

## **ABSTRACT**

### **Interaction with Local Community as Experiential Learning for Study Abroad Students in Today's Global Society : Japanese Student Perspectives**

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Japanese government encourages universities to send students for study abroad and to receive international students for study in Japan in order to enhance development of human resources needed urgently to deal with the current globalization of society. The aim of this research is to examine what and how students learn from their experience of interaction with local community during a one year period of study abroad. Informants are selected from students from "University A", which is considered one of the most globalized universities in Japan, with features such as a well-developed international campus setting, intercultural environment, classes taught in English, a mandatory year abroad program, and so on.

This dissertation has a total of eight chapters. Chapters 1-3 review materials related to the theme of general background of study abroad needs and conditions, Chapter 4 describes the environment of the "A" university, which shaped the background and preparation of informants for their study abroad experience. Chapters 5-7 focus on empirical studies, and the last, comprehensive chapter integrates the results and discuss the theme holistically.

Chapter 1 summarizes the current situation of sending Japanese students on the year abroad program, including the transition of governmental policy towards study abroad education, the barriers and the governmental measure of enhancing year abroad programs. Chapter 2 gives a brief outline of the interactions between Japanese university students and local communities home and abroad in the perspective of the current globalization in Japan. Two approaches are shown; one is Japanese students interact with local community overseas and the other is international students in Japan interacting with Japanese local community to assist internationalization. As a theoretical framework relevant to this research, in Chapter 3, the approach of Community Psychology is introduced with an emphasis on two major concepts of "Person-Environment Fit" and "Sense of Community". Research questions are then stated. Chapter 4 characterizes the environment of the "A" university, and describes how the university attempts to create a global environment and the opportunities of interaction with the local community for both Japanese and international students in a rural area of Japan, where its campus is located. Also, this chapter shows the author's positioning of this research.

Chapter 5 (Research 1), Chapter 6 (Research 2), and Chapter 7 (Research 3) include analysis of data regarding study abroad experience collected from 15 Japanese student informants from "University A" through extensive half-structured interviews upon their return to Japan. Chapter 5 (Research 1) investigates how much these students got involved in the local community activities and the factors influencing their involvement based on their willingness to get involved and actual experiences in the community interaction. The results of analysis point at two main factors conditioning involvement. One factor is of personal type: the desire to build good networks and to use supportive resources, also the positive attitude to overcome setbacks. The other factor is of social and environmental type: good school support system, friendly attitudes in the community toward Japan and willingness to accept a different culture. The outcome shows that without a supportive, social environment, it is not easy to access the local community, even though students may wish to do so. Chapter 6 (Research 2) focuses on the perception gap between the students and the university regarding student support for community involvement. The remarkable difference, confirmed between the view of host institutions and students' perceptions indicates the need for interventions for the purpose of improvement of student well-being and such interventions require good understanding of the source of the problem. Chapter 7 (Research 3) investigates types of awareness developed by study abroad students through the involvement

in local community activities, and the relationship between these types of awareness and transformation of the way students perceive their local communities. The data from 12 students who had experienced the interaction with the community collected in Research 2 was used for further analysis. The outcome of qualitative analysis shows that students gained new perception of their surrounding communities, of themselves, and of the support systems, as a result of their study abroad experience. Also the experience changed their willingness to support local community activities after they return from abroad. The sense of community grew within the university community, but not outside of the university. However, there is a noticeable tendency toward positive community development even in the wider community.

Chapter 8, the last chapter of this paper, discusses the result comprehensively. It shows the environment surrounding international students played a very important role in their involvement with the community and therefore pointed to the necessity to reconsider the way of support and cooperation between the systems. The fact that students exhibited their willingness to support local community activities after their return from abroad indicates the high probability that they can assume the role of the cultural brokers in a multicultural society.