

Exploring Factors Determining Motivation to Participate in Study Abroad Programs for Teacher Education Students in the U.S.A. and Japan

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to explore the factors which determine students' motivation to study abroad in two teacher education programs. One teacher education program is of a regional public university in Louisiana, USA, while the second counterpart is of a regional national university in Shikoku, Japan. A survey was administered to students of both institutions. Sixty students from the American institution and 163 from the Japanese institution responded. Results found that the American students were more interested in applying their knowledge and skills that they have acquired in their home institution and the Japanese students were more interested in gaining new experiences and skills and meeting new people including university students and school children. The American students' outgoing orientation was significantly determined by concern about language ability and having foreign experience. The Japanese students' outgoing orientation was determined by interests in speaking foreign language and visiting foreign schools, the foreign education system and disliking to travel.

Keywords: study abroad, exchange students, teacher education, overseas practice teaching.

1. Introduction

Students in today's universities are increasingly participating in study abroad programs. The Institute of International Education reported that study abroad participation rates have tripled in the last twenty years (2011). However, even with the increases, barely one percent of all U.S. students study abroad during their university careers (Institute of International Education, 2011). Likewise also in Japan, only about two percent of all Japanese students study abroad (MEXT, 2013).

The number of Japanese international students had its peak in 2004 and is decreasing. Now the Japan Association of National Universities urges its associated universities to internationalize more. It set a numerical target that more than five percent of national university students study abroad by 2020. Both countries strive for more chances to increase the number of international exchange students in higher education. In an effort to increase teacher education students' experience in working with diverse populations, teacher education programs look to create study abroad opportunities for their students. The purpose, the design, and the length vary from one teacher education program to another. For some programs, the purpose of a study abroad experience is to simply observe a different educational system. Some programs combine educational and cultural experiences, while others include teaching experience that is as short as 2 weeks to a year long. Study abroad programs typically are created between two higher education institutions.

Others are created through a private vendor and some are between an institution of higher education and a school district. Financial burdens of funding a study abroad program are handled in various ways by different institutions. Some schools cover the cost for the students, some cover partial costs through scholarships or foundations, while others require the students to pay for the entire experience. Universities located in rural areas create study abroad programs to give their students greater awareness and exposure to the world outside their community. Students from these areas may not have ever been abroad or even having a passport. Yet, as the world is becoming more and more integrated, teachers have to teach students who are not from their community. With that in mind, it is important for teacher education students in small towns and rural areas to be exposed to different cultures so they can help teach all students.

Creating study abroad opportunities allows teacher education programs to give their students exposure to a different world and culture. If the design of the study abroad program includes teaching experiences, that then provides a very enriching opportunity for teacher education students from small and rural towns, opportunities that they would not have had if it was not for the study abroad program. In order to design successful study abroad programs, it is critical that institutions know the factors which encourage or discourage students from participating in a study abroad program. The aim of the present study is to examine the effects of those factors including what country the study abroad program is conducted in, the length of the study abroad, and financial cost. One of the target universities is the University of Louisiana at Monroe (ULM in short), a regional public university in the State of Louisiana, the United States of America. The other is Ehime University (EU in short), a regional national university in Shikoku, Japan. The two institutions, separated by the Pacific Ocean, reached an agreement for academic exchanges in March 2012 and are trying to establish mutually beneficial exchanges of teacher education students to learn about the differences and similarities between the education systems. This partnership will be sending 20 students in total from each university to the partnering university for a two-week period. Students will be attending classes, spending time with students, observing the educational system, and introducing their own culture in the host country.

The following research questions will be addressed in this study:

- Research question 1: What factors differentially encourage American and Japanese teacher education students to participate in study abroad programs?
- Research question 2: What factors differentially inhibit American and Japanese teacher education students from participating study abroad programs?
- Research question 3: To what degree is the motivation for study abroad determined by the promoting and inhibiting factors?

In order to successfully start and continue exchange programs, effective recruitment of students is crucial. These questions are especially important in exploring the potentially promoting and inhibiting factors of participating in international exchange programs in the two institutions. Empirical analysis on students' answers related to those questions can collect relevant information the professors in each institution to set up the programs appealing to the students of each institution. (I do not understand the previous sentence). The present study is aimed at clarifying the institutional differences in students' preferences on study abroad programs. If the professors in both parties are knowledgeable about the differences, recruitment methods and program contents, these elements can strategically be differentiated depending on potential participants in each institution.

2. Literature Review

Many studies have looked for motivational elements and barriers students consider in general when deciding to study abroad. One such study conducted at Mount Holyoke College found that financial aid was critically important, as was course sequencing in order to graduate on time, the likelihood of raising a low grade point average, and extracurricular activities the student may already be committed to (like athletics) were contributing factors (Paus & Robinson, 2008). The study also found that reassurance and support from friends, family and faculty members allayed many of the fears students felt regarding a study abroad (Paus et al., 2008).

A study from the University of Iowa found that lower income students were less likely to study abroad than students who had more financial resources (Salisbury, Umbach, Paulson, & Pascarelle, 2009). In addition, students who have strong interests in reading and writing skills tended to be more attracted to study abroad programs, as were students who were open to diverse viewpoints (Salisbury et al., 2009). An institution in Canada attempted to understand motivating factors for students participating in their study abroad programs. The most cited reasons for picking an institution outside Canada for a study abroad experience were location, reputation, course offerings and academic programs (Massey & Burrow, 2012). For students coming to Canada, decision-making factors included a desire to live and make friends in the country and learn more about the culture (Massey et al., 2012). These students relied on websites, study abroad advisors and past exchange students' word of mouth to gain access to information (Massey et al., 2012).

Researchers at the University of California at Long Beach found the main barriers to study abroad experiences were cost and time (wanting to graduate without delays) (Lusby & Bandaruk, 2010). Short-term (eight weeks or less) experiences which included students and faculty from the home institution were most popular of the study abroad models among the students surveyed (Lusby et al., 2010). The content areas most desired during a study abroad program were "soft adventure activities," "learning about and trying local food," "learning about the culture and local customs," "learning about the marine environment," "natural areas and jungles," and "hands on learning and community service" (Lusby et al., 2010, p. 24). A study from West Virginia University also looked at factors motivating students to participate in study abroad programs. The most popular answers among students surveyed included: "experiencing a different culture, exploring the history and architecture, course offered through the university at which the students were enrolled, and the security of traveling in a small group" (Mansson, 2008, p. 22). To our best knowledge, the motivations and barriers specific to teacher education students utilizing study abroad programs have not been explored.

3. Method

A survey was administered electronically to teacher education students ranging from first year to final year students at both institutions. Sixty students from the American institution and 163 from the Japanese institution responded. The survey addressed questions pertaining to level of interest in conducting a study abroad on different continents, what type of study abroad programs would interest them the most, concerns or issues that worried them the most about studying abroad, the past experiences going abroad, reasons for wanting to participate in a study abroad program and the financial resources that they are willing to use to participate in a study abroad program. The items for those questions are listed on Appendix.

4. Results

Research question 1. What factors differentially encourage American and Japanese teacher education students to participate in study abroad programs?

Table 1 shows means and standard deviations of each item for in the two university's respondents. A two-way mixed factorial ANOVA was administered to examine the effects of institutional difference between ULM and EU and of item difference within the students. The main effect of institutional difference was not significant ($F(1, 218) = .313, p = .576, \eta_p^2 = .001$). The main effect of item difference was significant ($F(12, 2616) = 22.614, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .094$). Interaction effect of the two factors was significant ($F(12, 2616) = 7.345, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .033$). Along with the purpose of the present study, the following analyses were performed to examine institutional differences in each item as well as the item differences. Differences between American and Japanese means in each item were examined with Bonferroni multiple comparison procedure.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations of their expectations for international exchange

	ULM		EU	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1. Cultural tour	3.60	1.55	3.61	1.28
2. Speaking in a foreign language	3.37	1.44	3.13	1.36
3. Visiting foreign schools	3.55	1.33	3.42	1.37
4 Teaching practice	3.42	1.28	2.77	1.46
5. Developing teaching material	3.13	1.37	2.72	1.36
6. Learning in a foreign university	3.18	1.46	3.41	1.40
7. Meeting foreign university students	3.28	1.55	3.91	1.29
8. Interacting with foreign school children	3.38	1.52	3.91	1.17
9. Different cultures	4.13	1.24	4.11	0.98
10. Skills teaching in foreign language	3.45	1.20	3.58	1.01
11. Improving foreign language skills	3.88	1.19	3.89	1.01
12. Advancing teaching methods	3.55	1.32	4.19	0.98
13. Learning foreign education systems	3.68	1.23	3.94	0.95

The number of combinations of two items is too many to show all the results. Therefore only statistically significant relationships are mentioned here. (4) Teaching practice ($p = .002$), (5) developing teaching material ($p = .049$), (7) meeting foreign university students ($p = .003$), (8) interacting with foreign school children ($p = .005$), and (12) advancing teaching methods ($p < .001$). Differences between items were examined in each university. Within the American university samples, significant differences were observed most frequently in the relationships with (9) different cultures, which was higher than (2) speaking in a foreign language ($p = .009$), (3) visiting foreign schools ($p = .046$), (4) teaching practice ($p = .013$), (5) developing teaching material ($p < .001$), (6) learning in a foreign university ($p < .001$), (7) meeting foreign university students ($p = .001$), (8) interaction with foreign school children ($p = .001$), (10) skills teaching in foreign language ($p < .001$), and (12) advancing teaching methods.

In addition, (11) improving foreign language skills was significantly higher than (5) developing teaching material ($p = .027$) and (6) learning in a foreign university ($p = .030$), (10) skills teaching in foreign language ($p = .009$). Within the Japanese university samples, (12) advancing teaching methods was significantly higher than (1) cultural tour ($p < .001$), (2) speaking in a foreign language ($p < .001$), (3) visiting foreign schools ($p < .001$), (4) teaching practice ($p < .001$), (5) developing teaching material ($p < .001$), (6) learning in a foreign university ($p < .001$), and (10) skills teaching in foreign language ($p < .001$). (9) different cultures showed the identical trend with (12) advancing teaching methods: significantly higher score than (1) cultural tour ($p < .001$), (2) speaking in a foreign language ($p < .001$), (3) visiting foreign schools ($p < .001$), (4) teaching practice ($p < .001$), (5) developing teaching material ($p < .001$), (6) learning in a foreign university ($p < .001$), and (10) skills teaching in foreign language ($p < .001$). (13) Learning foreign education systems and (11) improving foreign language skills had a similar trend with (12) advancing teaching methods and (9) different cultures. (13) Learning foreign education systems showed a significantly higher score than (2) speaking in a foreign language ($p < .001$), (3) visiting foreign schools ($p < .001$), (4) teaching practice ($p < .001$), (5) developing teaching material ($p < .001$), (6) learning in a foreign university ($p < .001$), and (10) skills teaching in foreign language ($p = .005$).

(11) Improving foreign language skills showed significantly higher score than (2) speaking in a foreign language ($p < .001$), (3) visiting foreign schools ($p = .003$), (4) teaching practice ($p < .001$), (5) developing teaching material ($p < .001$), (6) learning in a foreign university ($p = .002$), and (10) skills teaching in foreign language ($p < .001$).

In addition, 1 cultural tour was higher than (2) speaking in a foreign language ($p = .001$), (4) teaching practice ($p < .001$), and (5) developing teaching material ($p < .001$). (3) Visiting foreign schools was significantly higher than (4) teaching practice ($p < .001$) and (5) developing teaching material ($p < .001$). (6) Learning in a foreign university was significantly higher than (4) teaching practice ($p < .001$) and (5) developing teaching material ($p < .001$). (7) Meeting foreign university students was significantly higher than (2) speaking in a foreign language ($p < .001$), (3) visiting foreign schools ($p < .001$), (4) teaching practice ($p < .001$), (5) developing teaching material ($p < .001$), (6) learning in a foreign university ($p < .001$). (8) Interaction with foreign school children was significantly higher than (2) speaking in a foreign language ($p < .001$), (3) visiting foreign schools ($p < .001$), (4) teaching practice ($p < .001$), (5) developing teaching material ($p < .001$), (6) learning in a foreign university ($p < .001$), and (10) skills teaching in foreign language ($p = .044$). (10) Skills teaching in foreign language was significantly higher than (2) speaking in a foreign language ($p = .003$), (4) teaching practice ($p < .001$), and (5) developing teaching material ($p < .001$). (4) Teaching practice and (5) developing teaching material were more expected in American students than Japanese counterparts.

On the other hand, (7) meeting foreign university students, (8) interaction with foreign school children, and (12) advancing teaching methods were more expected in Japanese students than American counterparts. Within American students, (1) cultural tour, (9) different cultures, (11) improving foreign language skills, and (13) learning foreign education systems were top-ranked items. Within Japanese students, (7) meeting foreign university students, (8) interacting with foreign school children, (9) different cultures, (11) improving foreign language skills, (12) advancing teaching methods, and (13) learning foreign education systems were top-ranked items.

Research question 2. What factors differentially inhibit American and Japanese teacher education students from participating study abroad programs

Table 2 shows means and standard deviations of items to ask the two university's respondents about potential concerns in international exchange. A two-way mixed factorial ANOVA was administered to examine the effects of institutional difference between ULM and EU and of item difference within the students. The main effect of institutional difference ($F(1, 221) = 11.572, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .050$), the main effect of item difference ($F(9, 1989) = 54.006, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .196$), and the interaction effect of the two factors ($F(9, 1989) = 7.757, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .034$) were all significant. Differences between American and Japanese means in each item were examined with Bonferroni multiple comparison procedure. In many concerns, Japanese students were more anxious than American counterparts: (1) security ($p = .003$), (4) food ($p = .032$), (5) cultural difference ($p = .005$), (7) language ($p < .001$), (9) trouble ($p < .001$), and (10) dislike of travel ($p = .016$). The only item that American students had stronger concern for was (8) doubting educational outcome ($p < .001$). Within the American university samples, the highest ranked score was (6) cost. The (6) cost score was significantly higher than (5) cultural differences ($p < .001$), (8) doubting educational outcome ($p = .007$), and (10) dislike of travel ($p < .001$).

The second highest item was (1) security, which was significantly higher than (5) cultural differences ($p < .001$), (8) doubting educational outcome ($p = .005$), and (10) dislike of travel ($p < .001$). The following relationships are also introduced in descending order of the score rank. (2) Being alone was higher than (5) cultural differences ($p < .001$), (8) doubting educational outcome ($p = .049$), and (10) dislike of travel ($p < .001$). (7) Language was higher than (5) cultural differences ($p = .001$), (8) doubting educational outcome ($p = .018$), and (10) dislike of travel ($p < .001$). (3) Away from family and friend was higher than (10) dislike of travel ($p < .001$). (9) Troubles and (4) food were also higher than (10) dislike of travel ($p < .001$). (8) Doubting education outcome was also higher than (10) dislike of travel ($p = .001$). (5) Cultural difference was higher than (10) dislike of travel ($p = .045$).

Table 2. Means and standard deviations of their concerns in international exchange

	ULM		EU	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1. Security	3.52	1.38	4.06	1.11
2. Being alone	3.40	1.37	3.80	1.35
3. Away from family and friends	3.12	1.30	3.04	1.46
4. Food	2.90	1.40	3.34	1.35
5. Cultural difference	2.53	1.11	3.07	1.30
6. Cost	3.53	1.35	3.88	1.20
7. Language	3.35	1.30	4.39	0.96
8. Doubting education outcome	2.72	1.40	2.07	1.03
9 Troubles	3.12	1.37	3.85	1.28
10. Disliking travel	1.88	1.22	2.36	1.34

It means (10) disliking travel had the least score which was significantly lower than any other items. Within the Japanese university samples, the highest-ranked score was (7) language, which was significantly higher than all other items except for (1) security: (2) being alone ($p < .001$), (3) away from family and friends ($p < .001$), (4) food ($p < .001$), (5) cultural differences ($p < .001$), (6) cost ($p < .001$), (7) language ($p < .001$), (8) doubting educational outcome ($p < .001$), (9) trouble ($p = .001$), and (10) dislike of travel ($p < .001$). The second-ranked item was (1) security, which was significantly higher than (3) away from family and friends ($p < .001$), (4) food ($p < .001$), (5) cultural differences ($p < .001$), (8) doubting educational outcome ($p < .001$), and (10) dislike of travel ($p < .001$). The third-ranked one was (6) cost, which was significantly higher than (3) away from family and friends ($p < .001$), (4) food ($p = .008$), (5) cultural differences ($p < .001$), (8) doubting educational outcome ($p < .001$), and (10) dislike of travel ($p < .001$).

The fourth-ranked item was (9) trouble, which was significantly higher than (3) away from family and friends ($p < .001$), (4) food ($p = .003$), (5) cultural differences ($p < .001$), (8) doubting educational outcome ($p < .001$), and (10) dislike of travel ($p < .001$). The fifth-ranked item was (2) being alone, which was significantly higher than (3) away from family and friends ($p < .001$), (4) food ($p = .013$), (5) cultural differences ($p < .001$), (8) doubting educational outcome ($p < .001$), and (10) dislike of travel ($p < .001$). The sixth-ranked, seventh-ranked, and eighth-ranked items were (4) food, (5) cultural differences, and (3) away from family and friends, respectively. All three items were significantly higher than (8) doubting educational outcome ($p < .001$) and (10) dislike of travel ($p < .001$). The second-least and the least-ranked scores were observed at (10) dislike of travel and (8) doubting educational outcome. As explained above, the two items were significantly lower than all other eight items.

It is found that Japanese students generally had more concerns in many facets. They worried more about (1) security, (5) cultural difference, (7) language, and (9) troubles than American counterparts. Only in (8) doubting education outcome, American students were more nervous than their counterparts. Within American students, (1) security, (2) being alone, (3) away from family and friends, (4) food, (6) cost, (7) language, (9) troubles were major concerns. Within Japanese students, (1) security and (7) language were the top concerns.

Research question 3. To what degree is the motivation for study abroad determined by the promoting and inhibiting factors?

In order to discover the relative contribution of the promoting and inhibiting factors to the general motivation for study abroad, multiple regression analysis with stepwise procedure was performed for each university's dataset. As an objective variable, a variable called the outgoing orientation is synthesized.

The scores for the degree they would like to go as the destination for their study abroad were aggregated to synthesize this variable. As explaining variables, all variables pertaining to promoting and inhibiting factors are included in calculation at the start of the stepwise procedure. In addition, one more variable added to the calculation was foreign experience. The variable was constituted based on the answers to the question about their experience in foreign countries. If he or she responded yes, the assigned value is 1 in a dummy variable. If no, the assigned value is 0.

As to the American samples, the outgoing orientation score was significantly determined by concern about language ($\beta = .351, p = .009$) and foreign experience ($\beta = .348, p = .010$). Adjusted determination coefficient is .128. The more the students worry about the language difference and they have foreign experience, they are more likely to want to go abroad for studying.

Same procedure was applied to the Japanese samples. The outgoing orientation is significantly determined by speaking in foreign language ($\beta = .215, p = .002$), visiting foreign schools ($\beta = .336, p < .001$), disliking travel ($\beta = -.174, p = .005$), and foreign education system ($\beta = .238, p < .001$). Adjusted determination coefficient is .496. The more the students are interested in speaking in foreign language, visiting foreign schools, and foreign education systems, the more likely they are to want to go abroad for studying. At the same time, the more they dislike traveling abroad, the less likely they are to go abroad.

3. Discussion

The objective of this study is to explore the factors which promote or inhibit students' motivation to study abroad in two teacher education programs at ULM in the United States and EU in Japan. As to research question 1, the authors examined the promoting factors for studying abroad. Teaching practice and developing teaching material were more expected contents for ULM students than EU counterparts. On the other hand, meeting foreign university students, interaction with foreign school children, and advancing teaching methods were more expected contents for EU students than ULM counterparts. Those results can be interpreted to suggest that ULM students are more interested in applying their knowledge and skills that they have acquired in their home institution and EU students are more interested in gaining new experiences and skills and meeting new people, including university students and school children. The difference found is informative in designing the program contents for each side of students. Research question 2 was about inhibiting factors against studying abroad.

EU students worried more about security, cultural difference, language, and troubles than ULM counterparts. ULM students wondered more about the outcome of the international exchange than EU counterparts. Does it mean that EU students are less interested in studying abroad? In order to answer this question, a two-tailed t-test was performed to compare the outgoing orientation score between ULM and EU students. The analysis indicated that the answer is no. The outgoing orientation score of EU was significantly higher than ULM ($t(221) = 5.720, p < .0001$). It means that psychological fear or anxiety does not always depress their motivation to study abroad. Students may feel more nervous about possible concerns if they think more seriously about studying abroad.

Finally, research question 3 explored the multiple regression equations that can predict the outgoing orientation in each university. ULM students' outgoing orientation score was significantly determined by concern about language ability and foreign experience. The outgoing orientation in EU students was determined by speaking in foreign language, visiting foreign schools, disliking travel (negative load), and foreign education system. In ULM students, interestingly again, negative factors do not always depress students' outgoing orientation. The anxiety of language ability positively explained the motivation to study abroad. The students interested in foreign culture may already know the difficulty in communicating in foreign languages. In order to design the optimal international exchange, the authors can conclude as following based on the results in present examination. For ULM students, a program should include situations where students can apply their teaching knowledge and skills like student teaching in a foreign country.

For EU students, a program should include the activities in which they can learn new things about teaching, instruction and education systems and they can meet new people in a foreign country. Regardless of the factors to promote students' participation to the international programs discussed above, financial support from universities or other institutions is crucial for recruiting students.

The original contribution of this paper is that it explored the promoting and inhibiting factors toward studying abroad specifically in teacher education students. However, the present study has some challenges. The data analysis adopted in the present study could be weak in its reliability. Most analysis was done with single items to indicate one psychological construct. This procedure is vulnerable to possible misunderstanding in respondents and susceptible to sample-specific deviation. In addition, the survey respondents are limited to a certain cohort of students in each university. Therefore, we need repetitive data collection in other cohorts in the future.

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