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Conceptualization of a Multicultural Society in Study Abroad Programs for Japanese University Students¹⁾

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine how Japanese university students can enhance their understanding and change their perceptions of multicultural societies through short-term study abroad programs. The participants of the study were university students in Tokyo (University A), who studied in the United States for two weeks during the summer term of 2018, and students in Sapporo (University B), who studied in Australia for three weeks during the spring term of 2019. In both programs, they took classes in intercultural communication and multiculturalism at a partner university and participated in group fieldwork. The programs also included a variety of activities, such as interacting with local college students, guest speakers, participating in LGBTQ pride parades, home visits, business visits, and visits to daycare centers, schools, farms, a Muslim neighborhood, and a Japanese American museum. At the end of their study abroad, the students made presentations and reflected on their experiences. The researchers examined how these experiences

1) This paper is based on the research presented at the presentation session, titled “日本人大学生の海外短期留学における多文化共生社会についての学びと気づき” of the 34th Annual Conference, Society for Intercultural Education Training and Research of Japan, which was held in Tokyo, Japan, in November 2019.

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changed the students' perceptions of interculturalism and multicultural societies, through observations and their journals and reflective reports. Based on the results, the researchers propose approaches to intercultural communication education in the context of studying abroad as a means to help reduce bias toward gender minorities and to raise awareness of multiculturalism.

Keywords: higher education, intercultural communication, minority, multicultural education, study abroad

Introduction

In response to an increasingly globalized society, a number of Japanese universities offer short-term study abroad (SA) programs to their students. According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) (2017), 105,301 Japanese students participated in SA programs in 2017. In the 2017 academic year, SA programs in the United States (19,527) made up the bulk of student travels, with Australia (9,879) and Canada (9,440) following. The SA programs typically fall under four durations: under one month, one to three months, six months to one year, and over one year. Of the 105,301 Japanese students who have participated in SA, 66,876 (64%) were abroad for under one month, followed by 13% for over one year, 11% for six months to one year, and around 10% for one month to three months (2% unaccounted); therefore, SA under one month is the most preferred option (MEXT, 2017).

Short-term SA programs offered by universities are of different types and have different objectives. Some programs are compulsory for graduation, others are designed for students in specific courses and consist of several subjects and study abroad components, while others are elective programs with or without credits. Language programs are the most common and often include cultural activities and sightseeing. Programs may also be specialized (related to a student's major), liberal arts (unrelated a student's major), and fieldwork-based.

This research focused on two student groups from SA programs at University A in Tokyo and University B in Sapporo. The two programs have several key components in common. First, both are two-credit courses and are specialized programs that incorporate fieldwork. The content in both programs focuses on

intercultural communication and understanding, and multicultural society. Second, the students are required to attend workshops prior to departure where they learn more about intercultural communication, cultural understanding, and multicultural society; plan the program with a partner university and an institution; and learn about health, safety, and cultural adjustment issues when abroad. Few researchers have highlighted the importance of support for increasing cultural understanding and sensitivity through education and training before going abroad (Altshuler, Sussman, & Kachur, 2003; Bennett, Bennett, & Allen, 1999; Paige, 1993; Pruegger & Rogers, 1994). Hence, it is important to study intercultural communication skills and competence, which refer to the ability to communicate and interact effectively in different cultures (Deardorff, 2006; Lustig & Koester, 2013; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). While abroad, the students are expected to apply their knowledge practically and use their understanding of the world in an intercultural context by interacting with local people. Third, after returning to Japan, students discuss what they learned from their study abroad program and submit a reflection report as part of the post-sojourn debriefing workshop. Finally, the researchers are actively involved in the design of the programs in collaboration with subject experts and other staff, which makes the two programs unique when compared with other short-term SA programs.

The researchers examined how the students' perceptions of intercultural and multicultural society changed as a result of their SA program based on field observations, student journals, and reflection reports. It is noteworthy that students' perceptions of gender issues changed as a result of SA, and the research suggests approaches to intercultural communication education that could reduce gender minority bias and raise awareness of multiculturalism.

Experiential Learning and Intercultural Intervention

It is widely recognized that intercultural learning involves cognitive, affective, and behavioral changes (Byram, 2008; Deardorff, 2006). Research on the impact of SA has increased since 2000 (Deardorff, 2012; Jackson & Oguro, 2018; Vande Berg et al., 2012), and SA is regarded as a powerful tool that can facilitate students' intercultural competencies.

Among various suggested frameworks for effective SA, Kolb's (2015) experiential

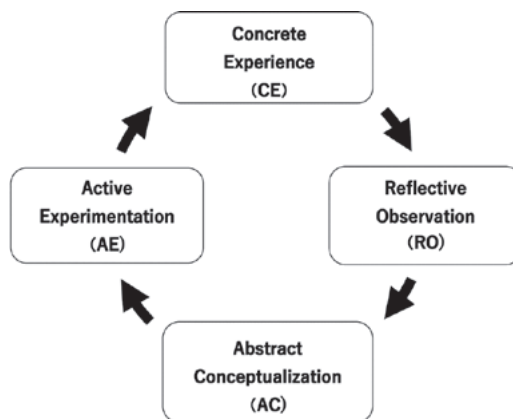


Figure 1 Kolb's (2015) Experiential learning theory

learning theory (ELT) is recognized as one of the most prominent for achieving deep cognitive learning (Passarelli & Kolb, 2012). ELT defines learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 2015, p. 49). The ELT model portrays two dialectically related modes to grasp experiences—concrete experience (CE) and abstract conceptualization (AC)—and two dialectically related modes to transform experience—reflective observation (RO) and active experimentation (AE). According to Kolb (2015) (see Figure 1), comprehension arises from the resolution of creative tension among these four learning modes. This process is portrayed as an idealized learning cycle, where the learner “touches all the bases”—experiencing (CE), reflecting (RO), thinking (AC), and acting (AE)—in a recursive process that is sensitive to the learning situation and covers the concept being learned (Kolb, 2015, p. 51).

In light of this, Vande Berg et al. (2012) suggest that ELT provides a model for educational interventions in SA. They offer key concepts and guidance to SA educators for utilizing the concepts to maximize student development. According to Vande Berg et al., seven intervention approaches are suggested: (1) cultural mentoring and the cultural mentor, (2) provision of cultural content, (3) reflection of intercultural experiences, (4) immersion and engagement with the culture, (5) intercultural learning throughout the studying abroad cycle, (6) online and on-site interventions, and (7) comprehensive intercultural interventions. They insist that most students begin to learn effectively abroad only when an educator intervenes

strategically and intentionally. Related to this notion, Hammer (2012) confirms that students studying abroad with intervention show a higher gain in their intercultural development inventory than those without intervention (Hammer & Bennett, 1998).

There has been a large number of research on the effect of SA programs in the foreign language learning area (Harris, 2014; Isabelli-García, Bown, Plews, & Dewey, 2018; Kinginger 2008; Tanaka & Ellis, 2003). Prior research has also shown that self-awareness increases in short-term study abroad (Gaia, 2015). However, there is little research on the efficacy of short-term programs with specialized subjects such as intercultural communication and multicultural societies. Therefore, this research aimed to provide new insights into how Japanese university students deepen their understanding and change their perceptions of a multicultural society and gender minority issues through short-term programs.

Descriptions of the Two SA Programs

Students from University A studied in Portland, Oregon, USA, for two weeks during a summer break, and those from University B went to Sydney, Australia, for three weeks during spring break. University A students stayed in a hotel and shared rooms with a roommate, while University B students were placed in homestays (Table 1). The SA program at University A consisted of classes on intercultural communication, cultural understanding, multicultural society, and activities. University B students studied English as a foreign language and multicultural society, participated in four exchanges, two with local students and two with business people, and engaged in multicultural fieldwork. During the last week of the program, University A students made their final presentations based on their field studies, While University B students were required to conduct a discussion of their short-term SA reflections. Both programs were accompanied by a research faculty member who specialized in intercultural communication and multicultural education within the department.

Table 1 Descriptions of short-term SA programs

	University A	University B
Credits	2 credits	2 credits
Duration	2 weeks in summer	3 weeks in spring
Country	Portland, U.S.A.	Sydney, Australia
Residence	Hotel	Homestay
Classes	Intercultural communication, cultural understanding, multicultural society, guest speakers	Language class, multicultural society, cultural diversity, identity and diversity, student exchange, business exchange
Multicultural Activities	Visiting companies, homes, nursery school, and Japanese American museum, field studies, etc.	Attending an LGBTQ parade, visiting a mosque and a Muslim neighborhood, field studies, etc.
Last Class	Group presentations	Reflective discussion
Attendant	Japanese faculty	Japanese faculty

The researchers believe that through their short-term SA, Japanese university students learned about issues faced by multicultural societies. The research question for the study was as follows: How can Japanese university students deepen and alter their conceptual understandings of a multicultural society through a short-term SA program?

Short-term SA Program Structure

When students applied to the programs, they were required to write their motivations for applying in English or Japanese and were interviewed. Once accepted, they were required to attend an orientation where an explanation of the program was given by faculty and previous participants. Students earned credits for the two short-term SA programs, so they were required to attend pre-departure workshops and complete assignments in Japan before studying abroad (see Figure 2). Once the students came home from their SA, they were required to attend a post-sojourn debriefing workshop and submit reflective reports and journals.

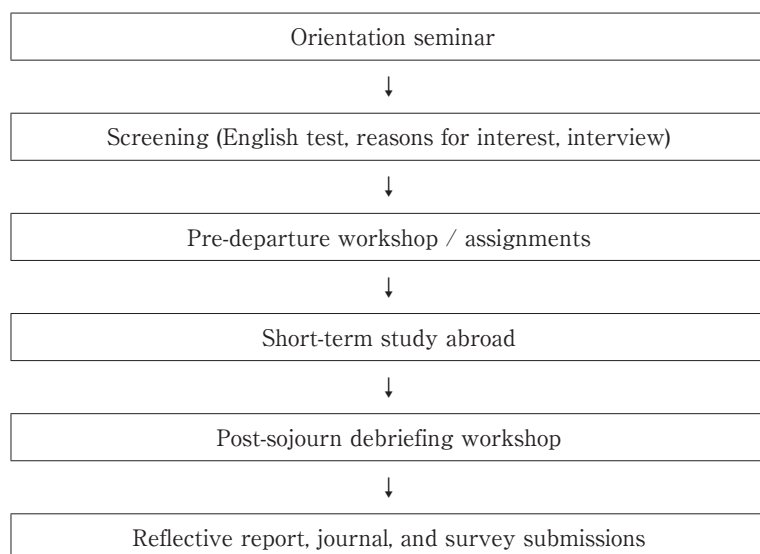


Figure 2 Flow chart of the short-term SA programs

Method

Students' reflective reports and journals were analyzed using a qualitative method to extract research findings.

Participants

The researchers enlisted the participation of 14 undergraduate students from University A in Tokyo and 18 undergraduate students from University B in Sapporo (see Table 2). Both are private universities. A total of 32 participants were included. Students' age demographics are given below in Table 2.

Table 2 Participants' details

	University A	University B
Number of students	14	18
Age	18–21 years	19–20 years

Research Instruments

The students from University A wrote their reflective reports and journals in English, and the students from University B wrote their reflective reports in Japanese. The text data from both universities were combined and analyzed.

Qualitative data analysis software NVivo⁴⁾ was used to analyze the text data.

As the data were a mix of Japanese and English, the researchers could not use a common text mining tool. Thus, NVivo software was utilized to create nodes from keywords extracted from the content of the reports and categorized in node tables (Jackson & Bazeley, 2019). The nodes were organized as parent, child, and grandchild nodes, and in the process of integrating them, the node list was scrutinized and the keywords found in the text of the student reports were compiled. The researchers were able to gauge what students gained from the SA program by examining the characteristic keywords from each university and integrating the data from both universities.

Results

Five Points of Awareness Demonstrated by the Node Results

The results of the analysis of the students' reports showed that there was a particular awareness of five points: self-awareness, multicultural society, perception of others, communication, and business. In the integration process, the nodal list was scrutinized to extract only "awareness and learning" words. The number of references in the code was significant for a recurring theme. Table 3 shows the results of the matrix coding query for University A.

Table 3 Matrix coding query results from University A

	Number of references	%
1. Self-awareness	323	57%
2. Multicultural society	98	17%
3. Awareness of others	65	11%
4. Communication	46	8 %
5. Business	37	7 %

Table 4 shows the results of the matrix coding queries for University B. The results in Tables 3 and 4 show that University A and University B had the same order of the five awareness scores. Self-awareness, the first point, was found to be higher in University A at 57% than in University B at 47%, suggesting that students

4) NVivo is a Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) and qualitative research support software.

from University A had more opportunities for reflection because they had to write in their journals every day. The percentages of multicultural society awareness and awareness of others were higher in University B, indicating that they focused more on multicultural social relations activities during their SA.

Table 4 Matrix coding query results from University B

	Number of references	%
1. Self-awareness	411	47%
2. Multicultural society	183	21%*
2. Awareness of others	183	21%*
4. Communication	86	10%
5. Business	15	2 %

Note: *There were the same number of references (%).

Table 5 shows the results from the matrix coding query of the two universities combined. The results revealed five major points of awareness. Self-awareness has been shown to have the highest priority in other SA programs (Gaia, 2015), and the results of this study were aligned. However, as the second awareness, multicultural society, was the purpose of these programs, the result was considered as satisfactory. The third, awareness of others, was unexpected, but based on observation, the students in the countries appeared to learn much from other people. The fourth point, communication, was expected to be seen at a higher percentage. The fifth, business, appeared as it was the first time students encountered foreign attitudes toward work and this impressed them.

Table 5 Matrix coding query results from both universities

	Number of references	%
1. Self-awareness	734	51%
2. Multicultural society	281	19%
3. Awareness of others	248	17%
4. Communication	132	9 %
5. Business	51	4 %

Cross-tabulation Analysis of Five Awareness Points

The results presented in Table 5 were further analyzed by cross-tabulation of the five awareness types, starting with self-awareness (see Table 6). Taking a closer look at self-awareness, almost half (45%) of the students said they were able to obtain

new knowledge and mindsets. The new knowledge influenced their behaviors and enabled them to take on different values. The results also show that they thought about their identity and their future.

Table 6 Cross-tabulation results of “self-awareness”

	Number of references	%
1. Knowledge and mindset gained from the experience	327	45%
2. Changes in attitudes/behaviors/skills	188	26%
3. Identity	80	11%
4. Future	74	10%
5. Increased perspectives and changed values	65	9 %

Table 7 further cross-tabulates and analyzes the second awareness “multicultural society.” In multicultural society awareness, it is apparent that students learned about the issues of the local multicultural society, such as minorities, diversity, discrimination, and prejudice. In addition, the cross-cultural aspect of the study included differences in culture, clothing, food, and housing. This last factor was a result of home stays and home visits. Some of the differences such as clothing are superficial, while other factors demonstrate more in-depth social awareness.

Table 7 Cross-tabulation results of "multicultural society"

	Number of references	%
1. Minorities	103	37%
2. Diversity	49	17%
3. Food/clothing/home	44	16%
4. Culture	39	14%
5. Discrimination and prejudice	28	10%
6. Religion	18	6 %

Table 8 shows the results from a further cross-tabulation analysis of “awareness of others.” Awareness of others indicates the intensity of local interactions. Evidently, students learned a lot from local faculty members, staff, and other people by listening to their stories and asking questions. The results also show that they learned much from each other by observing the behavior, thinking, and growth of their fellow students.

Table 8 Cross-tabulation results of "awareness of others"

	Number of references	%
1. Local faculty members and staff	118	48%
2. Faculty members who accompanied them	63	25%
3. Locals they interacted with	56	23%
4. Faculty member accompaniment	11	4 %

The fourth category, "communication," and the fifth, "business," have a smaller number of references; therefore, the cross-tabulation tables are not shown in this section, only the percentages and number of references. The results of a further cross-tabulation analysis of "communication" showed that "language" was 76% (100), "non-verbal" was 14% (19), and "communication style" was 10% (13). As the details of communication awareness show, most participants became aware of their English language skills and their ability to speak in English. Many participants who thought that their English was not good enough commented that they had to do their best to speak up; otherwise, they would not be understood. They further commented that their attitudes toward speaking English changed once they had gone abroad.

The results of the "business" cross-tabulation are "working style" at 62% (32), "future work" at 29% (15), and "life-work balance" at 5% (5). Although the students had never worked in Japan, they understood the differences between Japan and other countries in terms of working style and values. They commented that their sense of values before and after studying abroad had changed toward the work they would pursue after graduating from university.

Analysis of Minority Nodes in a Multicultural Society

In this study, the students' awareness of a multicultural society, which was a characteristic of the two short-term SA programs, was analyzed in greater depth. Analysis was performed on the minorities with the highest number of references in the multicultural society cross-tabulation results. The number of references for "minorities" was the highest among the multicultural society results; hence, they were subjected to further analysis by cross-tabulation.

The results of the detailed analysis of minorities revealed that the activities of both programs resulted in significant awareness for the students. Both programs include LGBTQ classes and activities, and both programs also provide students with much-

needed learning by bringing in guest speakers at short notice. Because the students expressed interest, a Muslim student was invited to a class, and visits to a Muslim community in Australia and a church that helps homeless people in America were arranged. There were trusting relationships between the local faculty and staff involved in both programs and the accompanying Japanese faculty; therefore, not only was planned content provided but there was also a flexibility for impromptu learning and guest speakers, while monitoring the students.

Table 9 Cross-tabulation results of “minorities”

	Number of references	%
1. LGBTQ	70	68%
2. Muslims	22	21%
3. Homeless people	7	7 %
4. Japanese immigrants	3	3 %
5. Aboriginal people	1	1 %

Discussion

In this section, the connection between students’ attitudinal changes and their comprehension of multicultural societies noticed in their reflective reports are analyzed. There is a focus on the students’ awakening to the awareness of gender minority issues.

The data show that most University A and B students experienced growing awareness of multicultural society through their changing perceptions of gender minorities. To explore what influenced this conceptual development, the source of their awareness was categorized into four areas:

1. Observation of the environment
2. Interaction with the involved gender minorities
3. Interaction with others
4. Intervention of cultural mentors

The reflective reports of seven students, three from University A and four from University B, were analyzed in depth using the ELT framework (Kolb, 2015).

1. Observation of the Environment

One factor that contributed to students' deeper awareness and understanding of multicultural societies, especially gender issues, was observation and being present, through sights and experiences. There were many descriptions of students noticing small differences for the first time, and then comparing and reflecting on the similarities and differences of things they were aware of in Japan.

Student #1, University A

Student #1 wrote about a unisex restroom while on a company visit:

... Another example is that there is a unisex restroom in a company. This is in consideration of LGBTQ people. Portland is ranked [as] the second [highest] LGBTQ-friendly city in the United States. In the future, it will become more important for society to create conditions [in] which women and LGBTQ people experience a better work environment. I want to work under conditions such as these...

For Student #1, this finding appeared to be an opportunity to critically analyze gender-specific restrooms in Japan. Using Kolb's ELT (Kolb, 2015), she observed that unisex bathrooms and her concrete experience led her to reflect that Japan is still not an LGBTQ positive society. Her reflective observations led to her formulation and AC of an ideal future work environment.

Students #2, University B

Student #2 wrote about how she had learned about gender and diversity with mixed feelings. First, she felt uplifted when she joined the LGBTQ pride parade, where locals and tourists celebrated diversity. However, a few days later, she visited a mosque for learning about diversity and found something controversial:

...Through the parade, I was able to see the advocacy and strong beliefs of LGBTIQ [sic] people directly... I also felt that LGBTIQ people should be recognized under all circumstances and that those who don't recognize them are evil...[later on] in the mosque, entrances to the building and hand and foot baths were segregated according to gender, and the clothing was quite different for men and women. I could see that the differences between men and women are strictly judged in Islam...

In her report, she goes on to talk about the complexity of multiculturalism compared to what she first imagined:

...In Australia, I used all my five senses to experience a much more difficult and tense reality than what I had thought it would be before the trip ... I have come to think more carefully about international issues in the world today.

Watching an LGBTQ parade (concrete experience) guided her to her first conceptualization that anyone who did not respect diversity was evil. However, during her second round of ELT, she formed a new and contrasting concrete experience through the visit to the mosque, its hand and foot baths, and her interactions with people in the community. This guided her to a different perspective on diversity. She wrote about this experience at length in her journal assignment, narrating how complex the issue could be (RO), and this led to her second round of conceptualization. In other words, she realized that respecting diversity is “much more difficult,” which subsequently led to her AE that “I have begun to think about international issues.”

Kolb (2015) defines learning as a “process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience,” and knowledge is believed to come about through the “combination of grasping the transformative experience.” It is assumed that Student #1 and Student #2 nurtured their critical cultural awareness (Byram, 2008) when they observed and analyzed the host culture and their own cultures critically and objectively. In doing so, their learning was transformed into further positive attitudes (i.e., openness and curiosity) toward diversity.

2. Interactions with the Involved Gender Minorities

Interaction with the people involved (i.e., gender minorities) had a heavy impact on the students' change in perceptions toward gender. Listening to gender minority voices enabled them to relate on an emotional level, which helped them nurture empathy, one of the crucial factors for developing intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006).

Student #3, University A

Student #3 from University A recounted a visit to a same-sex, married couple's home:

...Even though there are many LGBT people, I had never met any, so this was the first time for me to be able to speak with LGBT people. Before visiting their home, I thought they were somehow different from me, but I found that they are just same. The women who I visited told me their life histories and beliefs. I thought that their desire for changes in society was deeper than my own. I found the opportunity to get to know that other people's strong beliefs are important and it helped me to think about mine...

In light of Kolb's (2015) ELT, the researchers saw how the home visit (Kolb's keyword depicting the concrete experience) led her to a RO, "I thought they are somehow different from me, but..." Her perception of LGBTQ people changed by actively listening. The occurrence of AC was indicated when she wrote, "to get to know other people's beliefs was important ...", a concept which is expected to affect her future actions. As for Student #3, her episode appears further in the section on the intervention of a cultural mentor.

3. Interaction with Others

It is worth noting that the students also gained multiple perspectives on gender sometimes in unpredictable ways from people who were not gender minorities.

Student #4, University B

Student #4 from University B, who plans to become an elementary school teacher, related an episode in which a pre-departure belief regarding diversity was overturned by his interaction with a Muslim student and a mosque administrator:

...Before I went to Sydney, I used to think that [respecting] diversity ultimately came down to indifference. For example, we wouldn't care if we were eating pork dishes next to a Muslim. We treat our friends the same regardless of whether they were LGBTIQ+ or not ... However, when I was in Sydney and came into contact with a wide variety of people, communities, and social systems, I realized that I was wrong. Rather, I realized that discrimination rarely occurs with intention, but instead arises out of unconscious indifference...

His former perception was challenged through an unexpected dialogue with a Muslim student when they were discussing LGBTQ people:

...When I spoke with him, I had the impression that he was very conscious,

compassionate, and wonderful personality, as we both aspired to the same path as teachers. I didn't think the words "I respect the LGBTQ people, but I don't support them" could come out of his mouth...

This strained atmosphere was observed by Researcher B (an associate professor at University B), where all students, including Student #4, were upset and tense because of this unexpected comment from the Muslim student. During break time, the Muslim student introduced his background and talked about his Muslim neighborhood, which was the district that had the highest number of votes against the same-sex marriage referendum in Australia in 2017. This motivated Researcher B to suggest that the students visit this neighborhood as part of their fieldwork.

The next part of Student #4's narrative refers to the incident a few days later, when the student met a mosque administrator who told his story about discrimination against Muslims in Australian society. Student #4 continued:

...I thought the administrator of the mosque and A [the Muslim student] were victims in the chain of grief. I suppose they have been bullied or harassed in various ways in their lives... I thought that Australia was a successful example of a multicultural society, but my encounter with A and my experience in B [the Muslim neighborhood] made me realize that this was not true... The worst thing is being indifferent. That's the viewpoint [that] changed through my experiences

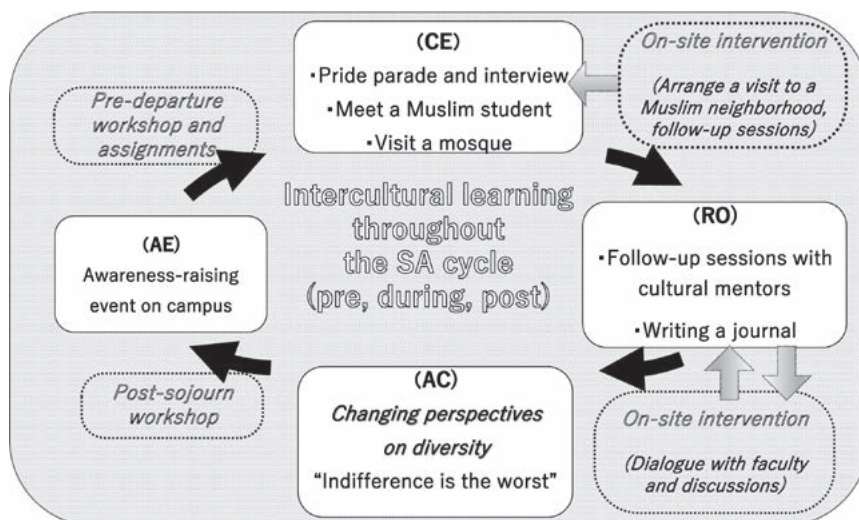


Figure 3 Learning cycle of Student #4, University B, based on Kolb (2015) and Vande Berg et al. (2012)

overseas. And if there are people in Japan who think like I did before I went to Sydney, I would like to tell them about my experience.

A transformation of conceptualization can be observed from his episode. His perception on diversity before and after the SA program went from “indifference is good” to “indifference is the worst.” After the SA program, this student and a few others from the program, applied for an on-campus project grant and were awarded funds to bring LGBTQ speakers onto campus to raise awareness. This case explicitly demonstrates that Kolb's AE occurred after “touching all the bases” (see Figure 3).

4. Intervention of Cultural Mentors

Vande Berg et al. (2012) assert that the preparation of cultural mentors is an essential part of student success in studying abroad. It is suggested that professional interventions by the local cultural mentors in both programs helped students to deepen their understanding of gender issues, especially from CE to RO, and thereafter to the AC stage.

Student #5, University A

Student #5 from University A wrote about one of the guest speakers, and the moment when she gained culturally specific knowledge from the speaker's lecture. Her story was based on the working experience and her friend and this story deeply affected Student #5:

...I thought [that] LGBTQ was an issue of immediate concern because the guest speaker's friend is LGBTQ, and she receive poor treatment at the company where she worked and was discriminated [against] in housing, employment, and health care services. In Japan, there are no same-sex marriage laws, so we have to think about this problem [more] deeply...

This session helped her make sense of the next encounter, that is, the aforementioned home visit to a same-sex, married couple. The following is a continuation of Student #3's (University A) reflective report. This episode concerns another cultural mentor, an American professor, who exemplified how professional intervention supported Student #3 after her visit to the couple:

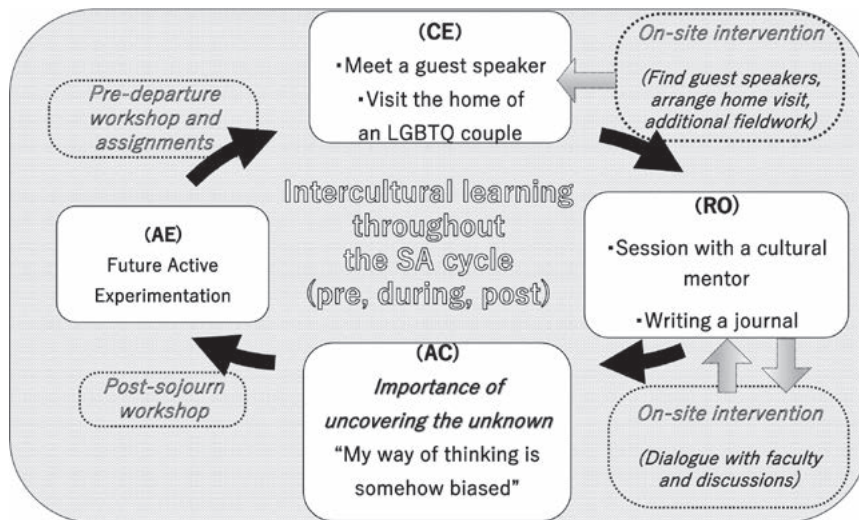


Figure 4 Learning cycle of Student #3, based on Kolb (2015) and Vande Berg et al. (2012)

Student #3, University A (continued)

...In addition, one of the American professors said that after we become accustomed, same-sex couples will seem normal. [Just] [a]s he said, I got used to everything [within] two weeks, but I realized that I should not forget the excitement which I felt when I first met these [people]. Also, I learned that I should not rely on just my own beliefs, because my way of thinking is somehow biased. Those experiences helped me to learn not only about another culture but also the importance of seeking new experiences and the importance of learning what I did not know...

Cultural mentors need to be skillful in providing support and knowledge about the process of intercultural adjustments (Vande Berg et al., 2012). The American professor related Student #3's experience with the theory of intercultural adjustment so that the student was able to make a better sense of this particular intercultural contact. The feedback provided by the professor was relevant to her level of intercultural development. Along with the former part of the episode (see the Observation of environment section), the learning cycle is shown in Figure 4.

Student #6, University B

Regarding the relation of experience to theory, Student #6 from University B

reported an exchange with Dr. A that gave the students their “makes sense” moment during an identity and diversity lecture. He explains the notion of microaggression:

... Dr. A said, “Everyone is a victim of microaggression” ... When he said that I didn't know what he was talking about. But when we listened to his explanation, I thought we all know that we've done this before. ... For example, “Do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend?” Everyone casually asks this question, but we are assuming the other person is heterosexual ...

Students #7, University B

Similarly, Student #7 from University B reflected on a conversation with Dr. B in a follow-up session on gender and discrimination, after the experience with the Muslim student and the mosque visit, where she became aware of the student's emotional state:

...I asked her if it would be a good idea to incorporate this area of study [gender] into elementary education. She said “yes” and gave me ideas from an approach I had never thought about before... I thought “She helps me to look at things differently.” She helped me get back on track...

Effective cultural mentoring means engaging learners in ongoing discourse about their experiences and helping them better understand the intercultural nature of the encounters (Vande Berg, 2012). In this session, Dr. B introduced the students to the notion of “intersectionality,” where compound discrimination occurs (e.g., Muslim and LGBTQ), which offered them new spheres to explore after returning home. The intervention by Dr. A and Dr. B in RO for the whole student group is exemplified in the follow-up sessions with cultural mentors (Figure 3).

The data from the two universities show that the most memorable lectures/sessions were the ones that did not end with the mere “banking” of knowledge (Freire, 2018) but successfully facilitated the students in actively engaging with the discussion and reflecting on their experience objectively, thus offering an ethno-relative view for them to practice. Moreover, the mentors' attitudes were in line with Freire's notion of “talking with” rather than “talking to” the students (2018), and this assisted them in becoming more open-minded to discussing any confusions or dilemmas they experienced, which can be challenging.

In this section, the four essential elements—observing the environment, interacting

with the involved gender minorities, interacting with others, and the intervention of cultural mentors—together led to students' awareness and understanding of gender issues and multicultural society. The students developed their attitudes and learned to withdraw judgment (Byram, 2008), gaining cultural knowledge and skills so that they could make a better sense of the world. This finding also has implications for program design for reducing prejudice toward the LGBTQ people. By analyzing students' perceptions with text data analysis within the framework of ELT, various types of AC and AE were observed as the above elements combined. The results of this study show that short-term SA programs that are strategically and intentionally designed considering the above factors can be effective in reducing prejudice.

In light of the intervention approaches, it is also worth emphasizing three additional points that did not fit into the abovementioned four elements. This NVivo research analysis did not capture these three points, yet they provide insight into the success of the program. First, the two SA programs attach great importance to the key concept of intervention: intercultural learning throughout the SA cycle. Vande Berg et al. (2012) stated that the most effective programs are those that “work throughout the entire cycle” by providing learning before, during, and after studying abroad. This also echoes the efficacy of the experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 2015). Second, teachers' on-site interventions, especially those decided on the spot, created foundations for the whole program, and played roles in making the concrete experience (CE) stage more meaningful. In fact, many key episodes narrated by students related to the activities that were not planned before the SA programs but coordinated by the collaboration of two researchers of this study with local partners. For instance, for University A, the guest speaker for the LGBTQ class was quickly arranged before the visit to the LGBTQ couples' home. This was decided by the faculty in collaboration with the local members because all parties agreed that it would help the students learn. This is also the case for the visit to the mosque: there was a session with the administrator and a follow-up session with Dr. B for the University B group. They were careful to ensure that students were maximizing their learning of relevant topics, rather than just digesting the program. Finally, but importantly, journaling was an important device for reflective intervention (Kolb, 2015), as it captured and stimulated deeper reflection on a daily basis.

In this regard, among the seven approaches of intervention (Vande Berg et al.,

2012), the programs benefited especially from (1) cultural mentoring and the cultural mentor, (3) reflection of intercultural experiences, (5) intercultural learning throughout the SA cycle, and (6) online and on-site interventions. Moreover, in order to design an effective program, teachers must be experts in their fields such as intercultural communication and multicultural education. The local cultural mentors as well as the teachers themselves became engaged in discourse and provided feedback that was relevant to the students' levels of intercultural development. This also implies that they could share their values when they collaborated with local partners to design courses that best fit students' needs. This leads to a few suggestions in the next section.

To answer the research question "How can Japanese university students deepen their understanding and change their perceptions of a multicultural society through a short-term SA program?" it is necessary to consider the following points. Students' awareness and understanding of multicultural societies, especially gender issues, did not end with simply gaining knowledge or experiencing the surface of different cultures. Rather, it came about through awareness derived from deep involvement in a cycle of experiential learning, with appropriate interventions for individual learning. The participants could conceptualize and envision a better society in which many diverse citizens, including gender minorities, could coexist.

Suggestions

Based on these findings, the researchers would like to suggest three key components when creating programs that promote awareness of multicultural societies. First, always seek opportunities to increase students' CE. Unlike the scheduled part of the program, additional on-site activities often suit students' developmental stages better so that the program can respond to their spirit of inquiry, curiosity, and willingness to explore. Second, communicate closely with local partners and staff members. In other words, create a rapport with them, and this assists the teachers to make better judgments in terms of improving the quality of the program and finding the "right person" quickly. Third, be mindful of the values of partners as educators, share these values, and bring out the best in the whole team. For example, if educators share the importance of reflection and conceptualization after the experience stage, they are more likely to participate in the several stages of

ELT with the students. It is also necessary for the staff and instructors to be experts in the field. This ensures that reflection does not simply end after the students' conversations or after the program itself, but expands on theoretically established tips for interpreting the experience from multiple perspectives.

Conclusion

The novelty of this study lies in its ability to analyze students' perceptions toward multicultural society, particularly gender issues, after attending short-term SA programs. Thus, it discovered how their perceptions and appreciation for minorities changed throughout the program and recorded these observations to gain deeper insights. Moreover, this study enabled students to think of ways to be involved in supporting cultural minorities in their own country and beyond, which promotes intercultural citizenship (Byram, 2008). The trust, cooperation, and understanding of the local faculty members and staff are the keys to the best possible conditions for students to study abroad. For this reason, faculties in Japan and other countries should do their best to provide students with the best possible learning experience. Finally, this study could be a valuable aid for intercultural and multicultural education and hence serve as the basis for forming a more well-designed regular pedagogy for university faculty to execute.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has four limitations. First, since the SA programs were limited to two universities, more universities should be investigated to provide even more credibility and fairness. Second, although the main goals of the short-term SA programs in the two universities were to learn about intercultural communications and multicultural societies, the content, destination, SA period, and the type of stay were different. Third, the lack of consistency of class content and activities was also a major constraint. Finally, students' written reports from University A were submitted in English and University B reports were submitted mainly in Japanese. Therefore, the two programs need to create common tasks for students. In the future, researchers must analyze the results for "self-awareness," which had the highest number of references.

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