

Understanding Japanese Sojourning Experiences in a Study Abroad Context

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ABSTRACT

The Internationalization of higher education is a major theme in the current educational debate in Japan. Among the various policies implemented, one of the major efforts of all tertiary institutions in Japan over nearly three decades has been to internationalize the minds of Japanese youths by sending them abroad on exchange programs as part of their university learning experiences. This research examines the Japanese students who are currently on study abroad programs, to comprehend what they learn and the experiences they undergo to elicit some answers to the challenges that Japanese universities are currently facing. The three popular study abroad destinations chosen for the study include: the University of Hawaii (UH) at Manoa, in Hawaii; the University of British Columbia (UBC), in Vancouver; and the Singapore Management University (SMU), in Singapore. Student numbers indicate that the selected institutions have attracted substantial number of Japanese exchange students in the past. The Japanese students have chosen these universities to improve their English language skills while pursuing other educational goals. An interview guide was developed to interview 46 Japanese students involving: in-depth interviews and focus group discussions capturing the experiences of Japanese students. The conceptual framework created for this study includes research ideologies developed by international scholars enabling formulation of the research questions for the field work undertaken. As a consequence, the validity and reliability of the study were constructed based on the analysis data collected following the existing models of research in the area. Three important findings emerged from this study: (1) there is a massive decline in the number of Japanese students going abroad due to the growing psychological resistance amongst them with respect to their cultural domain. (2) These students also experience various kinds of anxiety owing to the change in their learning environment, culture and language; (3) surprisingly, statistics do not indicate reduction in the number of Japanese students going to the selected sites based on the fieldwork data gathered

where a large number of Japanese students could be observed going to UH, UBC and SMU. At the time of writing, these three locations were very popular amongst the Japanese students and the study also reveals that the major factors involved in the Japanese students decision making to go abroad was for: academic enhancements, scholarship(s) and job opportunities. The rest of the thesis focuses on validating the acquired data.

Keywords: Japanese Youths, Study Abroad, Higher Education, Learning Experiences, Internationalization.