
green leaves that cover the ground						
place to wash						
top end of your arm						

	drink	educate	forget	laugh	prepare	suit
get ready						
make a happy sound						
not remember						

	check	fight	return	tell	work	write
do things to get money						
go back again						
make sure						

	bring	can	reply	stare	understand	wish
say or write an answer to somebody						
carry to another place						
look at for a long time						

	alone	bad	cold	green	loud	main
most important						
not good						
not hot						

	awful	definite	exciting	general	mad	sweet
certain						
usual						
very bad						

2,000 Word Level

	coach	customer	feature	pie	vehicle	weed
important part of something						
person who trains members of sports teams						

Post-test summer 2018

unwanted plant						
----------------	--	--	--	--	--	--

	average	discipline	knowledge	pocket	trap	vegetable
food grown in gardens						
information which a person has						
middle number						

	circle	justice	knife	onion	partner	pension
round shape						
something used to cut food						
using laws fairly						

	cable	section	sheet	site	staff	tank
Part						
place						
something to cover a bed						

	apartment	cap	envelope	lawyer	speed	union
cover for letters						
kind of hat						
place to live inside a tall building						

	argue	contribute	quit	seek	vote	wrap
cover tightly and completely						
give to						
look for						

	avoid	contain	murder	search	switch	trade
have something inside						
look for						
try not to do						

	bump	complicate	include	organize	receive	warn
get something						
hit gently						
have as part of something						

Post-test summer 2018

	available	constant	electrical	medical	proud	super
feeling good about what you have done						
great						
happening all the time						

	environmental	junior	pure	rotten	smooth	wise
bad						
not rough						
younger in position						

3,000 Word Level

	angle	apology	behavior	bible	celebration	portion
actions						
happy occasion						
statement saying you are sorry						

	anxiety	athlete	counsel	foundation	phrase	wealth
combination of words						
guidance						
large amount of money						

	agriculture	conference	frequency	liquid	regime	volunteer
farming						
government						
person who helps without payment						

	asset	heritage	novel	poverty	prosecution	suburb
having little money						
history						
useful thing						

	audience	crystal	intelligence	outcome	pit	welfare
ability to learn						
deep place						
people who watch and listen						

Post-test summer 2018

	consent	enforce	exhibit	retain	specify	target
agree						
say clearly						
show in public						

	accomplish	capture	debate	impose	proceed	prohibit
catch						
go on						
talk about what is correct						

	absorb	decline	exceed	link	nod	persist
continue to happen						
goes beyond the limit						
take in						

	approximate	frequent	graphic	pale	prior	vital
almost exact						
earlier						
happening often						

	consistent	enthusiastic	former	logical	marginal	mutual
not changing						
occurring earlier in time						
shared						

4,000 Word Level

	cave	scenario	sergeant	stitch	vitamin	wax
healthy supplement						
opening in the ground or in the side of a hill						
situation						

	candle	diamond	gulf	salmon	soap	tutor
something used for cleaning						
teacher						
valuable stone						

	agony	kilogram	orchestra	scrap	slot	soccer
--	-------	----------	-----------	-------	------	--------

Post-test summer 2018

group of people who play music						
long, thin opening						
small unwanted piece						

	crust	incidence	ram	senator	venue	verdict
hard outside part						
judgment						
place						

	alley	embassy	hardware	nutrition	threshold	tobacco
government building						
plant that is smoked in cigarettes						
small street between buildings						

	fling	forbid	harvest	shrink	simulate	vibrate
do not allow						
make smaller						
throw						

	activate	disclose	hug	intimidate	plunge	weep
cry						
tell						
turn on						

	diminish	exaggerate	explode	penetrate	transplant	verify
break into pieces violently						
get smaller						
move something to another place						

	adjacent	crude	fond	sane	spherical	swift
beside						
not crazy						
quick						

	abnormal	bulky	credible	greasy	magnificent	optical
believable						
oily						
unusual						

5,000 Word Level

	gown	maid	mustache	paradise	pastry	vinegar
hair on your upper lip						
perfect place						
small baked food						

	asthma	chord	jockey	monk	rectangle	vase
container for cut flowers						
group of musical notes that are played at the same time						
shape with two long and two short sides						

	batch	dentist	hum	lime	pork	scripture
green fruit						
low, constant sound						
meat from pigs						

	amnesty	claw	earthquake	perfume	sanctuary	wizard
liquid that is made to smell nice						
man who has magical powers						
safe place						

	altitude	diversion	hemisphere	pirate	robe	socket
height						
kind of clothing						
person who attacks ships						

	applaud	erase	jog	intrude	notify	wrestle
announce						
enter without permission						
remove						

	bribe	expire	immerse	meditate	persecute	shred
cut or tear into small pieces						
end						
think deeply						

	commemorate	growl	ignite	pierce	renovate	swap
catch fire						
exchange						
go into or through something						

	bald	eternal	imperative	lavish	moist	tranquil
calm and quiet						
having no hair						
slightly wet						

	diesel	incidental	mandatory	prudent	superficial	tame
not dangerous						
required						
using good judgment						

Appendix 3. Examples of the writing task

Appendix 3.1. The teenagers' example(same student at different time points)

Pre-test:

When I was younger I had all I needed: a family and good friends. I was a shy and friendly kid. I was a person who just wanted to finish the school day and go home to eat my lunch and see my nanny. Now I'm 17 years old. I live in Vitoria-Gasteiz. And this year I have to decide what do I want to be in the future. This is going to be the longest and hardest school year. So I have to work hard to be what I really want to be a happy man. Even if I have to study more than usually. I want to continue doing sport, playing soccer with my friends... But now, in the present I want to have the best summer of my entire life. I don't really like to look at the future because is the only way to imagine a not possible future I can't really reach without even knowing that. As I said before in the future I just want to be happy with my family and friends.

Post-test:

Looking at my past, looking at these 17 years I can only say that if I could I wouldn't change them for anything. These beautiful years I have met a lot of friends that are still with me, I have grown with my brother and sister, having really good times together, and I have collected thousands of wonderful experiences. Now I'm just a happy 17 years old student with a lot of dreams but who prefers to live the present living everyday as it was the last. I meet my friends as much as I can, I study, I do sport... I'm just a normal teenager who is happy with the life he has. For the future, I just want not to have any regrets and to be a man with friends, a girlfriend, a good job. But all of this will not be possible if I just look at it. That is why I like living and working on the present.

Appendix 3.2. The undergraduates' example (same student at different time points)

Pre-test:

I am from (name of a town) but since I born I am living in (name of a city). I love athletics and since I was 5 years old I trained in (athletics club). Nowadays, after being athlete for 17 years and trainer of a group of children until 7 years ago, I have very clear that I will like to do a course for being National trainer. So I will can train older athletes with high aspirations and fixed objectives. I love to transmit my passion to athletics and I think the children that I am training this year they recognize it. I am studying bilingual primary education and I realize that when I will be a teacher I will transmit the passion to learn to the pupils.

Post-test:

I was born in (name of a town). All of my family is from there and I am very happy when I am there or in my village. All my life I have been living in (name of a city), but my heart is on my village (name of a town). I have been doing athletics during 17 years. I started running when I was 5 but 2 years ago I stopped because I didn't find the motivation anywhere. Nowadays, I am the trainer of the 9, 10 and 11 year old children in the athletics club as I have been the last 8 years. I love athletics and I enjoy when I am preparing the activities the children are going to do. In the future, I would like to continue training little children but also a group of people who want to participate in National championships. I think it would be very nice to train both groups of people while I am teaching primary education in a school because now I am studying primary education in (name of the university). And my dream is to be a good teacher and also a good trainer. I think I have the capacities and the abilities to achieve that goals but I have to put all my effort to become the person that I want to be.

Appendix 4. CLAN output for a text

@Begin

@Languages: en

@Participants: STU Student_university

@ID: 1c

@Date:

*STU: When I was 4 I started to read because my grandmother didn't know

how to read because of the dictatorship [*lexerr] we had in Spain

when she was young. [T] [CL] [CL] [CL] [CL]

Appendix 5. VocabProfile output for a text

Freq. Level	Families (%)	Types (%)	Tokens (%)	Cumul. token (%)
K-1 :	74 (94.9)	86 (91.49)	173 (96.1)	96.1
Coverage 95				
K-2 :	3 (3.8)	3 (3.19)	3 (1.7)	97.8
Coverage 98				
K-3 :				
K-4 :				
K-5 :	1 (1.3)	1 (1.06)	1 (0.6)	98.4
K-6 :				
K-7 :				
K-8 :				
K-9 :				
K-10 :				
K-11 :				
K-12 :				
K-13 :				
K-14 :				

RELATED RATIOS & INDICES	
<i>Pertaining to whole text</i>	
Words in text (tokens):	180
Different words (types):	94
Type-token ratio:	0.52
Tokens per type:	1.91
Lexical density (content [72]/total [180]):	0.40
<i>Pertaining to onlist only</i>	
Tokens:	180
Types:	94
Families:	78
Tokens per Family :	2.31
Types per Family :	1.21
Singletons ratio new n=1 Fams[45]/total [78]	0.58

Original text [Lengthen] [Shorten] [Narrow] [Widen to align texts]

EXISTING WORDS RECATEGORIZED (Add/delete as needed)

Basque Donostia Spanish Vitoria

NEW RECATS - Dbl-Click or type to add words (Tokens, not Families)

Alt-Dbl-Click words to send to VP-1 and Thesaurus Boxes

My name is. I'm 16 years old and I was born in Donostia. I'm a happy person and I'm always having fun. nowadays I study at a Basque school with my friends. At the moment I'm studying four languages english french basque and Spanish. In my free time I like meeting my friends or being with my family. when I was born both of my parents used to work at donostia. However they were offered a better work in Vitoria and they finally accepted it. I have always had enough things to be happy. When I was a child I didn't have much things but they were very important for me. when my grandfather died I was very sad but in that moment I became stronger. In the future I would like to go to university and to study something related to sciences. I would like to have a good job and to meet a lot of people. my grandfather told me that I always have to do my best for then to be happy.

Profile summary

K-1	173	96.1
K-2	3	97.8
K-5	1	98.4
OFF	0	≈100

Promoted text Edit, Check with [RE-VP] and [SAVE]

REPEATED 2+ K-Families to remove with care when simplifying to lower K or C level [?]

+ UNREPEATED

0 UNREPEATED 2k+ Singletons (Fams) to note:

my name is i am number years old and i was born in donostia i am a happy person and i am always having fun **nowadays** i study at a basque school with my friends at the moment i am studying four **languages** basque and spanish in my free time i like meeting my friends or being with my family when i was born both of my parents used to work at donostia however they were offered a better work in and they finally accepted it i have always had enough things to be happy when i was a child i did not have much things but they were very important for me when my grandfather died i was very sad but in that moment i became stronger in the **future** i would like to go to **university** and to study something related to sciences i would like to have a good job and to meet a lot of people my grandfather told me that i always have to do my best for then to be happy

Appendix 6. Conventions to edit data

Measure examined	Software and format	Changes applied
Lexical density (content words/tokens) Lexical sophistication (comparison of words from different frequency levels)	VocabProfile (.txt)	Spelling errors corrected
Lexical fluency (tokens) Lexical accuracy (lexical errors/tokens)	CLAN (.cha)	Spelling errors corrected Format and punctuation adapted to software conventions

Appendix 7. The Oxford Quick Placement Test

Part 1

Questions 1 – 5

- Where can you see these notices?
- For questions 1 to 5, mark **one** letter **A**, **B** or **C** on your Answer Sheet.

1

**Please leave your
room key at Reception.**

- A** in a shop
- B** in a hotel
- C** in a taxi

2

**Foreign money
changed here**

- A** in a library
- B** in a bank
- C** in a police station

3

**AFTERNOON SHOW
BEGINS AT 2PM**

- A** outside a theatre
- B** outside a supermarket
- C** outside a restaurant

4

CLOSED FOR HOLIDAYS
Lessons start again on
the 8 th January

- A** at a travel agent's
- B** at a music school
- C** at a restaurant

5

Price per night:
£10 a tent
£5 a person

- A** at a cinema
- B** in a hotel

Questions 6 – 10

- In this section you must choose the word which best fits each space in the text below.
- For questions **6** to **10**, mark **one** letter **A**, **B** or **C** on your Answer Sheet.

Scotland

Scotland is the north part of the island of Great Britain. The Atlantic Ocean is on the west and the North Sea on the east. Some people **(6)**..... Scotland speak a different language called Gaelic.

There are **(7)** five million people in Scotland, and Edinburgh is **(8)**..... most famous city.

Scotland has many mountains; the highest one is called 'Ben Nevis'. In the south of Scotland, there are a lot of sheep. A long time ago, there **(9)** many forests, but now there are only a **(10)**

Scotland is only a small country, but it is quite beautiful.

6 **A** on

B in

C at

7 **A** about

B between

C among

8 **A** his

B your

C its

9 **A** is

B were

C was

10 A few
Questions 11 – 20

B little

C lot

- In this section you must choose the word which best fits each space in the texts.
- For questions 11 to 20, mark **one** letter **A, B, C** or **D** on your Answer Sheet.

Alice Guy Blaché

Alice Guy Blaché was the first female film director. She first became involved in cinema whilst working for the Gaumont Film Company in the late 1890s. This was a period of great change in the cinema and Alice was the first to use many new inventions, (11)..... sound and colour.

In 1907 Alice (12)..... to New York where she started her own film company. She was (13)..... successful, but, when Hollywood became the centre of the film world, the best days of the independent New York film companies were (14) When Alice died in 1968, hardly anybody (15)..... her name.

- | | | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 11A bringing | B including | C containing | D supporting |
| 12A moved | B ran | C entered | D transported |
| 13A next | B once | C immediately | D recently |
| 14A after | B down | C behind | D over |
| 15A remembered | B realised | C reminded | D repeated |

UFOs – do they exist?

UFO is short for 'unidentified flying object'. UFOs are popularly known as flying saucers,

(16) that is often the (17) they are reported to be. The (18)

"flying saucers" were seen in 1947 by an American pilot, but experts who studied his claim decided it had been a trick of the light.

Even people experienced at watching the sky, (19) as pilots, report seeing UFOs. In

1978 a pilot reported a collection of UFOs off the coast of New Zealand. A television

(20) went up with the pilot and filmed the UFOs. Scientists studying this

- 16 A because B therefore C although D so
- 17 A look B shape C size D type
- 18 A last B next C first D oldest
- 19 A like B that C so D such
- 20 A cameraman B director C actor D announcer

Questions 21 – 40

- In this section you must choose the word or phrase which best completes each sentence.
- For questions 21 to 40, mark **one** letter **A, B, C** or **D** on your Answer Sheet.

21 The teacher encouraged her students to an English pen-friend.

- A should write B write C wrote D to write

- 22 They spent a lot of time at the pictures in the museum.
 A looking B for looking C to look D to looking
- 23 Shirley enjoys science lessons, but all her experiments seem to wrong.
 A turn B come C end D go
- 24 From Michael, all the group arrived on time.
 A Except B Other C Besides D Apart
- 25 She her neighbour's children for the broken window.
 A accused B complained C blamed D denied
- 26 As I had missed the history lesson, my friend went the homework with me.
 A by B after C over D on
- 27 Whether she's a good actress or not is a of opinion.
 A matter B subject C point D case
- 28 The decorated roof of the ancient palace was up by four thin columns.
 A built B carried C held D supported
- 29 Would it you if we came on Thursday?
 A agree B suit C like D fit
- 30 This form be handed in until the end of the week.
 A doesn't need B doesn't have C needn't D hasn't got
- 31 If you make a mistake when you are writing, just it out with your pen.
 A cross B clear C do D wipe
- 32 Although our opinions on many things, we're good friends.
 A differ B oppose C disagree D divide

- 33 This product must be eaten..... two days of purchase.
A by B before C within D under
- 34 The newspaper report contained.....important information.
A many B another C an D a lot of
- 35 Have you consideredto London?
A move B to move C to be moving D moving
- 36 It can be a good idea for people who lead an active life to increase their
of vitamins.
A upturn B input C upkeep D intake
- 37 I thought there was aof jealousy in his reaction to my good fortune.
A piece B part C shadow D touch
- 38 Why didn't you..... that you were feeling ill?
A advise B mention C remark D tell
- 39 James was not sure exactly where his best interests
A stood B rested C lay D centred
- 40 He's still gettingthe shock of losing his job.
A across B by C over D through

Part 2

Do not start this part unless told to do so by your test supervisor.

Questions 41 – 50

- In this section you must choose the word or phrase which best fits each space in the texts.
- For questions 41 to 50, mark **one** letter **A, B, C** or **D** on your Answer Sheet.

The tallest buildings - SKYSCRAPERS

Nowadays, skyscrapers can be found in most major cities of the world. A building which was many (41)..... high was first called a skyscraper in the United States at the end of the 19th century, and New York has perhaps the (42)skyscraper of them all, the Empire State Building. The (43)beneath the streets of New York is rock, (44)..... enough to take the heaviest load without sinking, and is therefore well-suited to bearing the (45)..... of tall buildings.

- | | | | | | | | |
|-----|------------|---|-----------|---|------------|---|------------|
| 41A | stages | B | steps | C | storeys | D | levels |
| 42A | first-rate | B | top-class | C | well-built | D | best-known |
| 43A | dirt | B | field | C | ground | D | soil |
| 44A | hard | B | stiff | C | forceful | D | powerful |
| 45A | weight | B | height | C | size | D | scale |

SCRABBLE

Scrabble is the world's most popular word game. For its origins, we have to go back to the 1930s in the USA, when Alfred Butts, an architect, found himself out of (46) He decided that there was a (47) for a board game based on words and (48) to design one. Eventually he made a (49) from it, in spite of the fact that his original (50) was only three cents a game.

- 46A earning B work C income D job
- 47A market B purchase C commerce D sale
- 48A took up B set out C made for D got round
- 49A wealth B fund C cash D fortune
- 50A receipt B benefit C profit D allowance

Questions 51 – 60

- In this section you must choose the word or phrase which best completes each sentence.
- For questions 51 to 60, mark **one** letter **A, B, C** or **D** on your Answer Sheet.

51 Roger's manager to make him stay late if he hadn't finished the work.

- A insisted B warned C threatened D announced

52 By the time he has finished his week's work, John has hardly energy left for the weekend.

- A any B much C no D same

53 As the game to a close, disappointed spectators started to leave.

- A led B neared C approached D drew
- 54 I don't remember the front door when I left home this morning.
- A to lock B locking C locked D to have locked
- 55 I to other people borrowing my books: they always forget to return them.
- A disagree B avoid C dislike D object
- 56 Andrew's attempts to get into the swimming team have not with much success.
- A associated B concluded C joined D met
- 57 Although Harry had obviously read the newspaper article carefully, he didn't seem to have the main point.
- A grasped B clutched C clasped D gripped
- 58 A lot of the views put forward in the documentary were open to
- A enquiry B query C question D wonder
- 59 The new college for the needs of students with a variety of learning backgrounds.
- A deals B supplies C furnishes D caters
- 60 I find the times of English meals very strange – I'm not used dinner at 6pm.
- A to have B to having C having D have

Appendix 8. Post-test online questionnaire (undergraduate groups)

Dear participants, please do not leave any question unanswered. In the open-ended questions, please try to give as much information as possible. And remember that you should answer the questions thinking about yourselves and your experience, so please be as honest as possible. Thank you very much for your collaboration with this project and for your time! 😊

1. Name of the participant
2. In what country have you performed your stay?
3. Do you regret the destination chosen?
 - a. No, my experience was great.
 - b. Yes, I'd never go back where I went.
 - c. Well, I don't care...
 - d. I didn't choose my destination but it was good.
 - e. I didn't choose my destination and it was awful.
4. If you liked the destination, please explain why:
5. Where did you live?
 - a. In a flat with other students
 - b. With a host family
 - c. In a residence hall
 - d. Other
6. Can you tell us a bit about your living accommodation? With how many people did you live, where were they from...
7. How do you feel about your skills in the following languages? (If you went to an English-speaking country simply answer the "English" line)

	I don't feel confident at all when using it	I can say a couple things but not much	I think I could survive	I feel pretty confident	I can use it for any purpose, completely confident
Language of the country					

English					
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8. With whom do you prefer talking in English?
 - a. With native speakers (those whose L1 is English)
 - b. With non-native speakers (people who use English as an L2, like me)
9. I prefer talking to native-speakers because... (you can select more than one option)
 - a. They know more English
 - b. They can correct me and tell me how I can improve
 - c. Their English is the correct one
 - d. They are a model for me as an English learner
 - e. You learn more from them
 - f. I prefer non-native speakers
10. I prefer talking to non-native speakers because... (you can select more than one option)
 - a. I don't have to worry as much about not being properly understood
 - b. I feel less shy
 - c. I feel less worried about my abilities to use English
 - d. I feel more myself, free
 - e. I prefer talking to native-speakers
11. Which skill do you think you've improved the most while abroad?
 - a. Speaking
 - b. Writing
 - c. Listening
 - d. Reading
 - e. Vocabulary acquisition (new words, expressions, idioms, etc.)
12. Which skill do you think you've improved the least while abroad?
 - a. Speaking
 - b. Writing
 - c. Listening
 - d. Reading
 - e. Vocabulary acquisition (new words, expressions, idioms, etc.)
13. How many hours of instruction in English did you have while abroad? (per week)
 - a. Less than one
 - b. 1-3

- c. 3-5
 - d. More than 5
14. Which language do you think you've used the most while abroad? Why?
15. Have you participated in a reading or writing course while abroad?
- a. Yes, I took some extracurricular classes and we practised all language skills in general.
 - b. Yes, I took some extracurricular classes and I participated in a reading group in English
 - c. Yes, I took a course on writing
 - d. I attended some English classes to reinforce my practise but we did not read or write much
 - e. No, I didn't
 - f. Other, please specify:
16. Do you think you have learnt much vocabulary while abroad? (In English)
- a. Yes, a lot.
 - b. Yes, a bit.
 - c. I am not sure.
 - d. Not much.
 - e. Not at all.
17. Do you think you understand texts better after having been abroad?
- a. Yes, much better.
 - b. Yes, a bit.
 - c. I am not sure.
 - d. Not much.
 - e. Not at all.
18. Do you think you can read texts faster after having been abroad?
- a. Yes, much faster.
 - b. Yes, a bit faster.
 - c. Not much, I have not been reading much.
 - d. I don't think I read faster.
19. Do you think having been abroad has influenced your strategies when reading in English?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I am not sure
20. If so, do you have new strategies? Which ones?

21. Do you think after having been abroad you'll read more?
- Yes
 - No
 - Maybe
22. Why?
23. Do you think there has been an inflection point during the stay when you felt a change in your abilities to read in English? (E.g. an activity you performed)
24. Do you think knowing more words helps you to read faster and understand texts better?
- Yes, of course.
 - Yes, to some extent.
 - I am not sure.
 - Not much
 - I don't think so.
25. How do you think you've practised your abilities to read in English? (you can select more than one option)
- I had to read for academic/university reasons
 - Everything around me was written in English
 - I didn't practise my reading much since I only used English in oral communication/conversations
 - I didn't practise my reading much because I didn't use English much
 - Other. Please specify
26. How much time did you spend reading while abroad?

	Not at all	Only when I saw an advertisement, a restaurant menu, or something similar.	One hour a day for different reasons.	Only when I had homework	2-4 hours for academic reasons	More than three hours a day because I love reading.
In the Language of the country						
In English						

In Catalan/Spanish						
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27. Which language did you use the most at the following places:

	Language of the country	English	Catalan/Spanish	Other
University				
Home/living arrangement				
Social events/parties				

28. How many hours did you spend talking to your family back home every day?

- a. Less than 1
- b. 1-2
- c. 2-4
- d. We only spoke a couple of times a week
- e. We used whatsapp a lot but we didn't call much

29. How many hours a day did you spend using the language of the country? (do not answer this question if you travelled to an English-speaking country)

- a. Less than one
- b. 1-5 because I had classes in the language.
- c. More than five, I used the language a lot.

30. How many hours a day did you spend speaking English?

- a. Less than one
- b. 1-5 because I had classes in English
- c. More than 5, it's the language I used the most.

31. Select all the activities that have helped you to improve your English while abroad (individual actions):

- a. Writing personal things
- b. Reading emails
- c. Writing emails
- d. Listening to radio programmes
- e. Listening to conversations

- f. Reading magazines/newspapers
 - g. Writing much, and long texts
 - h. Taking notes
 - i. Watching TV
32. Select all the activities that have helped you to improve your English while abroad (interactive actions):
- a. I speak in English to my teachers at university outside the classroom
 - b. I used English with my housemates
 - c. I used English even with people who also spoke Catalan/Spanish
 - d. I met someone special with whom I communicated in English
 - e. I used English with my classmates
 - f. I used English with my Erasmus friends
 - g. Others. Please specify
33. Select all the activities that have helped you to improve your English while abroad (informative actions):
- a. I read and used English webpages
 - b. I used English to acquire new information
 - c. I read schedules, posters, advertisements, menus, etc.
 - d. I watched movies
 - e. I read novels
34. In general, what do you think about the tests you've carried out? Do you think they were difficult? (You can select more than one option)
- a. All the parts were easy
 - b. The reading texts were easy but the vocabulary test was complicated
 - c. I don't like writing much, so I don't think I've done very well in the writing
 - d. All the parts seemed a bit difficult but I think I managed
 - e. All the parts were difficult
 - f. Other. Please specify:
35. Which part was the easiest?
- a. Reading
 - b. Writing
 - c. Vocabulary test
 - d. General English test
36. Which part was the most difficult?

- a. Reading
- b. Writing
- c. Vocabulary test
- d. General English test

37. Is there anything you'd like to highlight about your stay? An inflection point when you felt a change in yourself, either personal or academic. You can refer to a subject, a person, an excursion... do you think you can explain it a bit?
38. To finish with the questionnaire, name the five people that have had the strongest impact in your life during the stay (teachers, friends, boy/girlfriend): who they are, what kind of relationship you had with them, which language did you use when communicating, etc.

Appendix9. Post-test semi-structured interview guiding questions (teenage group)

1. What's your name?
2. How do you feel with regard to your English knowledge? Do you think you know a lot, not much, so so...?
3. Which skill do you think you've improved the most during these past weeks? (speaking, writing, reading, use of English, listening...)
4. Is there any reason why you believe you've improved this skill over another one?
5. Which skill do you think you've improved the least? Why?
6. How many hours did you spend learning English formally? That is, how many hours were you learning English in a classroom and/or with a teacher?
7. What kind of activities did you do during these classes?
8. Did you spend much time reading or doing any task related to reading? If yes, which kind of task? (E.g. reading and answering questions)
9. Do you think that after these three weeks in Leixlip you understand English texts better? That is, do you think your reading comprehension has improved?
10. And, do you think you read faster after these weeks? Or at the same speed?
11. What do you think has influenced your reading improvement? The classes, being with the family, the outings...
12. Do you have any reading strategy or have you acquired a new one during the stay?
13. Do you think that after having been abroad you'll read more in English?
14. Do you think you've learnt many new words or idioms?
15. If so, what do you think has influenced your learning of these new vocabulary? The classes, the family, the outings...
16. During the classes, did you do any exercises to practise and learn new vocabulary? Which ones? (E.g. gap filling)
17. Do you have any strategy to learn new vocabulary or to help you memorize new words? Have you acquired a new one during the stay?
18. In general, what do you think has influenced your learning the most: the English lessons you attended during the mornings or the rest of the activities you performed during the stay like being with the family or going on an excursion? Or both?
19. Do you think there was an inflection point during your stay in Ireland? A moment when you felt that your English was really improving? (It can be any activity)
20. If so, when and how was it?

21. During your stay which languages have you used in your everyday life? (e.g. English at school and home Spanish with my friends, etc.)
22. What do you think about the tasks we've done today? Do you think they were difficult?
23. Which has been the easiest task? And the most difficult one?
24. To finish with the questions, I would like for you to tell me a word or an idiom that you've learnt during your stay in Leixlip, and how you learnt it or why you think you've memorized this one more than any other.
25. Now I am going to ask you some questions about your host family. Do you think they've helped your English learning? How?
26. How much time did you spend with your host family every day?
27. When eating or sharing time with them, what did you talk about?
28. Who started the conversations?
29. Did you ask any questions or did you try to make the conversation flow?
30. Other than sharing an evening meal, what else did you do with your host family? E.g. watch TV, play with your host siblings, ...
31. Did they correct you or tell you how to say things more accurately?
32. If so, how did you feel about these corrections?
33. Would you recommend living with a host family to people who wanted to practise their English abroad? Or would you say living in a hotel/apartment/residence hall would be better? Why?
34. What has been the best part of living with a host family?
35. And the worst?

Thank you!