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# Examining Trends and Future Directions for Short-Term Study Abroad from a Stakeholder's Perspective

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## Abstract

This study identifies the stakeholders in short-term study abroad programs. It examines how stakeholders invest in and benefit from study abroad; including students, family, friends, educational institutions, governments, and employers. In addition, this study reviewed current programs at the University of Shimane and found that they are largely focused on cultural exploration, which aligns with stakeholders' expectations and needs. In addition, this paper discusses some of the ongoing issues in study abroad, including costs, scholarships, credit, and graduation, establishing relationships, and the duration of study abroad. This paper also suggests possible solutions to overcome current issues deterring students from studying abroad.

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## 1. Introduction

Studying abroad as a global trend has been increasing rapidly alongside the importance of internationalization in society. The ICEF Monitor (2015) reported that, in 1990, about 1.3 million students worldwide went abroad to study language. This number increased to 2.1 million in 2000 and jumped again to 5 million in 2014, with roughly two-thirds of students learning English (ICEF, 2015). Many of these students were in higher education. There were 2.7 million students able to

study outside their own countries for higher education in 2004 (OECD, 2007). This number is expected to reach approximately 8 million by 2025 according to UNESCO (Jackson, 2008).

While the global trend to study abroad has rapidly increased, trends in Japan have ebbed and flowed. Surveys conducted by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) show that the number of students who went overseas for higher education hit a high of 82,945 in 2004 and declined to 57,501 by 2011 (MEXT, 2015). According to the survey conducted by the Sanno Institute of Management in 2010, fewer Japanese students went aboard due to a fear of studying abroad (Bradford, 2015). Studies such as this example portray Japanese students as narrow-minded and inward-focused, attempting to explain the seeming lack of interest in going overseas, especially while their international peers are traveling more. However, economics also plays an important role. Perhaps not entirely coincidentally, the timing of this drop in desire matched devaluation of the Japanese yen against the US dollar. Historically, the United States has been a popular destination for Japanese students, but this trend may not hold as true in the future. The number of students traveling to countries other than United States has been growing (ICEF, 2015). Japanese students are showing more interest in visiting the Middle East, or Latin America, as well as other countries in Asia, especially in Southeast Asia (ICEF, 2015). The government is also expanding its support by launching new programs to encourage Japanese students to go abroad. The Japanese government hopes to double the number of students who go abroad by 2020.

With so much investment and value being placed on study abroad, this paper seeks to answer the following research questions:

- 1) Who are the stakeholders in study abroad?
- 2) How do these stakeholders invest in and benefit from study abroad?
- 3) How do programs at the University of Shimane align with stakeholders' expectations?
- 4) Are there any opportunities to enhance study abroad programs at the University of Shimane?

## **2. Stakeholders**

For the purposes of this paper, a stakeholder is defined as anyone who is invested in or is directly affected by the experience of study abroad. This section seeks to identify who is involved in sending students abroad and what they hope to gain from the endeavor.

### **2.1 The students**

Students who are able to study abroad understand cultural differences better, have opportunities to build social relationships with people from other countries, and have ample chances to develop and use their second language beyond the classroom. Studying abroad can enhance students' ability to express themselves and interact with others. This can lead to further opportunities to interact with people of various backgrounds. Students gain an appreciation for things they had previously taken for granted. Studying abroad can even expand students' abilities to analyze issues from a much broader perspective (QS, 2014). Another benefit for students going overseas is that they can

list the experience on their CV to increase appeal when seeking employment. Desirable personal characteristics for hiring will be examined in detail in a later section.

## **2.2 Family and friends**

Studying abroad has mixed effects on family members, especially parents who contribute financially. Parents are one of the biggest investors in study abroad. Parents might also worry about safety when their child asks for permission to study abroad. However, a child's enthusiasm can often make family members excited as well. This effect is not limited to parents. If one sibling shows interest in study abroad, other siblings may also become similarly motivated. The same phenomenon can be observed with friends. Enthusiasm is contagious. Furthermore, a student may gain the necessary courage to go abroad if their friends are going with them or if a friend returned from a positive experience abroad.

## **2.3 Universities and institutions**

There are many students who would like to go overseas, but are limited by financial responsibilities. As a result, there has been a shift towards shorter, less expensive programs. The number of students participating in a university-sponsored program shorter than one month has nearly tripled from 10,036 in 2009 to 29,993 in 2014 (JASSO, 2016a). In addition to offering cheaper programs, many universities offer scholarships to enable more students to go abroad. For instance, in recent years, the University of Shimane has generously reimbursed 20% of program costs for students participating in official short-term programs. In addition to direct benefits gained by participating students, the knowledge they share upon returning benefits others as well. Study abroad programs are showcased in open campus events to attract prospective students. Furthermore, international partnerships between institutions can strengthen both sides. Some universities exchange professors, which can infuse both institutions with new ideas and increase diversity of courses available. Reciprocal exchanges increase opportunities for local students to have cross-cultural interactions domestically. Furthermore, study abroad has the potential to increase the employment rates of graduates. This is another very important factor for universities to attract new students and maintain a good reputation.

## **2.4 Government**

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) includes cultural education as a core element in primary and secondary education. The government requires cultural education in higher education and offers a variety of financial support to increase access to study abroad. According to JASSO's website, government scholarships supported 45 undergraduate, 128 graduate and 24,100 short-term study abroad students this year (McCrostie, 2017). The government aims to double the number of university students studying abroad from 60,000 in 2010 to 120,000 by 2020. Regarding high school students, the aim is also to double the number, from 30,000 in 2010 to 60,000 by 2020 (McCrostie, 2017).

## 2.5 Employers

There are a growing number of Japanese companies abroad, with over 20,000 Japanese companies with branches currently existing overseas (Kuno, 2014). As globalization increases, more companies seek employees with the ability to utilize languages as well as those who have experience living abroad. Such applicants for employment have demonstrated the ability to adjust their lives in unfamiliar environments, persevere in new surroundings, and get along with people who are different from them (Benson, Barkhuizen, Bodycott, & Brown, 2013).

Traditionally, study abroad programs have focused on developing language ability. However, with the shift towards short-term programs, this aim has become limited, as longer periods abroad remain more effective than shorter ones for developing language (Dwyer, 2004). Although there are various findings in the literature, it seems that the shift towards shorter programs, and away from solely focusing on language development, has been matched by changing attitudes of stakeholders. According to Nishiyama and Hirahata (2014a), who interviewed approximately 600 companies about their expectations towards university education in general, one of the most important things students should learn is foreign language. This result seems to conflict with other findings.

Kinginger (2013) surveyed a similar number of companies, 596, and found that 86.6 % looked for well-developed communication skills when hiring new employees, not necessarily foreign language proficiency. Her study indicates that time spent abroad is often most beneficial for enhancing the ability to perform certain speech acts, such as opening and closing conversations, and in some cases, choosing and using markers of politeness (Kinginger, 2013). Study abroad enables students to develop an increased understanding of how to utilize language in context by allowing them opportunities to speak in real situations. This skill is highly transferable, as social etiquette with foreign customers plays an important role in many service industries. Advantages of study abroad for employment purposes include increased interpersonal skills and a broadened understanding of international business practices (Orahood, Pearson, & Kruze, 2004).

Nishiyama and Hirahata (2014a) conducted another survey, examining responses from 558 companies. This study found that only 5.7% of companies put emphasis on foreign language ability when hiring. They also reported that ‘foreign language ability’ ranked 14th out of 15 categories. At first, these results seem to be in sharp contrast to the findings mentioned above. However, it is likely that companies seek well-developed and practical communication skills. Nishiyama and Hirahata (2014a) further explain the popular demand to hire ‘global’ employees. They outline the desirable characteristics of a ‘global’ person as having the following:

- (1) knowledge of basic subjects
- (2) historical understanding of issues Japan has faced in the past
- (3) critical thinking skills
- (4) problem solving skills
- (5) communication skills
- (6) cross-cultural communication skills

- (7) ability to learn independently
- (8) willingness to take risks
- (9) flexibility

Many of these characteristics can be developed in traditional classroom environments. Studying abroad, however, may provide a broader perspective to historical understanding, as well as excellent chances to develop practical know-how for characteristics three through nine. Though foreign language ability was ranked near the bottom of Nishiyama and Hirahata's (2014b) survey results, communication and cross-cultural communication skills still appear to be highly in demand.

After entering the workforce, it may be more difficult for people to go abroad for extended periods of time. Therefore, it remains important for students to take advantage of opportunities to study abroad while still in school. The next section will examine how employers are responding to this reality.

## **2.6 Investment in study abroad by businesses**

It is evident that companies of any size can benefit from having employees with experience abroad. Larger companies sometimes send employees overseas, but smaller companies may not have international branches which to send employees so that they can develop international skill sets. Typically, businesses benefit from their employees' previous experiences abroad, but do not actively invest in the process. However, this may be changing as new programs enable companies to invest in study abroad. According to McCrosite (2017), MEXT is planning to ask more companies to offer internships and hold seminars for students before and after going overseas. This reflects MEXT's desire to increase 'global talent', who has experienced studying abroad.

'Tobitate!' [Leap for tomorrow!] is a scholarship program the Japan Ministry of Education launched in 2013 with hope that young Japanese people would take more initiative to see the world outside of Japan. This program has sent students to 106 universities around the world (CIPD, 2017). The number of the students who won this scholarship was 507 out of 1,336 applicants in 2017 (MEXT 2017). This program is supported by businesses, athletes and artists. More than 100 individuals from various fields and several corporate sponsors have supported this program, including the CEO of Rakuten Inc., Kyoto University, and the Nadeshiko women's national soccer team (CIPD, 2017). Though the government organizes this program, there are many stakeholders involved.

On a smaller scale, the University of Shimane is working with local businesses to send students abroad. The university launched a scholarship program called 'Global Dream Hunt', which also aims to send students to a variety of countries. Companies, as well as individuals, in Hamada City provide support so students can experience life overseas. In 2017, a total of 13 students were awarded this scholarship. They will go to Cambodia, Fiji, Taipei, and Hawaii. In addition to learning more about languages and cultures, the aim of this project is to give students chances to solve problems. They plan and discuss approaches to various issues before traveling, then utilize and share their experiences after returning to Japan. During an interview with Mr. Shigeyuki

Yubuki, the director of the Global Dream Hunt project, he shared that he wants students to experience things they've never encountered before and expects that their experiences abroad will enable them to approach problems with a broader range of solutions in the future. Such scholarships demonstrate that local business communities can help students gain firsthand experience abroad.

### 3. Current Programs

Cultural learning while studying abroad, including the development of intercultural competence and intercultural personhood, has been the subject of many studies. However, as Jackson (2008) points out, most programs have focused their efforts on outcomes rather than the learning process itself. The remainder of this paper will examine current programs at the University of Shimane, then attempt to identify opportunities for study abroad to further develop students' abilities in accordance with stakeholders' expectations.

The University of Shimane offers a variety of programs to send students overseas. The most popular and well established are the Cross-cultural Learning programs. These three to four-week programs aim to help students gain firsthand knowledge of life and culture in different countries. Programs from 2016 have been included in this study because students' feedback was available for analysis. The following outline lists a brief summary of each of the five Cross-cultural Learning programs.

#### (A) Central Washington University (United States):

In 2016, 36 students participated in this three-week program. Students spent mornings in the classroom for language studies, followed by cultural activities, sightseeing, or shopping in the afternoons. Students stayed in dormitories and ate in the cafeteria.

#### (B) The University of Hawaii (United States):

In 2016, 15 students participated in this program for four weeks. They spent the mornings studying language and culture, followed by further cultural activities, sightseeing, or shopping in the afternoons. The program included homestays, where students could experience authentic home cooking and leisure with their host families.

#### (C) Russia Marine University (Russia):

In 2017, 5 students participated in this program. Students studied language in the mornings and participated in cultural events in the afternoons and weekends. Students stayed in dormitories and ate in the cafeteria.

#### (D) University of Ulsan (Korea):

In 2016, 12 students participated in this program for four weeks. They studied language and culture in the mornings, followed by cooking classes and sightseeing activities in the afternoons. They stayed in dormitories and ate in the cafeteria.

(E) Beijing Foreign Studies University (China):

In 2016, 16 students went to study at Beijing Foreign Studies University for four weeks. The activities were similar to those in the other countries. Students studied Chinese language in the mornings and experienced cultural activities in the afternoons and weekends. They stayed in dormitories and meals were served in the cafeteria.

The curriculum for each program contains some language study focused on improving access to other experiences. The main objective, however, is to provide opportunities for cultural exploration, to experience different foods, customs, and to have meaningful exchange with local people. Surveys were implemented following the Cross-cultural Learning programs in 2016 (University of Shimane - International Exchange Division, 2016). Analysis reveals that 60% of students felt satisfied with improvement in language ability, while over 90% were satisfied with the cross-cultural experience. Additionally, 57% of students responded that they would like to use these experiences in the future, such as studying abroad again or future careers.

These results give insight into the expectations of students. Since students are not overwhelmingly satisfied with language proficiency gains, their expectations are higher than probable outcomes. Actions could be taken to manage expectations, but it is unclear if this would have a positive impact. Students were satisfied with the main aim of gaining cross-cultural experience. That reflects positively on the programs. Finally, over 40 % of students did not seek to link these experiences to their futures. One opportunity for improvement is to help students make stronger connections between what they are learning abroad and what they will do in the future. Though many students have not decided what they want to do in the future, it is an actionable goal worth considering. Providing further platforms for increased sharing of experience between peers, or between older and younger participants, might help students imagine how experiences abroad could be applied in future situations.

No other research was conducted to monitor levels of satisfaction for other stakeholders. No plans have been announced to significantly change the programs, with the exception of the Washington program. A request was made by the University of Shimane for homestays, instead of staying in dormitories. It was not possible to accommodate the request at that time and alternative program, allowing students to experience homestays, are being investigated. The dissatisfaction with dormitory life reflects the importance of enabling students to immerse in life abroad, gaining foreign culture experience firsthand.

#### **4. Further discussion**

To gain further insight into current trends, and to better predict future directions, this section will examine threats and opportunities for stakeholders.

##### **4.1 Costs and scholarships**

As mentioned previously, one of the main concerns when students choose to go abroad is the cost. A study conducted by Tokyo University revealed that nearly 80% of students, 1,240 of 1,565,



do not want to study abroad for economic reasons (Tokyo Daigaku Kokusaika Hakusho, 2009). MEXT (2013) surveyed high school students and found economic reasons rated second, with 37.9%, as to why students did not want to study abroad. Perhaps the difference between age groups may be explained by who will pay for the trip. In both cases, however, the economic reason is a huge deterrent. Currently, about 80% of university students in Japan attend private institutions and must budget carefully for domestic tuition (Nishiyama & Hirahata, 2014b). A trip abroad may be considered a nonessential luxury. To help overcome this concern, there are numerous scholarship programs, though many of them require students to return after a predetermined time. In response to this situation, a few scholarship programs allow students to apply within or outside of Japan, enabling students to remain abroad longer. These scholarships vary depending on the type of degree being pursued, undergraduate or masters, and the duration of the stay (JASSO, 2016b). Students may not realize that such opportunities exist. They may feel obligated to return to Japan or even return the money if they wish to continue studying or living abroad. Awareness of these scholarships must be increased to facilitate continued study abroad for those who wish to stay longer.

#### **4.2 Credit and graduation**

Another related concern for students is that studying abroad for longer periods of time can delay graduation. A delayed graduation postpones when they can start working and generating enough income to become self-sufficient. MEXT (2013) found that 67.8% of students surveyed worried about failing to graduate from the university in four years. Some students may wish to experience study abroad, but consider graduating within four years to be more important. This factor has contributed to the recent popularity of shorter programs. However, it is worth questioning if it is a good policy. At peak travel times, shorter programs are less cost effective. If credits from foreign universities were accepted more easily, it could eliminate this deterrent and enable longer, more meaningful experiences abroad. Increasing the number of mutual agreements would also enable more foreign students to study in Japan.

Another approach to address this issue is to design a four-year curriculum that includes time for study abroad. This way, students could see a clear path to graduation within four years. Again, mutual exchange agreements and easier credit transfer could help facilitate this type of program.

#### **4.3 Establishing relationships**

As mentioned in the previous section, mutual agreements between universities enable many opportunities for students. However, as a stakeholder, universities may be reluctant or unable to set up and maintain numerous relations with partner schools, as it can be very time consuming for faculty and administrators. There are, however, organizations dedicated to helping institutions connect to each other. University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (UMAP) is one such organization. It was launched by MEXT in 1991 and is currently comprised of over 570 universities in 35 countries. The main objective of UMAP is for the countries and territories in the Asia-Pacific region to achieve a better understanding of the cultural, economic, and social system of the other

countries and territories in the region through enhanced cooperation among higher education institutions and increased mobility of university students and staff. It is a voluntary association of government and non-government representatives in higher education within the Asia-Pacific region (University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific, 2017). For universities who are reluctant to take on new partners, working with an established organization, such as UMAP, would increase the opportunities available for students and eliminate several potential deterrents.

#### **4.4 Duration**

This paper has largely focused on short-term study abroad programs. However, to examine future directions, it is worth considering extending the duration of study abroad. As mentioned previously, traveling for short periods of time during peak travel season severely reduces cost effectiveness. Despite all the benefits these programs have, stakeholders could be getting a much better value for their money. If a full year abroad is not possible, Dwyer (2004) suggests the duration of a trip should be a minimum of six weeks. She conducted a survey of 3,700 students and found that, if a short-term program is well designed and well implemented, six weeks abroad can significantly impact a student's personal and cultural development. These findings suggest that relatively shorter programs can still have substantial outcomes, though careful planning and implementation are essential.

#### **5. Conclusion**

This paper sought to identify who the stakeholders are in sending students abroad, how these stakeholders invest in and benefit from study abroad, how programs at the University of Shimane align with stakeholders' expectations, and what opportunities are available to enhance the study abroad programs at the University of Shimane. This study identified major stakeholders and examined how they invest in and benefit from the experience. This study also reviewed current programs at the University of Shimane and found that they are largely focused on cultural exploration, which is in line with stakeholders' expectations and needs. In addition, this paper discussed some of the ongoing issues for study abroad and suggested possible solutions to overcome them.

Each student brings a unique combination of reasons for studying abroad. Some go overseas to enhance their language abilities, some aim to enrich their cultural awareness, and others seek to develop professional skills to succeed in the global economy. All of these ambitions are worth pursuing, but it is very difficult for students to study abroad without the support of families, universities, governments, and even businesses. Education is the cornerstone of society and we are all stakeholders in the future being shaped by decisions and actions today. In addition to the individual benefits examined in this paper, study abroad contributes to increased tolerance and respect for differences worldwide. It is hoped that this paper will offer insight and prove useful for decision makers as study abroad programs continue to develop and enable more students to have positive experiences abroad.

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