

A Balance of Tripod Model about Satisfaction Changing Patterns for Short-term
International Students from/to Japan that Focused on Involvement
in Host Societies

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A Balance of Tripod Model about Satisfaction Changing Patterns for Short-term International Students from/to Japan that Focused on Involvement in Host Societies

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to explore satisfaction changing patterns for short-term international students from the student's individual perspective. The study employed projective methods for a total of fourteen participants. Eight of them were international students in Japan and six of them were Japanese students studying abroad. They drew figures representing changes in their satisfaction and explained them while studying abroad. The figures did not follow the U-curve but the reasons for satisfaction maximums were controlled by events they experienced during their study abroad. That is, the reasons behind maximums were found to be recreational events while the reasons behind minimums were negative events. A balance of tripod model among recreation, study and cultural experiences is proposed in order to explain the satisfaction of international students. Lastly, given the results of the study, the way to increase the sense of satisfaction of short-term international students is also discussed.

[Key words] short-term international students, satisfaction, changing patterns, a balance of tripod model

I. Introduction

1. Social background of the study

In Japanese universities, international exchange has recently been promoted through the implementation of various study abroad policies. One of the policies of the promotion is the short-term exchange of undergraduate students by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), Japan. Twenty-eight out of eighty-seven national universities in Japan now offer this special program for exchange students (Student Services Division, Higher Education Bureau, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2006, p34).

The short-term exchange program has the following two characteristics. First, it provides undergraduate students with an opportunity to study foreign languages, cultures and their specialization for a period of six months to one year. Next, it is inferred that short-term exchange students are able to study abroad under less pressure both economically and mentally. In this sense, the short-term exchange program is a new type of study abroad and is expected to increase

the quantity of students studying abroad because short-term exchange is easier than long-term study abroad. When thinking about this new trend of study abroad, the question that arises is whether previous studies on cross-cultural adjustment can apply to short-term exchange students.

2. Previous research

Regarding cross-cultural adjustment of sojourners, Lysgaard's U-curve hypothesis is well-known as a classical hypothesis (Lysgaard, 1955). According to Lysgaard, cross-cultural adjustment over time seems to follow a U-shaped curve. To give an example of a previous cross-sectional study of cross-cultural adjustment, Tanaka and her colleagues discuss the adjustment of international students, comparing those who stayed less than one year with those who had longer stays of one to two, two to three or more than three years. Their study, however, does not report in detail on adjustment changes that occurred within a year; for example, what happened during the third month or the ninth month remains unknown (Tanaka, Takai, Kohyama and Fujihara, 1994). Yamamoto and Wapner (1991), on the other hand, is an example of a longitudinal study of cross-cultural adjustment. They did not find a 'valley' of a U-curve using a scale for university freshmen. Moreover, the focus on previous research was on cross-cultural adjustment of more than one year and used quantitative methods such as a questionnaire.

3. Three tasks in the study

The purpose of this study is to qualitatively analyze short-term international students' changing patterns of satisfaction from an individual perspective. In order to achieve this purpose, three activities were carried out for the study. First, short-term exchange students were asked about their subjective satisfaction during their study abroad. Second, they were asked to draw a graph of their satisfaction through recall. Third, they were also asked to describe the reasons for their satisfaction. The advantage of using this method is that it offers a concrete view of the changing patterns of individual students' adjustment.

II. Method

1. Participants

The participants in the study consisted of eight international students in Japan (I1 to I8) and six Japanese students studying abroad (J1 to J6). All of them used the same short-term exchange program from and to a local national university in Japan. The Japanese university usually sends approximately twenty students abroad and accepts about twenty students from overseas each year. Table 1-1 and Table 1-2 show the breakdowns of participants by sex, age and length of stay. Overall, it was felt the sample was a fair representation of the general demographic characteristics of short-term exchange students from and to the university.

Table 1-1. Breakdown of international students by sex, country and duration of stay

Group	International students in Japan
Sex	
Male	3
Female	5
Country*	
U.S.	4
China	2
Thailand	1
U.K.	1
Duration of stay	
6 months	3
10 months	0
1 year	5

*“Country” means the country in which the international students’ home university is located.

Table 1-2. Breakdown of Japanese students by sex, country and duration of stay

Group	Japanese students studying abroad
Sex	
Male	1
Female	5
Country*	
U.S.	3
China	1
Thailand	2
U.K.	0
Duration of stay	
6 months	0
10 months	1
1 year	5

* “Country” means the country in which the Japanese students studied.

2. Procedure

The study used projective methods for a total of fourteen participants. The first author of the paper asked for participants to take part in the study and these fourteen students volunteered to do it. When the study was carried out, the international students were within one month of returning to their home institutions. The Japanese students joined the study within one year after

they came back to Japan. The reason we selected these participants was to examine whether international students in Japan and Japanese students abroad were affected by similar phenomena regardless of the host country or the student's nationality. In the questionnaire, students were asked to draw figures of changes in their satisfaction in the plane shown in Figure 1. In addition, they were asked to explain why they drew the maximal and minimal points on the figures.

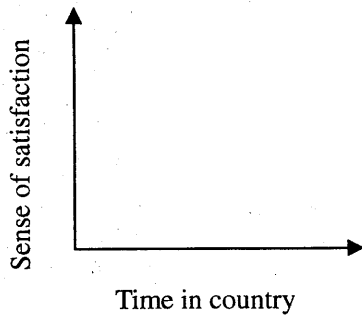


Figure 1. The plane used to draw students' changing patterns of satisfaction

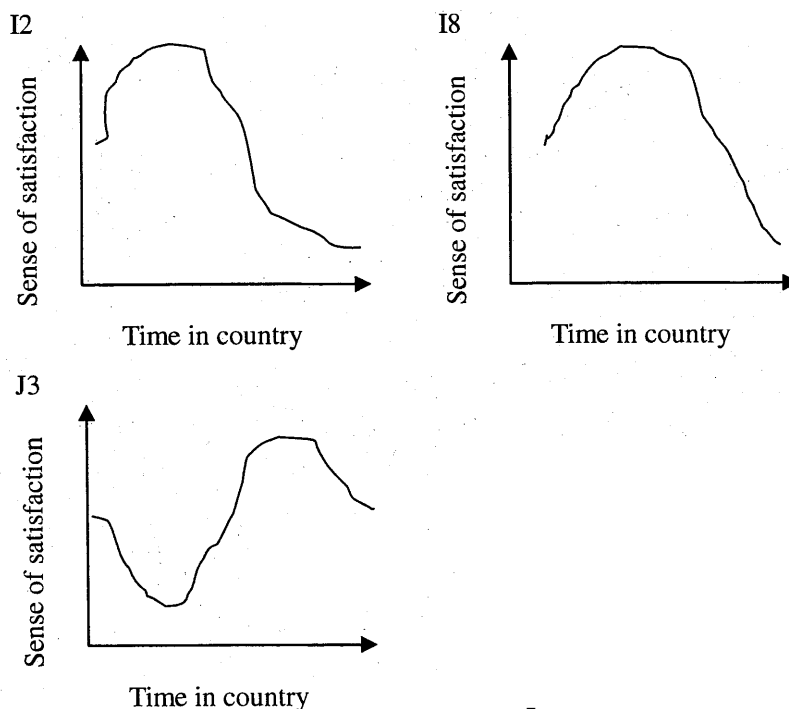
III. Results

1. Criteria of pattern classification

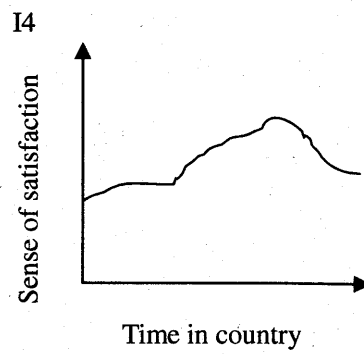
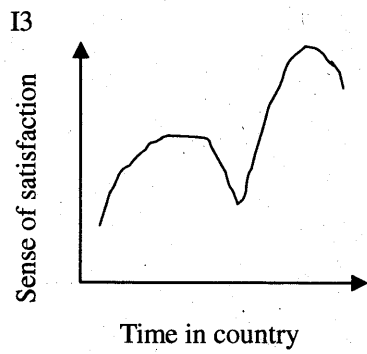
The return rate of the questionnaire was one hundred percent. One example I6, however, was ruled out because the student did not seem to understand the meaning of the question.

Various types of curves were obtained from the students, but none were U-curves. The curves were then classified into three higher and two lower categories: the higher categories were based on the number of maximums (one, two to three, and more than four), and lower categories on the direction of the curves (upwards and downwards). This was because we found more maximums (i.e. peaks) than minimums (i.e. valleys). Figure 2 shows examples of each category.

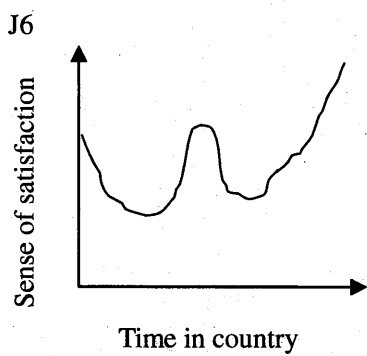
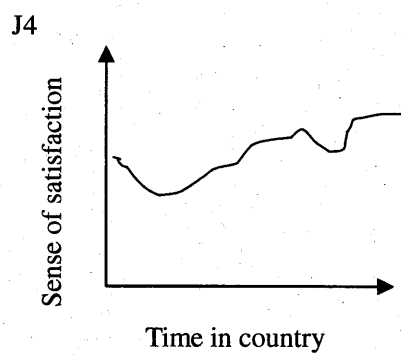
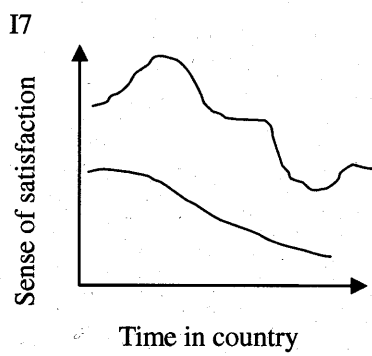
Type A. One maximum and upward curve (I2, I8, J3)



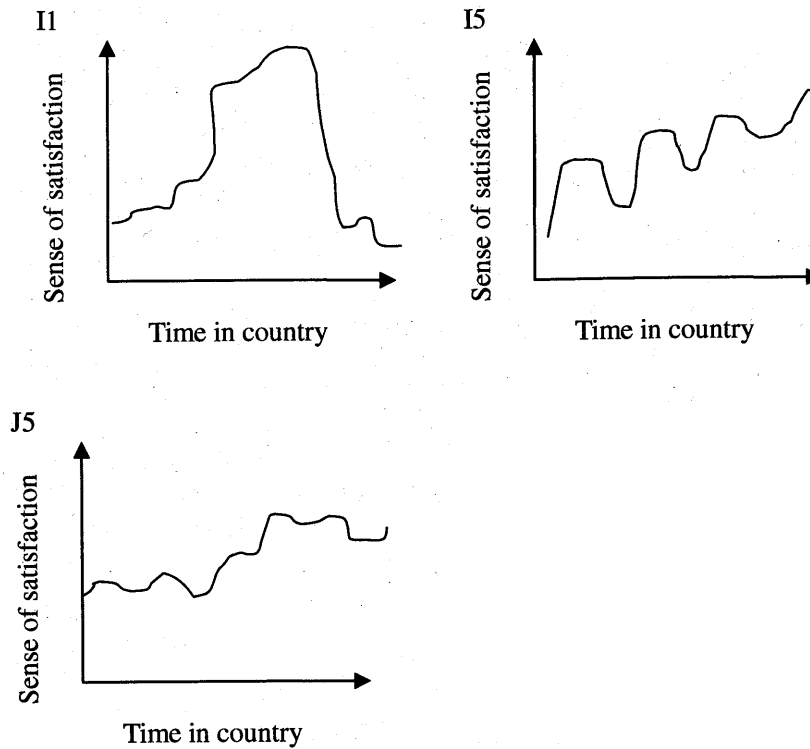
Type B. A few maximums and minimums, and upward curve (I3, I4)



Type B'. A few maximums and minimums, and downward curve (I7, J4, J6)



Type C. Zigzag and upward curve (I1, I5, J5)



Type C'. Zigzag and downward curve (J1, J2)

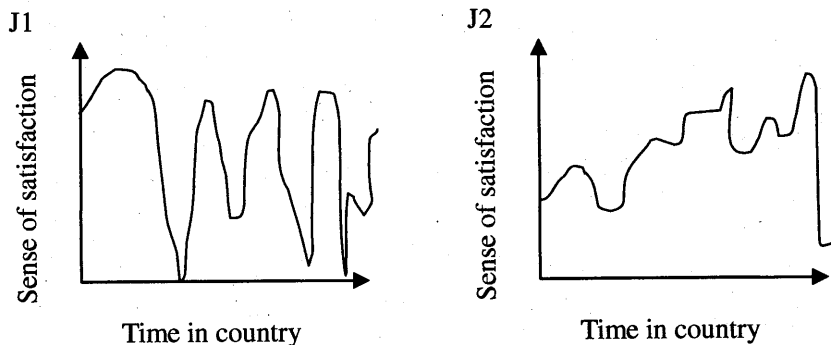


Figure 2. Examples of each category

2. Reasons for maximums

Concerning the reasons behind satisfaction maximums, these often included recreational events students took part in such as a trip in the host country.

Furnham and Bochner (1986) and Furnham (2004) suggest that international students have three tasks or roles to play as opposed to native students. The three tasks/roles are that of a young person, that of a student and that of a cross-cultural ambassador. In this study, the focus was more on the participants' personal opinions than on these roles. Therefore, a new system of classification based on the above mentioned tasks/roles and consisting of the categories young people/recreation, student/study, and cross-cultural experience was used to classify the students'

opinions. For example, a trip in a host country is categorized as young people/recreation.

Table 2-1 and Table 2-2 list all the reasons for and categories of satisfaction maximums. As the tables show, recreation seems to be the most common category and cultural experience the second most common. Study, however, is much less common. Additionally, as seen in Table 3-1 and Table 3-2 the reasons for minimums include incidents such as illness and breakups with a boyfriend.

Table 2-1. Reasons for and categories of satisfaction maximums of international students

Student	Type	Number	Recreation	Study	Cultural experiences	Reasons indicated
I1	C	1	○	—	△	Spent time with foreign friends
		2	○	—	△	XX trip
		3	○	—	△	XX scuba diving
		4	○	—	△	Went to XX
I2	A	1	○	—	△	Getting better in Japan and started traveling
I3	B	1	○	—	△	Spring break (saw XX girls in XX)
		2	○	○	○	1) Prof. A said my Japanese improved 2) B & C concert
I4	B	1	○	—	△	I went to XX and met my friend.
		2	○	○	○	I practiced Japanese with my Chinese friends. That's so fun.
I5	C	1	△	—	○	I had some friends.
		2	—	○	—	I studied Japanese by myself in library.
		3	—	—	—	—
I7	C	1	○	—	△	Camping trip
		2	△	—	○	Meeting new people
I8	A	1	○	—	△	Schools out, traveling in Japan

*XX: a name of a city **I6: exception

Table 2-2. Reasons for and categories of satisfaction maximums of Japanese students

Student	Type	Number	Recreation	Study	Cultural experiences	Reasons indicated
J1	C'	1	—	—	—	—
		2	○	—	△	Travel
		3	△	—	○	Played with friends
		4	△	—	○	Played with friends
J2	C'	1	—	—	—	—
		2	○	—	△	The first semester was over, I began to travel with my friends
		3	○	—	△	Travel (with friends)
		4	—	—	—	—
		5	—	—	—	—
		6	○	—	△	Travel with friends
J3	A	1	○	—	△	Fall semester was over and I traveled to Europe during winter break.
J4	B'	1	△	—	○	I could make friends and enjoyed preparing for the school festival.
J5	C	1	—	—	—	—
		2	○	—	△	First trip with friends
		3	—	—	—	—
		4	○	—	△	Trip to XX and YY
		5	△	—	○	Played with friends every week
J6	B'	1	—	○	—	I found I could do well if I did my best.
		2	△	—	○	I could make more friends by studying with groups.

*XX and YY: a name of a city

Table 3-1. Reasons for and categories of satisfaction minimums of international students

Student	Type	Number	Recreation	Study	Cultural experiences	Reasons indicated
I1	C	1	—	○	—	Studying with Japanese class, but working hard
I2	A	1	△	—	○	I hated that I found my love one in Japan.
I3	B	1	—	—	—	—
I5	C	1	—	—	—	—
		2	△	—	△	I caught a serious cold.
		3	—	○	—	I prepared for my thesis. I felt tired.
I7	C	1	△	—	○	Lack of real friends (upper line)
		2	—	○	—	Every day not understanding enough (lower line)
I8	A	1	△	—	○	Friends leave one by one. I leave Japan.

* I4: no minimums ** I6: exception

Table 3-2. Reasons for and categories of satisfaction minimums of Japanese students

Student	Type	Number	Recreation	Study	Cultural experiences	Reasons indicated
J1	C'	1	△	—	○	My friend went back to his/her country
		2	—	—	—	—
		3	△	—	○	My friend was always with her boyfriend
		4	△	—	○	Everyone (my friends) went back to his/her country
		5	—	—	—	—
J2	A	1	○	—	△	Homesick/ I didn't understand the classes
		2	—	—	—	—
		3	—	—	—	—
		4	○	—	△	I broke up with my boyfriend
		5	—	—	—	—
		6	—	—	—	—
J3	A	1	△	—	△	I lost my confidence and became homesick
J4	B'	1	—	—	—	—
		2	△	—	△	I felt stuck because I had to leave in 4 months
J5	C	1	△	—	△	It was getting cold
		2	△	—	△	I caught a cold
		3	—	—	—	—
		4	—	—	—	—
		5	—	—	—	—
J6	B'	1	△	—	○	It was hard to catch up with classes. I couldn't speak well and understand what they say
		2	○	—	△	My XX roommate and I talked about the War and it made me feel blue

*XX : a name of a country

IV. Discussion

1. A balance of tripod model

The results show that the reasons for satisfaction maximums are controlled by events students experienced during their study abroad. That is, the reasons for maximums are recreational events while the reasons for minimums are negative events.

To explain the satisfaction of international students, a balance of tripod model among recreation, study and cultural experiences is proposed. Figure 3-1 shows a sketch of a

fundamental tripod and Figure 3-2 shows the base of the tripod seen from above. As seen in these figures, the tripod consists of three parts; young people (recreation), students (study) and cross-cultural experience.

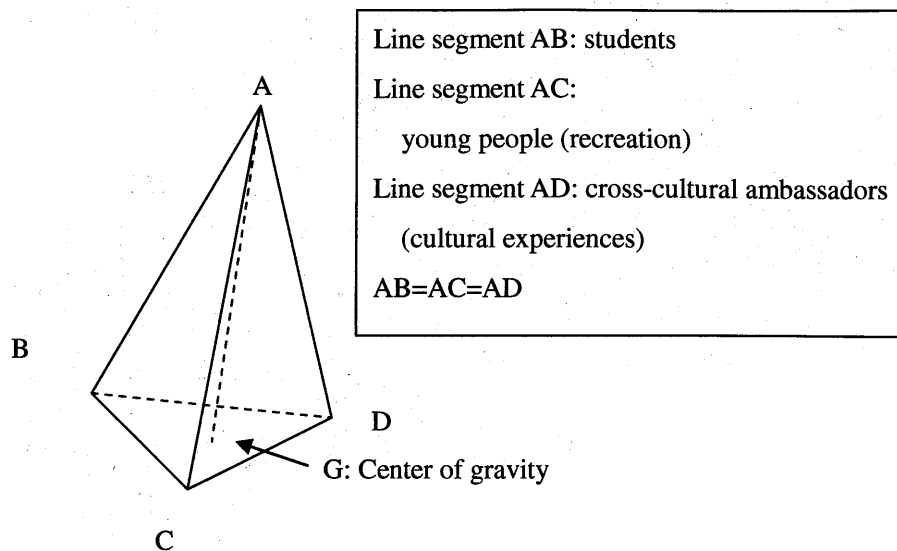


Figure 3-1: Sketch of a fundamental tripod

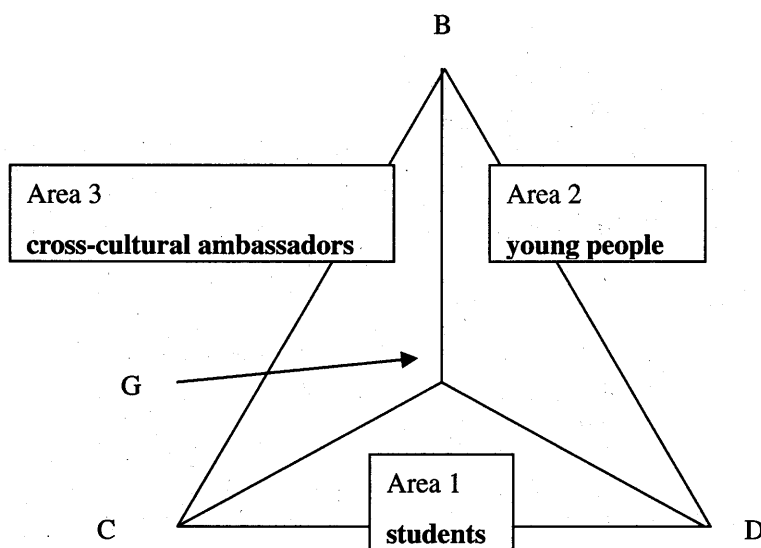
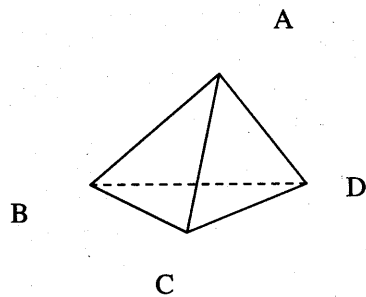


Figure 3-2: Base of the tripod seen from above

Consider the short-term exchange students of the study for example. Because the exchange students enjoyed recreational events the most as discussed earlier, the line segment AC is the longest of all the segments (Figure 4). Therefore, the center of gravity (G) is located in Area 2 of the base of the tripod (see left side of Figure 4).

Short-term study abroad

Risk: low, Tripod: small



Long-term study abroad

Risk: high, Tripod: big

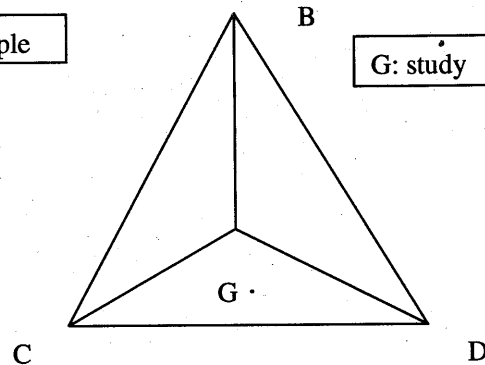
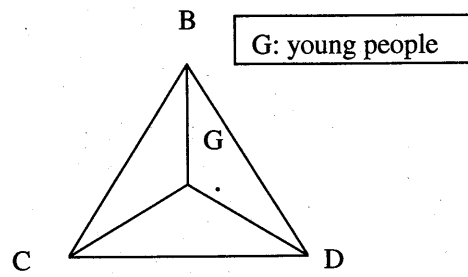
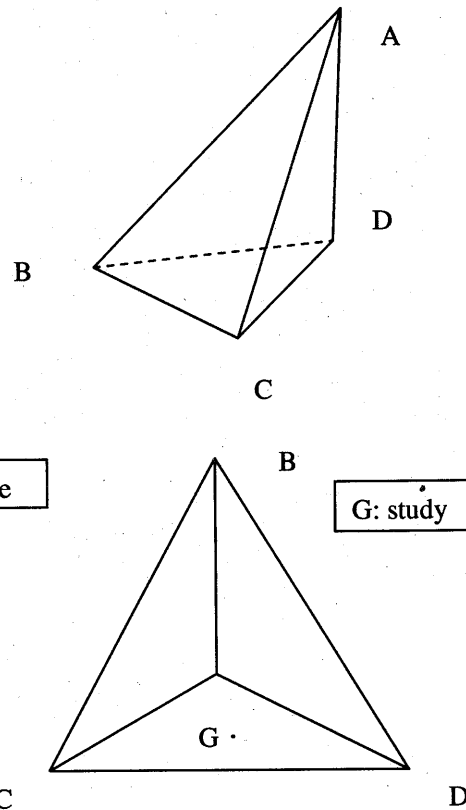


Figure 4: Tripods of short-term and long-term international students

Let us take another example to continue to illustrate how the tripod model functions. If a student studies abroad long-term and for a degree, line segment AB of the tripod becomes long. Thus, the center of gravity will lie on Area 1 of the base and his/her regulator of satisfaction will be events regarding his/her study.

It should be noted that the tripod of the short-term exchange students is smaller than the long-term international students. When the risk and stress of study abroad is small, the tripod is small as well. When the risk and stress of it is big and the tripod becomes big, the tripod becomes conspicuous compared to smaller tripods.

2. Interpretations of the student's satisfaction and changing patterns

Their satisfaction sums up their personal opinions. Although it is determined by which 'leg' of the tripod is weighted, it is not determined solely by the changing of time. To put it plainly, it is controlled by what happens to the students. For instance, satisfaction of the students of the study is controlled by recreational events.

Also, it was found from the study that the participants of the study do not have any tasks during their study abroad. Therefore, their adjustment did not follow the U-curve pattern to achieve success after overcoming their difficulties at the beginning. This is because the U-curve may represent the combination of elevation of first stage and recovery from difficulty. The participants of the study obtained short-term pleasure, not a long-term sense of accomplishment. In this sense, the participants were short-term 'marginal people' rather than being deeply immersed in foreign cultures and societies. Thus, it would be reasonable to conclude that events they experienced during their study abroad suggest the main regulator for their satisfaction.

3. Implication for practical application

Given the results of the study, what can be done to increase the sense of satisfaction of short-term exchange students? In order to answer this question, it is important to consider which 'leg' of the tripod is weighted. For example, for the short-term exchange students of the study, since the recreation leg is weighted, more events will give them more satisfaction. For those who study abroad for a degree, the study leg is weighted. For delegates who visit a sister city, the cross-cultural experience leg is weighted. Short-term exchange seems to be a cross-cultural experience close to a 'study tour.'

To conclude, a new category of study abroad has emerged. Diversity of international students makes it necessary to bring versatility and innovation to research on international students.

Notes

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