



Global Conference on Media, Communication, and Film

February 21 _ 23, 2024

Birmingham, UK

Cross-Cultural Catch-Up: Rectifying Missed Opportunities After Study Abroad

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Abstract

Studying abroad (SA) presents a unique opportunity for students to develop their interpersonal, linguistic, and intercultural communication (IC) skills. However, IC skills are often overlooked during and after the SA experience and often only linguistic skills are accounted for (Allen, 2023). As a result, this study investigates the IC experiences of Japanese students post-one-year SA and explores their responses to a reflective survey and an analysis of their post-SA IC development through experiential activities, including situational judgement tests and linguistic landscape projects. Findings reveal that many students did not engage in explicit IC activities during their SA period, prompting enrolment in post-SA IC courses to deepen their understanding and integration of SA experiences. Moreover, students value reflective exercises in formal IC classes post-SA, often linking their sojourn experiences to the course content and assessments. This study underscores the necessity of integrating explicit IC education into SA programs and highlights the use of post-SA activities to address missed opportunities. The study also advocates for such experiential learning activities to provide students with theoretical knowledge and practical first-hand experiences. By shedding light on these dynamics, our research enhances intercultural learning experiences and outcomes for SA participants.

Keywords: Study abroad, intercultural development, intercultural education, experiential learning, student experiences