

Impact of Short-Term Study Abroad on Trust and Civic Norms

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1. Introduction

In recent years, short-term study abroad for higher education with diverse goals is increasingly popular, especially in developed countries. For example, the EU has the ERASMUS Programme (European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students) and Austraria has the “*New Colombo Plan*” Programme to boost the mobility of young people. Likewise, now Japan is actively promoting “*Tobitate Ryugaku Japan*” (“TOBITATE! Young Ambassador Program”), a study abroad campaign introduced in 2013, intended to double the 2013 number of Japanese “mobile students” (those going overseas) by 2020. Figure 1 shows the recent numbers of Japanese mobile students and trip durations by year. The number more than doubled from 2009 to 2015, with the *Tobitate* Programme implemented in 2013 in response to a slowing of the growth of mobile students the previous year. Note also that 97% of the 84,456 Japanese studying abroad in 2015 were on courses of less than one year (in this article, I call study abroad programmes of less than one year “short-term” and one year or more programmes “long-term”).

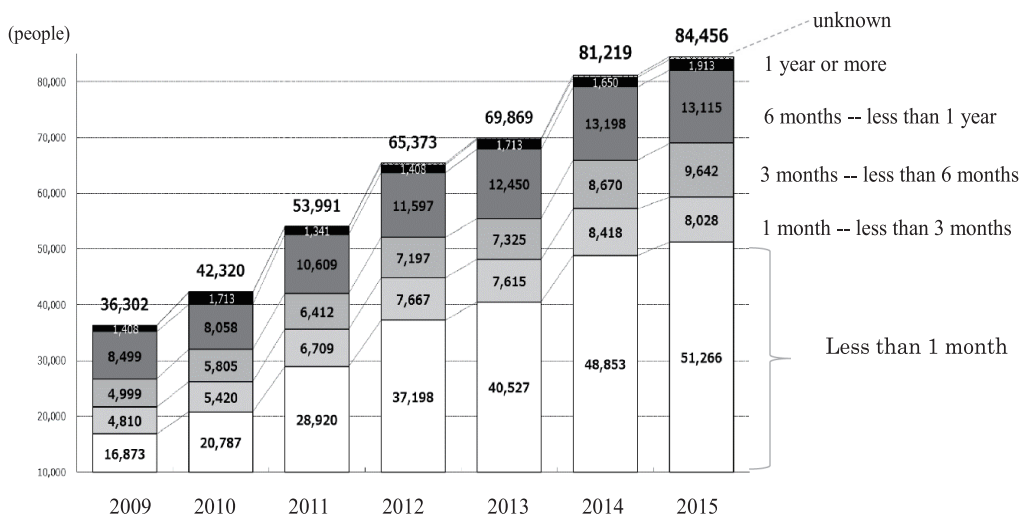


Fig.1 The number and duration of study abroad trips by Japanese students
(from MEXT 2016)

In response to this recent increasing popularity of short-term study abroad, a number of studies looking at the impact of short-term study abroad have been carried out. Most have

focused on changes in sojourners' soft-skills rather than hard-skills, presumably because statistically significant improvements in hard skills, especially as measured by large standardized tests such as TOEIC, TOEFL and G-TELP. Chieffo & Griffiths (2004) found a statistically significant difference between mobile and non-mobile students in terms of "global awareness", a composite they defined as including intercultural awareness, personal growth and development, awareness of global interdependence, and functional knowledge of world geography and language. They concluded that even programmes as short as one month were educationally worthwhile endeavors that had significant self-perceived impacts on students' intellectual and personal lives. Likewise, Rexeisen & Al-Khatib (2009) concluded that study abroad has a positive impact on both intercultural development and on attitudes toward the "physical environment". Scharoun (2016, p.85) found three key benefits of short-term study abroad: they are a way to connect students that might not otherwise travel abroad; they can increase cross-cultural awareness and intelligence; and thirdly, they support learning outcomes and experiences in a global context. Murphy, Sahakyan, Yong-Yi, & Magnan (2014) compared groups of alumni with and without undergraduate study abroad experience, and concluded that alumni with experience of study abroad showed higher levels of civic engagement; higher levels of "voluntary simplicity" (opting to live simply); and higher levels of philanthropic activity for organizations devoted to the arts, education, environmental issues, human rights, international development, and social justice. An earlier study by the author (Katori 2016) supported the general theme of these studies, finding no statistically significant effect on English proficiency from short-term study abroad episodes, but that participants report positive changes and improvements in a range of soft skills, including global and cultural awareness, greater confidence, interpersonal and intercultural communication skills, and some kind of paradigm shift in their way of thinking.

2. Background of the study

The author has been involved with the study abroad programme at a university in northern Japan (Tohoku district) for several years. At present, the university offers students three short-term study abroad options (table 1).

Table 1

Details of the three study abroad programmes.

Destination	Duration	Study hours (per week)	Accommodation
Boston (USA)	3 months	25	dormitory
Waikato (NZ)	3 weeks	23	homestay
Stirling (UK)	4 weeks	20	dormitory (single)

To make these programmes as effective and fruitful as possible, the author has studied the impact of the short-term study abroad programme since 2015. Results from a small initial group found no statistically significant effect on English proficiency (Katori 2016), but were from a small sample of only 15 mobile students. A repeat study in autumn 2016 gathered data from 27 mobile students and used t -tests to analyse the pre- and post-test results. These tests were the level 3 G-TELP (General Test of English Proficiency), administered before and after the abroad study period. Changes in test scores were not significant at $p \leq 0.05$ under a two-tailed t -test ($t(25)=1.19, p=.24$). Table 2 shows the G-TELP results for the 27 mobile students. These 27 students studied abroad for a mean period of 4.3 weeks.

Table 2

G-TELP results (Pre- and Post-test scores)

Subject	Pre	Post
1	135	210
2	196	184
3	124	130
4	219	240
5	206	151
6	198	207
7	207	173
8	128	138
9	180	140
10	190	129
11	124	172
12	211	211
13	215	219
14	163	190
15	179	210
16	186	187
17	211	229
18	188	181
19	185	204
20	211	187
21	189	204
22	227	228
23	167	236
24	190	176
25	135	191
26	184	217
27	207	219
Average	183.52	191.22

In both studies, mobile students were given a semi-structured interview, to check their subjective response to their study abroad experience, and to check for changes in soft-skills and attitudes. Eight students were added to Katori (2016); therefore, the number of total interviewee was 30. Figures 2 and 3 shows the interview results. The questions were developed with reference to Edwards (2009), and emailed to interviewees a few days in advance, so they could prepare rough answers in advance. Each interview was conducted individually and took about 45 to 60 minutes. Although students answered about 20 questions in their interviews, only the two relevant to this topic are shown below.

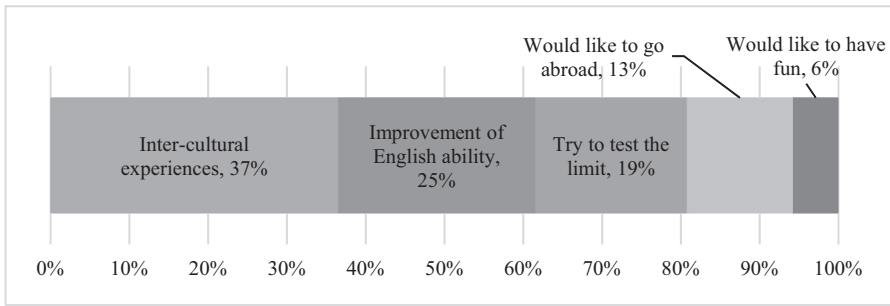


Fig. 2 What is your main purpose in studying abroad?

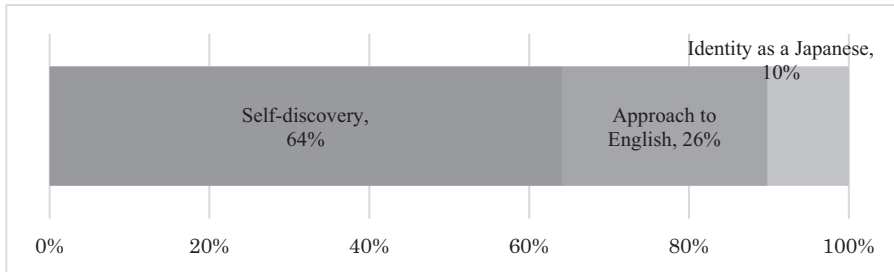


Fig. 3 How did you change?

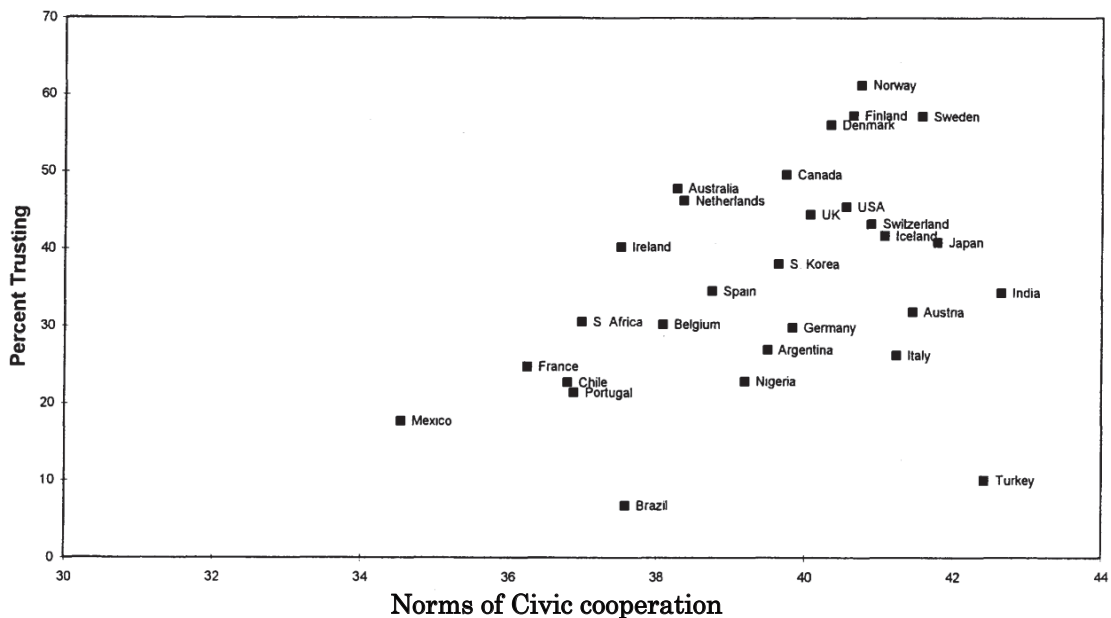
As we can see in fig. 2, though the students' main purpose in participating in the study abroad programme is "inter-cultural experiences", a full quarter of the students aim primarily to improve their English ability.

As for fig. 3, most students struggled to give a concrete explanation regarding how they had changed or developed, while nonetheless being sure that they had changed in some way. Some students remarked that they became "rougher" (more easy-going, less worried about small details), while others mentioned that they came to ignore some less-important (Japanese) societal norms and morals after their stay overseas, but at the level at which a clear theme was apparent in answers, students were clear only that they had discovered something about themselves, which is a rather vague result.

Thinking, then, of how the nature or content of this self-discovery could be made clearer, I have taken a start from a recurring comment made not by students themselves, but by the university faculty members: that mobile students are more active with regard to voluntary activities, and more active interpersonally in and out of class.

Knack & Keefer (1997) suggest that willingness to participate in group activities (for example as volunteers, in youth clubs, and so on) is correlated with levels of trust in the society: specifically, in high trust societies, people tend to be more willing and active in their participation in group activities. Fig. 4 shows Knack & Keefer's results, ranking 29 countries including Japan with regard to "norms of civic cooperation" and "general trust". Japan was ranked highly (third out of the 29 countries) for obedience to norms of civic cooperation, but in the middle of the 29 countries for "general trust" (see also the discussion in Brinton 2008).

Indeed, American students, coming from a society with a higher trust rating than Japan -- a difference Yamagishi & Komiyama (1995) show to be significant -- do often seem to be more proactive in joining in a range of social activities than Japanese students. So, thinking about ways to better characterise and even quantify some of what changed for mobile students, general trust and norms of civic cooperation are candidates which are both interesting (since they affect behaviour, and participation is presumably a social good, allowing people to cultivate both social skills and social contacts) and credible (since they differ significantly between countries, spending time in a different country exposes study abroad students to a novel environment with regard to general trust and norms of civic cooperation).



From Knack & Keefer (1997)

Fig. 4 Norms of civic cooperation and Trust

3. The purpose of this study

In recent years, study abroad is increasingly popular for Japanese students in higher education. The popularity of studying abroad is expected to continue to increase for several years. However, even after their study-abroad experience, students often do not clearly identify or quantify the changes and growth they gained through their programme. Therefore, the focus in this article is to examine whether study abroad has an impact on general trust and norms of civic cooperation. For mobile students or expected mobile students, to understand the meaning or value of their experiences and identify their changes would be helpful for them to achieve it or use it more effectively to make the long-term impact of study abroad.

4. Method

4.1 Participants

46 Japanese subjects took part in this research. 44 are university students and 2 are alumni at the same university located the northern part of Japan (Tohoku district). 21 (including 2 alumni) out of 46 have participated in a university-provided short-term study abroad programme between 2013 and 2016: 6 students went to the United States (Boston) for one or three months, 13 went to New Zealand (Waikato) for three weeks, and 2 went to the UK (Stirling) for one month. 25 non-mobile students took part in this research as the control group.

4.2 Norms of civic cooperation

As a way of measuring obedience to social norms, I adapted a brief questionnaire from an article by Knack & Keefer (1997). Five items were used to measure subject' norms of civic cooperation. Respondents are asked whether each of the mentioned behaviors "can always be justified; can never be justified; or something in between". The five behaviors are as follows.

- a) "claiming government benefits which you are not entitled to"
- b) "avoiding a fare on public transport"
- c) "cheating on taxes if you have the chance"
- d) "keeping money that you have found"
- e) "failing to report damage you've done accidentally to a parked vehicle"

In this research, I used a version modified into Japanese for both mobile and non-mobile students, and counted the answer "can always be justified" as worth 1 point, "something in between" worth 2 points, and "never be justified" as worth 3 points.

4.3 General trust

Then, to measure subjects' general trust, 5 items from Yamagishi & Komiyama (1995) were adapted because they fit the current context. Yamagishi & Komiyama modified Julian Rotter's scale for the Japanese context. The 5 items are:

1. "originally, most people are honest"
2. "most people are reliable"
3. "originally, most people are kind and good"
4. "most people trust others"
5. "I am rather trustful"

Subjects answer with a number from 1 to 7, where 1 means "strongly disagree" and 7 means "strongly agree". Finally, scores for the five questions are averaged and analyzed.

5. Findings

5.1 Norms of civic cooperation

Figure 5 shows the results of the questionnaire regarding norms of civic cooperation. 25

students were in the control non-mobile group and 21 subjects were in the mobile group. As you can see, the average results are very close (2.75 and 2.74) and there was no significant differences by two-tailed t -test ($t(44)=-0.14, p=.89$). The result is not significant at $p<.05$. Therefore, within the limits of this study and its operational definition of norms of civic cooperation, we can conclude that short-term study abroad experience do not have a direct impact on norms of civic cooperation.

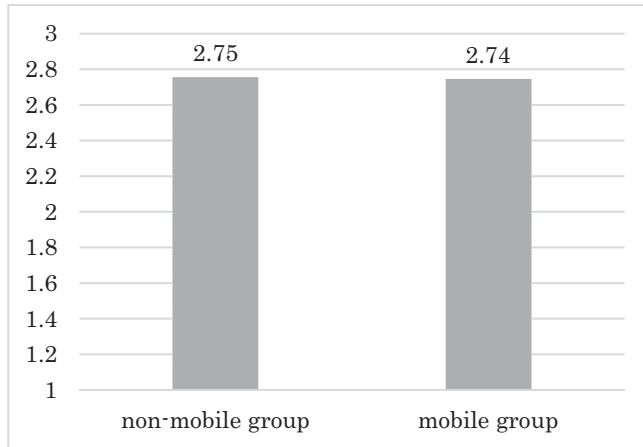


Fig. 5 Results: norms of civic cooperation

5.2 General trust

Figure 6 illustrates the results of the questionnaire concerning general trust. Again, 25 students were in the control non-mobile group and 21 subjects were in the mobile group. The average results are 3.75 and 4.73 respectively, which a two-tailed t -test shows to be significant at $p<.05$ ($t(44)=2.88, p=.006$.) Therefore, within the limits of this study and its operational definition of general trust, we can conclude that short-term study abroad experiences have some impact on general trust.

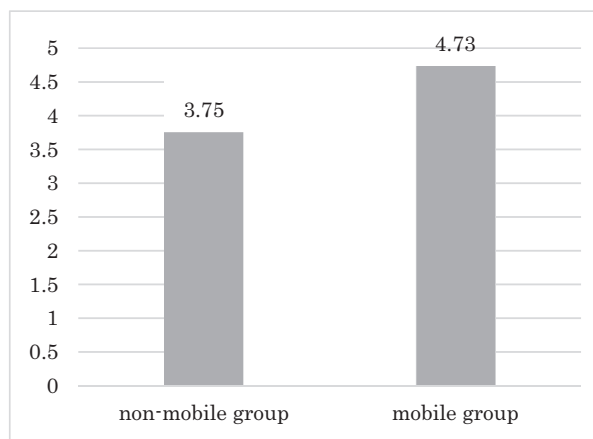


Fig. 6 Results: general trust

6. Discussion

As table 2 shows, short-term study abroad episodes themselves have no statistically significant effect on English proficiency. However, participants report positive changes and improvements during the semi-structural interview after their study abroad. The majority of students answered that “something has changed”. Though students struggled to explain what had changed clearly, they were all positive and related to “self-discovery” (see figure 3). This study aimed to examine whether study abroad has an impact on general trust and norms of civic cooperation.

The results show that there was no significant difference between mobile and non-mobile students with regards to “norms of civic cooperation”. This seems to fit well with the findings of Rexeisen & Al-Khatib (2009), namely that study abroad experiences have no direct positive impact on moral reasoning or change in ethical reasoning. Their argument that morals and civic norms are usually cultivated and built up through the entirety of one’s experiences, so a mere month of new experiences cannot be expected to produce a quick and measurable change, seems credible.

The results show, however, that there was a significant change in “general trust” between the mobile and non-mobile groups. In terms of what this means, following Yamagishi (2005), a high tendency of “general trust” does not mean being easily fooled by others. Rather, general trust is identified with high “social intelligence”. In his words, people who have high social intelligence are able to accept proper information in interpersonal relations sensitively and behave appropriately based on that information. Additionally, as Knack and Keefer (1997) suggest, in high trust societies, people tend to be more willing and active in their participation in group activities such as volunteering. Accordingly, short-term study abroad seems to be a social good, helping participants develop “social intelligence” and giving them the willingness or ability to be more socially active and thereby cultivate both social skills and social contacts.

7. Conclusion

In Japan, short-term study abroad programmes will continue to grow at least until 2020. In recent years, many studies have tried to find or quantify the positive impact of study abroad experiences. This study found a significant impact on “general trust” at the conclusion of short-term study abroad trips. Increasing general trust sounds like both an individual good (involving gains in social intelligence and social activity) and a societal good. If the experience of studying abroad can improve general trust, private and public investment in studying abroad may be seen as worthwhile.

Acknowledgments

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