

The Language Teacher



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Global Personnel Development through Study Abroad and Study + Work Abroad

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The definition of global human resources provides a useful way to evaluate study abroad options for university students. In this qualitative study, study abroad and study + work abroad students' narratives were analyzed for growth in English language use, initiatives to take challenges and responsibility, and intercultural learning. Participants who studied and worked abroad described more growth in elements of global personnel development, particularly in taking the initiative to engage in a fruitful study abroad experience. This study suggests that study abroad experiences should include student-directed challenges outside the classroom to assist in developing graduates with global personnel characteristics.

グローバル人材の定義を用いれば、様々な大学の海外留学プログラムを評価することが可能となる。この質的研究では、外国で語学学習のみを経験した者と、就業経験を伴う語学留学経験者が書いた文章とを比較・分析した。グローバル人材の定義の3要素は、1) 語学力およびコミュニケーション能力、2) 主体性・チャレンジ精神・責任感、3) 異文化学習である。語学と就業の両方を経験したグループの方が、3つの要素すべてにおいて、語学学習経験のみのグループに比べて高い度合の成長が見受けられた。本論は、グローバル人材の要素を兼ね備えた卒業生を生み出すためには、教室外の学生主体の活動を含む海外留学経験が必要であると提案する。

Japanese universities are being called on to develop graduates who can engage with people of different cultures and represent Japan on the world stage. These graduates are often referred to as “global human resources.” Universities have responded by increasing study abroad options such as study tours, short-term study at language schools, and programs organized at foreign universities (Menking, 2012). A variety of options for study abroad are needed to accommodate students' differing skills, aims, and resources. Moreover, the results of different study abroad options should be discussed. This study examines the foreign language use and personal growth of eleven Japanese college students who did study abroad or study + work abroad for eight to ten months.

“Global human resources” has been defined as people with vitality that can thrive internationally due to three factors: (a) foreign language, linguistic, and communication skills; (b) self-direction, a willingness

to engage with challenge, cooperativeness, and flexibility, and a sense of responsibility and mission; and (c) understanding other cultures, and a sense of Japanese identity (The Council on Promotion of Human Resource for Globalization Development, 2011).

Evaluation of Study Abroad Experiences

The three factors of global human resources were used to evaluate a short-term study abroad program by Koyanagi (2013). The participants, 49 Japanese university students who studied one month in England or Canada, answered a self-evaluation questionnaire concerning the above factors. The results showed that participants perceived increases in their communication ability along with growth in assertive adult-like characteristics, but felt little improvement in intercultural understanding. Koyanagi observed that overcoming negative stressful experiences overseas required a change in thinking and behavior which may be connected to improvement in communication skill and maturity.

The influence of international experiences on a person's ability to function effectively in a foreign culture was studied by Chang, Yuan, and Chuang (2013). The Taiwanese participants were analyzed by the length of time abroad and by the depth of their cross-cultural involvement, specifically either low involvement such as study tours or high involvement such as work or long-term study for a degree. The results found that length of time abroad had little effect on cross-cultural ability, however greater social involvement with the foreign culture yielded greater emotional resilience, flexibility, and openness. The study suggests that “physically being abroad may not be the key determinant for desired international competence. Rather, how people engage with the host society and how much they are involved in the new context have more of an impact on competence development” (p. 272). Studies evaluating American students' study abroad experiences have found that involvement in the host community resulted in greater foreign language gains than those without community involvement (Dewey, Belnap, & Hillstrom, 2012; Fraser, 2002).

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study was to broaden the understanding of long-term study abroad and study + work abroad experiences. Are the three factors of global human resources equally developed in both types of experiences?

Method and Instrument

This study examined the experiences of Japanese college students who lived overseas for eight to ten months, either studying only or studying and working. In order to learn the participants' growth in foreign language ability, self-direction, and understanding of other cultures, narrative inquiry was chosen as a way to understand phenomena "from the perspectives of those who experience them" (Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chin, 2000, p. 2). Narrative frames, a collection instrument developed by Barkhuizen and Wette, are a way to gather narrative data that is efficient for the participant and the researcher (2008). A narrative frame is a set of sentence starters that provides scaffolding for the writer to follow and yields data that can be analyzed across multiple participants. The narrative frame developed for this study consisted of eight sentence starters (Table 1) that guided the participants in describing the growth of their abilities.

Table 1. Sentence Starters in the Narrative Frame

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| A. Reflecting on the last 3 months, I think living overseas is . . . |
| B. When I am in an unknown situation I . . . |
| C. When I meet someone for the first time I . . . |
| D. Speaking English outside the classroom . . . |
| E. I realized my English ability had improved when . . . |
| F. Once I felt uneasy but I faced the challenge to . . . |
| G. Recently I have been worried about . . . thus I am . . . |
| H. Now, I am putting energy into . . . |

The narrative frame, written in Japanese, was completed by the participants at two intervals during their time overseas, three months after arrival and during the last two months.

Participants

The participants were twelve female students in the English department of a junior college. They desired to improve their English communication ability and experience living abroad. After completing their first year of college they withdrew, went overseas and

then returned to the college a year later. The participants planned their time abroad and made arrangements. They went to Australia, New Zealand, Canada or the United States for eight to ten months. Three participants received a student visa and nine received a working holiday visa. All began their time abroad with study at an English conversation school, which entailed about twenty hours of classroom study a week. Those who did study + work abroad began to work in restaurants several months after arrival.

Data Analysis

The narrative frame data was translated into English and checked by a Japanese researcher. Each participant's first and second narrative frames were read recursively and changes in foreign language ability, self-direction, and cultural learning were noted. Next, responses to each sentence starter were analyzed across the eleven participants in order to find reoccurring themes. The study abroad and study + work abroad experiences were compared. Later, the participants were interviewed in order to clarify facts and seek more explanation.

Growth in Elements of Global Personnel

(1) Linguistic and Communication Skills

The following excerpts from the narratives show how the participants described their English communication skills at the beginning, mid-point, and end of their time overseas. The sentence starter is in italics.

"Speaking English outside the classroom I have to ask people to repeat many times. As opposed to in the classroom, when I speak people don't understand me and give an unpleasant face. Now (four months) I'm used to it and my anxiety has lessened. Now, I don't give up." In month seven, I am *"speaking English outside the classroom at my job every day.* When I hear a customer use a phrase I don't know I am trying to use it myself at least once."

"In Speaking English outside the classroom I am slowly gaining confidence to speak" (four months). At six months, *"Speaking English outside the classroom* is easier now. I can speak without being concerned about the other person."

The following sentence starter prompted participants to write about communication ability when meeting strangers.

"When I meet someone for the first time I was passive at first, but now (four months) I am used to it."

"When I meet someone for the first time I am not shy and speak friendly and thus can make friends." At seven months, *"When I meet someone for the first time* I don't hesitate to talk. I am trying to develop close relationships."

The following sentence starter prompted participants to write about noticing improvement in English ability.

“I realized my English ability had improved when I could hold a conversation in English without thinking about it.” At six months, *“I realized my English ability had improved when without getting nervous I can listen and speak smoothly.”*

One participant had not realized improvement in her ability at four months however at seven months she wrote,

“I realized my English ability had improved when I was able to counsel a friend in English and when I was able to express what I was thinking to the café owner.”

(2) Self-Direction, Challenge, and Responsibility

The second factor of global personnel includes self-direction, taking the initiative, taking a challenge and a sense of responsibility. The following sentence starter prompted descriptions of challenges the participants faced.

“Once I felt uneasy but I faced the challenge to use transportation that I hadn’t used before and left the city on a trip by myself.”

“Once I felt uneasy but I faced the challenge to start participating in running events. The twice a week running events have helped me to meet local people and have given me opportunities to use English.”

Another sentence starter revealed a sense of responsibility concerning time management, language improvement and jobs.

“Recently I have been worried about my plan for the next six months. Thus, in order to lessen my anxiety I am doing what I want to do and not losing my purpose. I decided to meet various people and study English conversation.”

“Recently I have been worried about my listening ability not improving much. Thus I am listening to the radio on every day.”

“Recently I have been worried about my job as a tour guide. It is more difficult than I thought. Thus I am studying every day to gain the trust of the customers and the travel company.”

(3) Cultural Learning

Although the narrative did not ask about understanding of other cultures, all the participants commented on making friends from many different countries. One participant was observant of the host culture and wrote about her efforts to learn about their culture and communication style.

“When I meet someone for the first time I have begun (at four months) to be able to look them in the eye and smile while I speak.” At nine months, *“When I meet someone for the first time I look at them firmly. I have noticed that Australians often compliment the clothes, hairstyle or possessions of a person they meet, so I am trying to do this too.”* Also, *“Once I felt uneasy but I faced the challenge to initiate talking with the person sitting next to me in the bus. Australians talk easily with people they don’t know . . . on the bus or train . . . I was happy when I talked with someone on the bus and people around me joined in the conversation.”*

The students who did study + work abroad proved that they had attained a minimum level of cultural understanding by the fact that they maintained a job. For most of the participants their first job was at a restaurant owned by an Asian immigrant. Although they dealt with customers and co-workers in English, they desired to work in an establishment owned by people of the majority culture. If they did get a job working for a majority culture owner, they were proud of their accomplishment.

“Once I felt uneasy but I faced the challenge and was hired by a restaurant that is fully managed by local people.”

Growth in all three factors of global human resources was seen in eight of the nine students who did study + work abroad. All of the quotes above were from these participants. The study only participants described growth in English ability however it was less pronounced than those who worked.

“Speaking English outside the classroom I sometimes can’t understand what they say because their speaking is faster than my teacher and homestay family. . . .” At seven months, *“I am Speaking English outside the classroom, even though my English is poor. If the other person smiles I can relax and talk to them, but if they don’t smile I get nervous.”*

Discussion

The narratives provided a candid glimpse of the struggles to become an effective communicator in a foreign culture. Data from two intervals show the growth in listening comprehension, communication skills, and confidence to take risks. Comparing the experiences of the study abroad only and study + work abroad participants revealed different levels of development in the three factors of global human resources.

First, study abroad only participants described their communication ability as very low in the beginning. They cited “freezing” with nervousness when spoken to, and struggling with listening comprehension.

Toward the end of their stay abroad, although they still expressed low confidence in speaking, they were able to make conversation with cooperative interlocutors and understand dialogue in a movie. Study + work abroad participants also struggled to overcome shyness, yet mid-way in their sojourn were learning to become bolder and experienced success in communication with strangers. Near the end of their stay, they could communicate effectively with strangers and employers without nervousness. The need to work pushed them to communicate with a wider variety of people than those who studied only and whose primary communication took place the classroom.

Regarding the second factor, maturity, as seen in self-directed action, a sense of challenge, and responsibility was hardly seen in the study only narratives. They described challenges of choosing a higher level class and attending a public yoga class. In contrast, the study + work participants described their challenges in approaching an employer for a job, participating in community clubs, and traveling alone. For these students, their biggest challenge was creating a fruitful study abroad experience and sufficient income to continue living overseas.

A striking difference was observed in the third factor, the participants' identity. The study only participants maintained a student identity, which viewed the world as an academic one where English improvement was measured by teachers and test scores, and challenges were within the classroom. The study + work participants' identities were independent adults working toward their goal of improving their English usage.

Implications and Conclusion

In comparison to the study only participants, the study + work abroad participants described higher and broader English communication skills, showed more self-directed action, embraced challenges and accepted responsibility, and presumably gained a deeper level of understanding of the host culture as they worked in it. Being a working member of society is a deeper level of integration into the host culture than that of a tourist or a customer in a language school, and requires overcoming differences in communication style and values to accomplish work. The study + work experience undoubtedly developed the abilities of the participants. However, these observations should not be seen simply as causative. The students who chose to study + work were willing to try working in order to be able to stay abroad for a long time. They were also willing to accept non-traditional learning. The study only students chose not to work during study abroad due to adequate finan-

cial support, a high value on classroom learning, and a lack of confidence to be able to work.

Elements of global personnel that were developed in the study + work abroad participants may also be developed through tasks added to classroom learning programs. Unstructured tasks that require students to leave the classroom, initiate with people in the host culture, and find a way to contribute to society may be beneficial. Universities will preferably have multiple study abroad options to match students' differing abilities and resources. This paper suggests that learning that occurs outside the classroom is also valuable for developing global personnel.

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