

Longterm Impact of Studying Abroad for Japanese Students

Introduction

In recent years various studies have examined the positive impacts of studying abroad. While the results of studies from different regions show commonalities, there are also geographical and contextual differences. In Japan, a [large-scale study](#) on the impact of studying abroad was conducted from 2014 to 2015. It included those who had both studied at a university or graduate school overseas for more than three months and who had already entered the workforce for a sample of 2,640 participants. A control group of 1,298 Japanese graduates of domestic universities or graduate programs was also included in the survey. This article references the results of survey and interviews and found three primary effects of studying abroad for Japanese students. These include developing skills, changing perceptions, and choosing fulfilling careers. Finally, some ideas to promote studying abroad are also discussed.

Developing skills for globalized society

One of the main impacts of studying abroad for Japanese individuals was the development of new skills as a result of the experience. According to the survey results, Japanese people who studied abroad indicated that they developed various abilities and skills that were directly related to their experience in another country, such as foreign language competency, the ability to interact successfully with other cultures, and increased knowledge of foreign countries. Based on a self-assessment, those who did not study abroad were not confident of these skills at a comparable level. In addition, study abroad participants recognized that they acquired or improved general social skills, such as communication skills, the ability to act on decisions, and to be more flexible— again, at a higher level than

individuals who did not study abroad. These social skills are critically important for individuals to live and work effectively in a modern, civil society, but are not always associated with study abroad experiences. Although social skills should be developed at a university in the home country, the current study showed that the study abroad experience had a significant impact on the development of these skills not developed by those students who remained at their home university throughout their period of study.

Changing their perspectives as transformation

Study abroad experiences can also have significant impact on one's perceptions, awareness, and attitudes. The study showed that the study abroad participants recognized more change in these areas than those who did not study abroad, especially in enhanced self-awareness of how they are influenced by their own culture (being Japanese), greater interest in international relations and issues, and increased awareness of the challenges of coexisting with people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

In follow-up interviews, people who studied abroad reported that they frequently interacted with people from different countries and cultures in their daily lives while abroad, something that tends to be difficult in a largely homogenous country like Japan, where the majority of people are Japanese. Through the interactions with people from various cultural backgrounds, they came to reflect on their own national identity and raised their awareness regarding international relations and cross-cultural understanding. These kinds of changes taken in perspectives can be seen as transformational experiences, that confirm that a single frame-of-reference is not always applicable in different environments. Living and studying abroad and numerous interactions with others from different cultures in a foreign environment transformed participant views with important implications for their lives in the longer term.

Choosing a fulfilling career

Another impact of studying abroad was the impact on the choice of career. In Japan, university students typically seek jobs at a big company or positions as a public servant to insure a stable life with a decent income. However, study abroad experiences seemed to change this inclination. Individuals with study abroad experiences tended to choose a career path by examining more thoughtfully whether the work would be fulfilling to them or not. According to the study, individuals who studied abroad reported a higher level of satisfaction with their subsequent work life compared to those who studied at Japanese universities or graduate schools. Interestingly, the average income of people who studied abroad was also higher than those who did not, though there were individual variations. In the follow-up interviews, many people with study abroad experiences indicated that they chose their jobs because the work allowed them to apply skills and experiences gained through studying abroad to their careers. Through engagement in fulfilling careers and increasing their potential to apply more skills and experience to their work, study abroad appeared to enrich participant's lives long after their international experience.

Promoting studying abroad for the future

The current study provided evidence that study abroad experiences have positive and long-term impact on Japanese students in developing skills, changing perceptions, and choosing fulfilling careers. The findings from the current study resonated with the results of other studies conducted in the United States and Europe that stated that study abroad experiences have long-term impact on participants.

Although the impact of studying abroad can be positive, it can be difficult to imagine for those who have not yet had these experiences. Those who aren't aware of the potential impact of this experience may overlook these opportunities and not consider studying abroad. Documented benefits should be communicated with more frequency and more clearly to young

Japanese people, especially those who have not had international experience or do not have family or friends who can discuss the value of living abroad. Opportunities to listen to the experiences of those who have returned to Japan after being abroad will be most effective in this regard.

Finally, continued support by the government, especially for long-term international experience, is necessary. Recently, the number of short-term study abroad (shorter than three months) is increasing due to available scholarships from the government for this kind of study along with increased infrastructure to encourage and support study abroad at Japanese universities. However, the number of Japanese people who study abroad for more than three months has decreased since 2004. Structural obstacles in Japanese society for seeking long-term study abroad should be examined and efforts should be made to remove them. A support system to encourage students who have been abroad for a short period to pursue additional, longer stays abroad should also be developed.