
“Super-Short-Term” Study Abroad in Japan: A Dramatic Increase

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Since the mid-2000s, Japanese students have reportedly been developing an “inward-looking” attitude (some likely reasons are discussed in an article by Shimmi in *IHE*, issue 66, 2012). In recent times, there has been a dramatic increase of students participating in “super-short-term” study-abroad programs, lasting from one week up to one month. According to the Japan Student Service Organization (JASSO), the number of Japanese students who participated in such super-short-term programs more than tripled between 2009 and 2016, increasing from 16,873 to 60,145. This reflects a growing global trend among college students, especially in developed countries. This article discusses the background of this trend in Japan as well as emerging challenges.

THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT’S NEW POLICIES ON STUDYING ABROAD

During the postwar period, the central focus of the Japanese government’s internationalization policy was on attracting international students to come and study in Japan. However, with the decline, from the late 2000s, of the number of Japanese students studying abroad, the government (under the Abe administration) started prioritizing the promotion of outbound mobility in order to foster a globally-minded workforce for Japanese companies. Until that point, studying abroad had been mainly considered as a private choice, and governmental support for Japanese students to study abroad had been limited. In its effort to promote study

abroad, the government increased scholarships available for individual students and provided competitive funds for universities to develop support systems in order to broaden the range of study abroad options.

With respect to scholarships, in 2008, the government increased the budget for JASSO study-abroad scholarships for students enrolled at Japanese universities. Currently, this scholarship can be granted to students who participate in one of their university's study abroad programs with a duration of eight days to one year. The number of recipients dramatically increased from 627 in 2008 to 22,000 in 2017. In addition, in 2014, the government established another scholarship program called "*Tobitate!*" ("Leap for To-

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morrow!") Young Ambassador Program (A Public-Private Partnership Encouraging Students Study Abroad), with funding from both the government and private companies. "*Tobitate*" scholarships are intended for students who study abroad for periods varying from 28 days to two years. By 2017, about 3,000 university students had studied abroad with "*Tobitate*" scholarships.

With respect to competitive funds for universities, since 2011, the Inter-University Exchange Project has provided funds for two-way exchanges between Japan and regions that are specified each year. Through this scheme, by 2017 the number of Japanese students who had studied abroad reached 14,712, while the number of international students who had studied in Japan reached 15,289. In addition, from 2012 to 2016, the Go Global Japan Project provided funds to 42 universities to develop study abroad programs for students to acquire competencies for the new global society. The aim of recipient universities was to send 58,500 students abroad through this project. Other programs—such as the Top Global University Program, started in 2014—also aim to stimulate Japanese students to study abroad.

UNEXPECTED CONSEQUENCES AND CHALLENGES

Although these scholarships and grants were not meant for this in particular, universities specifically increased opportunities for super-short-term programs abroad, because, for

a number of reasons, they appear to be more accessible for Japanese students. First, the short duration of the program prevents time conflicts with other activities, such as looking for jobs at Japanese companies, typically conducted during a certain period in the year; preparing for national qualification examinations; and participating in club activities. Second, super-short-term programs tend to require lower participation fees than longer programs. Third, super-short-term programs that focus on foreign language learning at the basic level are popular among Japanese students because many students do not have sufficient foreign language skills to participate in longer exchange programs, during which they are required to take courses at partner universities together with local students.

The recent government support has been effective in increasing the number of students studying abroad for at least super-short-term programs; in comparison, the number of participants in longer-term programs has not increased as much. Moreover, although participating in short-term study-abroad programs can be a step for "inward-looking" students toward becoming more open to other cultures, super-short-term study abroad programs are considered too short to enhance the students' foreign language and cross-cultural competencies, compared to longer-term programs. Similar observations have been made in the United States and other countries.

NURTURING "OUTWARD-LOOKING" STUDENTS

In order to leverage the current increase in the numbers of super-short-term study-abroad participants, it is crucial to provide opportunities for students to continue developing their global competencies after returning home. As an example, encouraging students to participate in longer programs could be a possibility, but efforts are necessary to reduce existing obstacles, by providing adequate scholarships, solving issues related to companies' hiring systems, and developing mechanisms to allow students to easily transfer credits earned abroad. Opportunities for international exchange on home campuses should be increased both in curricular activities, e.g., with English-taught courses, and extracurricular activities, e.g., language exchanges, tutoring, peer-support, and buddy systems.

In addition, in order to respond to the current skepticism about the effect of super-short-term study-abroad programs, it is important to conduct assessments to measure the impact of the programs as well as the students' learning outcomes, and to continue improve the quality of these super-short-term programs. Collecting and assessing evidence on the value of the short-term study-abroad experience to develop global competencies is necessary to build support. These recently developed super-short-term programs are meant mainly for students with a basic level

in a foreign language; more advanced programs, requiring high foreign language and cross-cultural skills (such as project-based learning with local students in a host country) can be an additional option for students to continue developing their competencies. Developing an environment for students to utilize and build on their experiences during super-short-term study abroad programs will be key to making this new trend an opportunity to nurture future “outward-looking” graduates. ■

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