

Significance of Studying Abroad at Universities in 'Multicultural' Australia

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The Japanese Government is really keen to globalise the country and in order to achieve this grand goal, the then Minister of Education and Science wrote in 2003 that it is crucial to increase those who can use (speak) English, and the Government believes to promote the study abroad scheme is one of the ways to achieve this objective.

Based on this Government policy, three academic staff in Australia (Dr Mariko Kubota of the University of Melbourne, Ms Mayumi Parry of Queensland University of Technology, Ms Jun Yano of Monash University) and one academic staff from Japan (Prof. Takako Asaoka of Saga University) teamed up to investigate how effective the study abroad scheme in order to globalise Japan. This project is titled as "An investigation of the experiences of Japanese exchange students in Australian universities: their growth in awareness and proficiency towards globalisation" and is funded by the Japanese Ministry of Education and Science Research Grant.

We started to collect data from these students early 2006 and this will last until they go back to Japan next year. The data we are going to collect are as follows:

1. Two interviews: one within a month after their arrival and another one just before their departure
2. Monthly email report: Participants are requested to send us monthly report by email on several questions.
3. Identity test: We are going to ascertain if there will be any change in the participants' identity
4. English proficiency test: Participants are to sit for TOEFL test within a month before their departure
5. On-line survey: Apart from the survey on the exchange students, we also planning to collect data from the general public. In order to facilitate this, we have designed an on-line questionnaire and this has been uploaded.

Using the above mentioned data of the experience as exchange students, we would like to examine:

- Whether their English proficiency has improved;
- Whether the students' viewpoint to the world would change;
- Whether their understanding of different culture has deepened;
- Whether they think they have grown mentally;
- What they think about the education in Japan;
- Whether their view on Japan have changed;
- What they think globalisation is;
- Whether the services universities of both mother country and host country provide are appropriate, and
- What role has a study abroad played on above aspects.

The paper will focus on some of the findings that we have obtained so far.