

Research Report

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Title of Research:

Japan as the Gateway to Asia and Beyond: The long-term impacts of American undergraduate study abroad experiences

Purpose of Research: (400 words)

Higher education is facing an era in which the development of intercultural competencies and international understanding are more important than ever for all stakeholders involved to succeed and have a competitive edge, and internationalization is considered by many as a viable strategy to meet this demand. Student mobility is widely recognized as one of the main pillars of the internationalization of higher education to cultivate skills required to be competitive in the global knowledge economy. While considerable consensus exists regarding the importance of study abroad programs as a process of the internationalization of higher education to promote the cultivation of intercultural competent and internationally-minded individuals for a globally competitive society of the global knowledge economy, current research focuses mainly on assessing the short-term impact of study abroad in a wide range of destinations. This study aims to contribute to the knowledge of the long-term impacts of study abroad in general and also in the context of US-Japan mobility by examining the experiences of American undergraduate students in Japan. The intent of this research is to inquire into the role of study abroad in participants' personal transformation that later manifests in their academic, professional, personal life examine the long-term impact of the study abroad experience on the participants' subsequent bilateral, regional, and global orientated behaviors and attitudes, and gain an understanding of subsequent migration after the completion of study abroad.

This study will offer both practical and academic contributions to the fields of international studies, comparative international education, and higher education. First, this research aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of the historical development of study abroad programs and the long-term impact of study abroad on participants. Secondly, theoretical contributions pertaining to subsequent bilateral, regional and global oriented behaviors and attitudes can be made through examining the long-term impacts beyond just international by identifying relationships between the home country with not only the host country but also regions throughout the globe. Finally, the findings of this study will provide a concrete example that illustrates the importance of study abroad to foster and nurture the US-Japan relationship and the potential of Japan as the gateway to Asia and beyond through study abroad.

Content/Methodology of Research: (800 words)

Mixed-method research strategies was employed to complete the research objectives that seek to inquire the long-term impacts of study abroad on the individual participants. The study utilized a retrospective tracer study and aimed to research study abroad alumni covering nearly 50 years (1963-2010). The study provides a local view of the study abroad experience on a selected study abroad program in order to gain a better understanding of the long-term impact of international experiences on undergraduate students from the participant perspective. The sample includes approximately 1,400 participants who have studied abroad for one academic year or one semester for academic credit in Japan from the United States during the period of 1963-2010. A sequential mixed methods design was utilized and consisted of two phases.

Phase one consists of a single, cross sectional, online survey instrument administered to the 530 individuals and aims to yield a baseline dataset of study abroad alumni and their long-term impact of study abroad. The online survey was administered in January to February 2012 and was open for a one month time span. The survey was emailed by the study abroad program Director to approximately 530 individuals to ask for cooperation in the study. Due to the limited knowledge of current contact information, it was impossible to send to all former program participants. The online survey response rate was 50% with almost equal representation of each cohort of study participants from the 48 year timespan. The survey includes 57 questions within four major categories: basic demographics, key study abroad program elements, impact of study abroad on academic attainment, career development and personal development, and overall impact of study abroad. Additionally, the survey incorporates three dimensions, bilateral (US-Japan), regional (US-Asia), and global (US-worldwide), in order to examine and gain a better understanding of impact of study abroad

on these behaviors and attitudes.

Phase two consists of qualitative in-depth interviews focusing on individually experiences and employs purposive sampling from respondents who volunteered to be interviewed during survey in order to get perspectives from respondents who have experienced the central phenomenon. A total of 30 in-depth interviews were conducted. The interviews provide informative insights and enriched understanding to the long-term impacts of study abroad that are impossible to capture using the quantitative survey data. Typologies of the interview respondents included individuals who remained largely in the US, returned to Japan, went to Asia, or lived worldwide.

Conclusion/Observation (400 words)

This study shows that for respondents their study abroad experience is one of the most important experiences they had during their undergraduate education. Second, the findings demonstrate how the study abroad influenced respondents in terms of the academic, career, and personal development. Third, this study shows just how influential the study abroad experience is perceived by participants in terms of their attitudes and behaviors on transnational, regional, and global dimensions. These dimensions are explored in detail by systematic inquires into their post-study abroad behaviors and attitudes in relation to Japan, Asia, and the world. This approach provides a new and clearer understanding in the ways study abroad can manifest into public diplomacy and a gateway to the region and world through the personal transformation of participants. Based on the empirical findings of this study, study abroad participants acted as a bridge between the US to Japan, Asia, and the world. Also, Japan, as a study abroad destination, was a gateway to Asia and the world for respondents. The findings of this study noted respondents felt a heightened awareness of Asia and the world through their study abroad experience. The outcomes resonate in all areas of the individuals' life: academic, career, and personal. In general, the study abroad experience reinforced the participants' connection to Japan while raising awareness and interest in Asia and the world. These outcomes manifests in their subsequent educational decisions, academic attainment, career development and personal/intercultural development.

The act of studying abroad has life-long influences on participants, and they form a strong bond with the host country that lasts throughout their life. This tie manifests in the participants' subsequent career, academic, and personal development. Through administering this study to a selected sample, the potential of the study abroad experience to act as a gateway to the region and the world and create bridges between nations has been empirically and systematically documented. This finding is particularly salient given the current imperative for the cultivation of individuals with knowledge of the world and cultures outside of their own and the need for not only bilateral but also regional cooperation. This is particularly salient for Japan and the US as they continue to strengthen their ties through mutual academic exchange and adapt to the changing world and conditions in Asia. The findings of the study support current national and institutional policies that seek to foster global leaders to further the prosperity of their countries and strengthening ties with other nations and regions. As nations and regions mutually seek more cooperation, the promotion of study abroad programs can be an effective strategy to build a solid foundation of individuals equipped with the skills and knowledge required for a global society.