

Development of Global-Mindedness among College Students: a Comparative Study among the Japanese and US Students

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Abstract

It is to be expected that a significant difference should exist in the development of global-mindedness between students with study-abroad experience and those with none. This study seeks to examine how U.S. college students, in comparison with Japanese college students, describe the concept of global-mindedness. The target population for this survey was current undergraduate college students in the U.S. and Japan. In the background section of the survey, I indicated each student's year in college and whether or not she or he had studied abroad. The next section of the survey sought to measure global preparedness. 209 U.S. college students and 120 Japanese college students responded to this survey. U.S. college students and Japanese students responded in fundamentally similar ways, with some notable differences. Both characterized awareness of other cultures as an essential characteristic of globally minded adults. However, most U.S. college students indicated open-mindedness and global awareness as characteristics of global-mindedness, while many Japanese college students indicated flexibility to work on different teams and possession of foreign language skills. Japanese college students emphasized individual strength, identity, and language ability, whereas U.S. college students emphasized ability to understand other cultures. On study abroad experience, the outcomes did not show measurable differences in global mindedness between those with and those without international experience, either among Japanese or US students. This study highlights differences in the ways Japanese and U.S. college students think about their careers and the degree and kinds of global preparedness necessary to accomplish career goals.

Keywords: global careers, global-mindedness, global leaders, higher education, globalization.

1. Introduction

There are differences in the ways Americans and Japanese think about their careers and the degree and kinds of global preparedness necessary to accomplish career goals (Aronsson, 2015). The question has essentially to do with what U.S. college students versus Japanese college students think it means to be a globally minded adult. For Japanese college students, there appears to be a greater awareness of the need to position oneself competitively against other regional economies and in relation to the other major economic powers like the United States and other G8 countries, whereas in the U.S. people are more accustomed to thinking of globalization as an abstract economic process happening externally to their daily lives that impacts them only insofar as it makes their goods cheaper and supports their financial systems. Since the 2016 US elections, Brexit and other recent events in Europe, there seems to be a new turn toward economic nationalism, though this has been expressed in more populist than institutional terms. The message in universities remains an embrace of internationalism and global initiatives.

U.S. university administrators talk about “global initiatives” and global programs and training. Japanese domestic companies and university administrators also frequently talk about cultivating more “globally minded young adults.” Since 37 Japanese universities were selected for the Top Global University Project launched by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), which aims to enhance the international compatibility and competitiveness of Japanese universities (MEXT, 2014), many universities have encouraged their students to study abroad. The purpose of this research is to assess how much study abroad experiences have influenced the development of global-mindedness between both students who have and have not had such experiences, comparing to Japanese and U.S. college students.

2. Review of the Literature

2.1 The Concept of Global-Mindedness

The concept of global-mindedness is broad. Every country has different ideas of what it means to become globally minded. The Japan Business Federation (2011) conducted a survey about primary attributes that characterize globally minded adults. In the survey, Japanese domestic companies stated that the following were essential characteristics of global-mindedness: (i) having a passionate spirit; (ii) having effective communication skills in foreign languages; and, (iii) being mentally tough and strong. The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2012) also describes the concept of global-mindedness this way: (i) having effective communication skills; (ii) having a passionate spirit; (iii) having flexibility, (iv) having more than one mother tongue in which to communicate with others; and, (v) having a strong individual identity (MEXT, 2012).

In Western countries, many people have different concepts of global-mindedness. Arthur (2000) states that the essential characteristics of global-mindedness are: (i) understanding of cultural influences from diverse backgrounds; (ii) having self-awareness to interact with people from culturally diverse backgrounds; (iii) having a positive mindset about learning from others; (iv) having a mindset about learning cultural empathy; (v) appreciating the ways that other people view themselves and the world around them; and, (vi) having foreign language skills for cross-cultural communication. Caligiuri (2006) places the emphasis on success in global leadership activities and indicates three examples of characteristics of global leaders: (i) intercultural interaction skills; (ii) foreign language skills; and, (iii) cognitive ability across all positions regardless of level or organizational context.

From this can be identified some differences in the concept of global-mindedness as it tends to be discussed in Japan and in the U.S. The key difference is that the Japanese list emphasizes individual strength, identity and so on, whereas the American one emphasizes ability to understand other cultures. I also assume that one of the key differences would be that everyone in Japan assumes global mindedness involves being able to communicate in another language, whereas many who consider themselves globally minded in the U.S. assume they can communicate in English wherever they go. There is a difference between Americans who only speak English and those who are multilingual in this respect.

3. Method

3.1 Procedures

My target population for this study was current college students in the U.S. and Japan. I conducted an online survey of current undergraduate students. Through the survey I was able to gather hundreds of responses in a short period of time. The online survey was distributed through several student organizations and class websites, as well as through social network services. The data was collected during a two-week period beginning in November of 2016. The results of this research provide insights into the need to be globally minded and reveal differences of thinking between Japanese and American current college students.

In the background section of the survey, I have included each student's year in college and whether or not she or he had studied abroad. It is to be expected that there would be a significant difference in the concept of global-mindedness between U.S. college students and Japanese college students, and that there would be another significant difference in the development of global-mindedness among college students who had participated in study abroad programs while in college versus those who had not. The information about student's country of citizenship or gender is not included because permission was not obtained to conduct a survey including that background information from some U.S. universities and colleges.

The next section of the survey measured global preparedness. I asked, "Have you ever thought of global-mindedness as an important part of preparation for your future career?" At the end of the survey, the questionnaire included the following open-ended question: "What do you think are the primary attributes that characterize globally minded adults?" Current college students in the U.S. and Japan offered diverse opinions on how to help students develop the skills necessary for global careers.

Those questions sought to measure differences in the ways U.S. college students and Japanese college students think about their careers and the degree and kinds of global preparedness necessary to accomplish career goals.

4. Results

4.1 Data Analysis

209 college students in the largest cities in Los Angeles County, the San Francisco Bay area, and Oklahoma County, the U.S. and 120 college students in the largest cities in Tokyo and Osaka, Japan responded to this survey. In the U.S., the respondents were 17.7% freshmen, 32.1% sophomores, 25.8% juniors, and 24.4% of seniors. In Japan, the breakdown was 39.2% freshmen, 23.3% sophomores, 25% juniors, and 12.5% seniors.

The majority of respondents (79.4%) in the U.S. were students who had never studied abroad while in college, while 20.6% had study abroad experience. Among those students who had studied abroad, 31.3% had completed a semester of study abroad, and 31.3% had had a year-long study abroad experience. 25% had completed short-term study abroad programs, and 12.5% had completed overseas internships or volunteer activities.

In Japan, the majority of respondents (60%) were students who had never studied abroad, while 40% were those who had. Among those students who had studied abroad, 15.6% had a

semester, and only 6.7% had a year-long study abroad experience. The majority of respondents (44.4%) had short-term study abroad program experience, and 33.3% had overseas internship or volunteer experience.

4.2 Primary Attributes of Global-Mindedness

After identifying students in this way, the next question assessed the concept of global-mindedness. In the U.S., the majority of respondents (87%) considered global-mindedness to be an important part of preparation for their future career. In Japan as well, 90.8% of respondents considered global-mindedness important.

College students with and without study abroad experience had varying impressions of the concept of global-mindedness and indicated several characteristics. In the data results, U.S. college students with study abroad experience indicated 14 characteristics of global-mindedness. The largest group of U.S. college students who had study abroad experience (21.4%) responded that awareness of other cultures was an important characteristic, and 19% pointed to having an open-mind toward all cultures and religions (see Table 1). 16.7% indicated awareness of global issues and being updated on current events in the world. U.S. college students without study abroad experience indicated 30 characteristics of global-mindedness. The majority of U.S. college students who did not have study abroad experiences (38.9%) indicated awareness of other cultures, and 32.3% indicated open-mindedness. 25.1% of respondents pointed to awareness of global issues and being updated on current events.

Japanese college students with study abroad experience indicated 28 characteristics of global-mindedness in this study. The majority of Japanese college students who had study abroad experience (35.4%) pointed to flexibility to work on different teams in intercultural settings to be globally minded adults (see Table 1). 27.1% of the respondents pointed to foreign language skills and 27.1% also indicated effective communication skills for working with others. Japanese college students without study abroad experience indicated 28 characteristics of global-mindedness. The largest group (38.9%) indicated foreign language skills (see Table 1).

Table 1: The Concept of Global-Mindedness and College Students with and without Study Abroad Experience

	U.S. Student with Study Abroad	U.S. Student without Study Abroad	JPN Student with Study Abroad	JPN Student without Study Abroad
Awareness of other Cultures	21.4%	38.9%	31.3%	16.7%
Open-Mindedness	19.0%	32.3%	0%	0%
Global Awareness	16.7%	25.1%	0%	0%
Flexibility	9.5%	22.8%	35.4%	27.8%
Language Skills	2.4%	2.4%	27.1%	38.9%
Communication Skills	2.4%	1.2%	27.1%	26.4%
Leadership Attitude	0%	0.6%	14.6%	9.7%

Compared with U.S. college students without study abroad experience and Japanese college students with study abroad experience, Japanese students without study abroad experience indicated foreign language skills as a primary attribute to become globally minded, and they noted that having more than one mother tongue or native language in which to communicate with others was an essential characteristic of becoming globally minded adults. This was a surprising finding, as it suggests Japanese college students think that only people raised with two languages can become globally minded adults. 27.8% also pointed to flexibility to work on different teams,

and 26.4% of respondents pointed to effective communication skills for working with others, while most U.S. college students did not indicate those characteristics.

4.3 Classification of College Students and the Concept of Global-Mindedness

Undergraduate students were classified as freshmen, sophomores, juniors, or seniors in universities and college in the U.S. and Japan. The study analyzed what students thought were the primary attributes of globally minded young adults broken down by this four-tier classification system.

No U.S. freshmen who had studied abroad participated in the survey. The majority of U.S. freshmen without study abroad experience (40.5%) indicated awareness of other cultures as an essential characteristic of global-mindedness (see Table 2). 35.1% pointed to open-mindedness, and 18.9% indicated awareness of global issues and being updated on current events in the world.

On the other hand, the largest group of Japanese freshman with study abroad experience (55.6%) indicated effective communication skills for working with others in intercultural settings, and 33.3% pointed to the flexibility to work on different teams and in different settings (see Table 2). Also, the majority of Japanese freshmen who did not have study abroad experience (42.1%) indicated foreign language skills. Both U.S. and Japanese freshmen indicated awareness of other cultures as an essential characteristic of global-mindedness. While U.S. freshmen indicated open-mindedness and global awareness, Japanese freshmen considered effective communication skills in foreign languages to be more essential than the open-mindedness and global awareness that U.S. college students indicated.

English is a more internationally spoken language. Many U.S. college students hardly bother to learn foreign languages, and they do not see foreign languages as paths to careers the way Japanese students might. Most Japanese see English as a strategic language and a path to a global career.

Table 2: The Concept of Global-Mindedness among Freshmen

	U.S. Student with Study Abroad	U.S. Student without Study Abroad	JPN Student with Study Abroad	JPN Student without Study Abroad
Awareness of other cultures	0%	40.5%	33.3%	18.4%
Open-Mindedness	0%	35.1%	0%	0%
Global Awareness	0%	18.9%	0%	0%
Flexibility	0%	8.1%	33.3%	27.8%
Language Skills	0%	2.7%	22.2%	42.1%
Communication Skills	0%	5.4%	55.6%	36.8%

The next data results show responses among sophomores in the U.S. and Japan. The majority of U.S. sophomores without study abroad experience indicated awareness of other cultures (35.8%) as well as the open-mindedness (35.8%) (see Table 3). The largest group of U.S. sophomores with study abroad experience (28.6%) pointed to awareness of global issues and being up to date on current events in the world.

On the other hand, the majority of Japanese sophomores with study abroad experience (41.7%) responded flexibility to work on different teams, and 25% indicated leadership attitude and the ability to organize and support a team (see Table 3). Also, the largest group of Japanese sophomores without study abroad experience (31.3%) indicated effective communication skills for

working with others. Among them, 18.8% indicated flexibility to work on different teams and 18.8% pointed to leadership attitude and the ability to organize a team.

Table 3: The Concept of Global-Mindedness among Sophomores

	U.S. Student with Study Abroad	U.S. Student without Study Abroad	JPN Student with Study Abroad	JPN Student without Study Abroad
Awareness of other cultures	7.1%	35.8%	16.7%	25.0%
Open-Mindedness	7.1%	35.8%	0%	0%
Global Awareness	28.6%	18.9%	0%	0%
Flexibility	0%	24.5%	41.7%	18.8%
Language Skills	7.1%	3.8%	8.3%	31.3%
Leadership Attitude	0%	1.9%	25.0%	18.8%
Communication Skills	7.1%	0%	8.3%	6.3%

Regardless of study abroad experience, Japanese college sophomores considered leadership attitude to be essential. Kumar, Anjum, & Sinha (2011) note that “globalization has also created the need for leaders to become competent in cross-cultural awareness and practice.” No Japanese sophomores indicated global awareness and open-mindedness as an essential characteristic of global-mindedness, while they tended to recognize leadership attitude and the ability to organize a team as one of the essential characteristics.

In the data results among juniors in the U.S. and Japan, regardless of the type of study abroad programs, juniors in the U.S. and Japan indicated awareness of other cultures as an essential characteristic of global-mindedness (see Table 4). Also, 41.2% of Japanese juniors with study abroad experience and 38.5% of those who did not have study abroad experience indicated foreign language skills.

Also, the majority of U.S. college seniors without study abroad experience (43.3%) indicated flexibility to work on different teams as the primary attribute characterizing globally minded adults (see Table 5), while the largest group of Japanese seniors without study abroad experience (80%) focused on flexibility to work on different teams. An interesting point is that both U.S. and Japanese college seniors indicated the flexibility to work on different teams as one of the primary attributes characterizing globally minded adults, the same as freshmen and sophomores.

Table 4: The Concept of Global-Mindedness among Juniors

	U.S. Student with Study Abroad	U.S. Student without Study Abroad	JPN Student with Study Abroad	JPN Student without Study Abroad
Awareness of other cultures	50.0%	35.8%	47.1%	7.7%
Open-Mindedness	50.0%	35.8%	0%	0%
Global Awareness	12.5%	18.9%	0%	0%
Flexibility	12.5%	24.5%	29.4%	23.1%
Language Skills	0%	3.8%	41.2%	38.5%
Communication Skills	0%	0%	35.3%	23.1%

Table 5: The Concept of Global-Mindedness among Seniors

	U.S. Student with Study Abroad	U.S. Student without Study Abroad	JPN Student with Study Abroad	JPN Student without Study Abroad
Awareness of other cultures	19.0%	40.0%	20.0%	0%
Open-Mindedness	14.3%	40.0%	0%	0%
Global Awareness	9.5%	26.7%	0%	0%
Flexibility	14.3%	43.3%	40.0%	80.0%
Language Skills	0%	0%	30.0%	0%
Communication Skills	0%	0%	10.0%	20.0%

4.4 Type of Study Abroad Program and the Development of Global-Mindedness

Depending on type of study abroad program, there were different responses between Japanese college students and U.S. college students. Japanese college students with year-long study abroad experience indicated flexibility to work on different teams in different settings (100%) and foreign language skills (100%) as the primary attributes that characterize globally minded adults (see Table 6). The majority of U.S. college students with year-long study abroad experience indicated awareness of other cultures (40%) and open-mindedness (40%) (see Table 7).

Also, the largest group of Japanese college students with a semester of study abroad experience (42.9%) indicated awareness of other cultures, and the majority of U.S. college students with a semester abroad (30%) indicated awareness of other cultures as well.

Thus, type of study abroad program did not influence the development of global-mindedness between Japanese college students and U.S. college students.

Table 6: The Concept of Global-Mindedness and Types of Study Programs for Japanese College Students

	Semester Study Abroad	Year-Long Study Abroad	Short-Term Study Abroad	Volunteer and Internship Abroad
Awareness of other cultures	42.9%	66.7%	20.0%	33.3%
Flexibility	14.3%	100%	25.0%	46.7%
Language Skills	28.6%	100%	25.0%	20.0%
Ability to accomplish plans	14.3%	33.3%	10.0%	0%
Leadership Attitude	14.3%	33.3%	10.0%	20.0%
Communication Skills	28.6%	33.3%	20.0%	26.7%

Table 7: The Concept of Global-Mindedness and Types of Study Programs for U.S. College Students

	Semester Study Abroad	Year-Long Study Abroad	Short-Term Study Abroad	Volunteer and Internship Abroad
Awareness of other cultures	30.0%	40.0%	37.5%	50.0%

	Semester Study Abroad	Year-Long Study Abroad	Short-Term Study Abroad	Volunteer and Internship Abroad
Open-Mindedness	0%	40.0%	37.5%	0%
Global Awareness	10.0%	10.0%	50.0%	0%
Challenging Spirit	0%	10.0%	25.0%	0%
Flexibility	20.0%	30.0%	12.5%	0%

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

This study identified a significant difference between Japanese college students and US college students, where Japanese students emphasized individual strength, identity, and language ability, whereas U.S. college students emphasized ability to understand other cultures. However, the outcome shows that neither Japanese nor U.S. college students became more globally minded after an international experience. The results did not support the hypothesis that there would be a significant difference in the development of global-mindedness between students who had studied abroad and those who had not. Regardless of the type of study abroad program, most U.S. college students indicated open-mindedness and global awareness as essential characteristics for becoming globally minded, while Japanese college students did not indicate these two characteristics.

Further research is needed to account for the fact that Japanese college students appear not to think that the open-mindedness and global awareness are primary attributes that characterize globally minded adults. Japanese society is not a multicultural society like the U.S., and most Japanese college students rarely consider prejudice and racial discrimination in their everyday lives. Even many Japanese college students who have study abroad experience tend to seek employment at major Japanese companies and governmental organizations, not global companies in intercultural settings. It seems that many Japanese college students tend not to take initiative on their own, but given a framework for action tend to engage actively. Thus, they tend to be focused on the local framework and are rarely concerned about global issues or events beyond those of their local communities, cities, and regions. In the U.S., many college students discuss social and political issues with their classmates and friends, and it seems that many American companies such as Google, Amazon, Facebook, and so on create new value through global business as compared to other countries.

In comparison with U.S. college students, many Japanese college students are not interested in political or economic issues, and they rarely discuss global issues with their classmates and friends. This question should have been added to the survey: do you discuss global political issues with your classmates? In consideration of this, Japanese universities and colleges should provide more opportunities for discussion-centric teaching and foster development of communication skills among students. Japanese education tends to be much more lecture-oriented than in the U.S. The Japanese education system from the primary-school level will need to provide active learning curricula and promote students' active participation and interaction with each other in order to cultivate more globally minded young adults. The degree to which the U.S. education system excels at this can be debated, but the pedagogical methods are more focused on interactive discussion.

5.2 Recommendations

In this survey, the outcomes did not support the hypothesis that there would a significant effect on the development of global-mindedness based on type of study abroad program, but we can assume that study abroad experiences significantly influence the development of global-mindedness. Further research is needed on the concept of global-mindedness between students with study abroad experience and those with none.

Current college students in the U.S. and Japan have valuable opinions regarding the concept of global-mindedness, and they may offer insight into how students can be educated into more globally minded adults. Further research is also needed to account for the fact that college students in different states in the U.S. and in different countries, such as India, seem to have different views of the primary attributes that characterize globally minded young adults.

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