

元留学生の振り返りと異文化感受性の発達

A Study-Abroad Returnee's Reflections and Development of Intercultural Sensitivity

武田 礼子 TAKEDA, Reiko

● 成城大学, 国際基督教大学教育研究所研究員

Seijo University / Research Fellow, Institute for Educational Research and Service, International Christian University

 **留学生, 振り返り, 異文化感受性発達モデル**
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ABSTRACT

過去十数年において、海外留学プログラムに参加した日本人学生数は約三倍に増加し、2019年度には十万人を超えた。派遣留学生の増加に伴い、多くの大学では留学準備の講座を開設してきた。しかし指導できる人的資源の限界、または学生の興味の喪失が原因で、帰国後の講座の開設が課題になっている。その一方で、自己啓発のためにあらゆる機会を通して、帰国後に振り返りに取り組む元留学生もいる。本稿では、新型コロナウイルスの感染拡大が原因で、留学先より帰国せざるを得なかった一人の日本人大学生の事例研究を扱う。筆者が指導する留学準備講座を帰国後に受講し、それを通して当該学生の異文化感受性の発達が、振り返りの記述内容にどのように現れているか探求する。

In the past decade, the number of Japanese students who participated in study-abroad programs has tripled, reaching over 100,000 in academic year 2019. In response to the increase of Japanese students going abroad, many universities are making attempts to prepare them for their study abroad by offering pre-sojourn courses. On the other hand, the availability of post-sojourn programs for the returnees seems to be limited, due to shortage of resources or students' loss of interest. Despite these conditions which seem unfavorable, some former study-abroad participants have taken advantage of opportunities available to them by engaging in reflection on further developing themselves. In the present research notes, I introduce a case study of a Japanese university student whose year-abroad was cut short due to COVID-19. This paper explores that by taking my study-abroad preparation course after returning to Japan, the participant's intercultural sensitivity was further enhanced, which was revealed in her reflections.

1. Introduction

According to Japan Student Services Organization (2021), in academic year 2019, over 107,000 Japanese students were enrolled in non-degree seeking programs outside of Japan. This was a three-fold increase from the previous decade where only 36,000 students took part in study-abroad programs.

A variety of pre-sojourn courses are offered, from language classes for studying abroad (Gildart et al., 2015), to those designed to enhance intercultural understanding (Takeda, 2018). Compared to what students can take before their departure, post-sojourn courses seem to be limited. Furthermore, difficulties involving returnees in re-entry events may stem from the fact that they do not experience re-entry the same way as preparing for their study-abroad, due to their possible loss of interest by the time they come home (Brubaker, 2017).

This paper introduces a case study of a Japanese university student after returning from her study-abroad in the UK, which was shortened due to COVID-19. This participant enrolled in my study-abroad preparation course after her exchange program, unlike the majority who take it before their departure. The present research notes explore how the course facilitated the development of her intercultural sensitivity, which her reflections reveal.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)

Although research on cross-cultural studies in the West became popular in the twentieth century, there are models which still play a significant role, one of which is Bennett's (1986, 2013) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). According to Bennett, intercultural sensitivity is said to be the precursor for behavioral manifestation of intercultural

adaptation (Bennett, 2013).

In the DMIS which is represented in a continuum, development starts from a "less complex perception and shallow experience of cultural difference" (Bennett, 2013, p. 86) which needs to be internalized for intercultural sensitivity to take place. Although Bennett warns that stages in development does not occur in a linear fashion, he advocates that they range from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism, which include six stages. In the ethnocentric stages (e.g., denial, defense, and minimization), one's culture is perceived as central to reality (Bennett, 2013) and cultural differences are avoided. Denial of cultural differences may lead to imposition of one's own culture on others. On the other end, in the three stages of ethnorelativism (e.g., acceptance, adaptation and integration) one seeks cultural differences by acknowledging and respecting other cultures, making a conscious decision to change their perspective and behavior, thus adapting to them. Finally, by integrating the experience of cross-cultural differences, people develop a wider repertoire of cultural perspectives and behavior, in addition to their own.

2.2 Study-Abroad and Reflection

Study-abroad returnees generally gain a wealth of information and knowledge from their overseas experience which they can share with others. To tap into their resources, home universities can hold events such as informational sessions, presentations and workshops, as they provide students opportunities for reflection. The concept of reflection is not new; Dewey perceived reflective thinking as "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it" (Dewey, 1910, p. 6). According to Dewey, one tries to apply previous experiences to new ones in order to understand them better, and that is seen in the research.

It is agreed that reflections allow students to

recall information from their overseas experience (Dressler et al., 2018); however, there are no specific guidelines (Kappler Mikk et al., 2019). That said, the literature on cross-cultural reflection has changed over the years. Previously, the focus was on difficult and challenging experiences, including culture shock (Neuliep, 2018). However, in the past decade, the focus has been on the positive aspects of cross-cultural experiences, such as sojourners' agency expressed in their self-reflection (Xu, 2018) and the "staying power" (Wilbur, 2016) of their overseas learning which are developed through reflection.

3. Methods

3.1 Study Participant and Course Description

The study participant, Hana, which is not her real name, enrolled in the 15-week-long study-abroad preparation course which is designed to deepen students' understanding in intercultural communication relevant to studying abroad. After returning from her year abroad in the UK, Hana took the online course in Fall 2020. Of the 26 students who were enrolled in the course, Hana was the only third-year student.

The course is taught in Japanese and topics are selected to enhance students' problem-solving skills on issues which they could potentially encounter during their stay overseas. In addition to culture, communication and non-verbal communication, other topics such as diversity, culture shock and intercultural communicative competence are covered. In Fall 2020, a combination of asynchronous and synchronous sessions was offered.

3.2 Collection and Analysis of Data

Although information collected before Hana's departure is included as they play a significant role in understanding her intercultural sensitivity, much of the qualitative data was gathered when she was

enrolled in my course. Her reflections in Japanese include blog entries, in-class assignments, journal entries, and an oral presentation she delivered to her classmates via Zoom. In this paper, not all of Hana's data are presented in chronological order, as the timing of her reflections does not coincide with when they happened. Nevertheless, her data, which I translated into English, is analyzed from an emic perspective (Kakai, 2015), which does not represent an outsider's perspective.

4. Hana's Story

4.1 Her Background

Hana, who is a sociology major, matriculated at university in April 2018. She appeared to be a self-driven and self-motivated student as she already expressed her determination in studying abroad, before course registration started. Hana's IELTS™ (International English Language Testing System) band score in high school was 5.5.

Hana first enrolled in the academic writing course that I taught. Although we were not in contact regularly after the term ended, she took advantage of opportunities to improve her English. For example, in the summer, she participated in an intensive English program in Ireland. Back in Japan, she took a one-week intensive IELTS™ course, which resulted in a band score 6.0.

My communication with Hana resumed after the Fall 2018 term ended, when she was accepted to a British university as an exchange student for two terms. Although she already fulfilled the language requirement by her host university, she wanted a 6.5 and be exempted from the intensive English courses. After meeting every week for one-hour tutorials, Hana's efforts paid off and by April 2019, her overall band score rose to 6.5. As one of the last steps, she enrolled in a bilingualism course which I taught entirely in English. Since it provided her the opportunity to listen to lectures and participate in

discussions with international students, it seemed timely for Hana to take it before her departure.

4.2 In the UK

Hana wrote blog entries in the UK, which were uploaded on the admissions department's website of her home university. She was spending a significant amount of time outside of classes preparing for and reviewing her course material. For Hana, taking part in discussions was challenging because other international students in class seemed more proficient in English than she was. She wrote, "As I study every day, I feel I discipline myself in many ways, and I can sense my growth. Once I got used to how classes are conducted, I started asking questions, too. I want to keep this up!"

Hana's biggest accomplishment was taking part in her host university's theater society. She auditioned for a Broadway musical and won the role of one of the support characters. Hana wrote in her blog that she had been an amateur actor since she was in elementary school, and although she had wanted to perform in English, she faced many difficulties: "Among the cast, I was the only international student, and saying my lines in English was a challenge. But I am grateful for the opportunity to work with the cast and staff as they accepted me for who I was."

4.3 Back in Japan

The outbreak of the COVID-19 put an end to Hana's stay in the UK prematurely. International students who were studying at institutions away from home were affected by the pandemic, and so was she. This is how she described her experiences in her oral presentation.

I was told by my family to wear face masks, but it's not part of the British culture. Also, there were Chinese students who faced discriminatory treatment because they wore masks, which made others think they had the virus. This led to

creating a forum called #WeAreNotAVirus, through which we spoke up against the prejudice Asian students experienced.

After making the decision to leave the UK, Hana returned to Japan in March 2020. She continued taking online courses offered by her host university and completed her year-abroad, albeit in Japan.

4.4 Taking the Study-Abroad Preparation Course

After Hana finished her coursework in July 2020, I heard from the university's Educational Affairs section that she was interested in enrolling in my study-abroad preparation course. She wanted to find out whether she would be eligible to take the course, which students usually register for before their departure. This was her response when I asked her what her intentions were.

I have two reasons I would like to enroll in your course. First, because I had to cut my study-abroad short due to the coronavirus, I didn't feel I got enough out of my program. Next, in the course, I hope to have an opportunity to revisit the valuable experiences I had and reflect on them.

Initially, I was reluctant to give her permission to take my course because I was concerned that Hana could feel bored by taking it with first-year students. However, her presence turned out to be very positive, not only for herself, but for her classmates as well. This is how she introduced herself in the class blog.

Hi! I am a third-year student and I already went to the UK on the exchange program. Because I was not able to take this course before going abroad, I wanted to reflect on my experiences and deepen my understanding, so I decided to take this course... Let me know if you have any questions and if I can be of help.

Hana did not come across as an expert, just because she was older and more experienced than her first-

year classmates. During the course, Hana offered a high level of insight, even with the topics which she was unfamiliar with. I introduce Hana's reflections from two sessions, diversity and culture shock, where her past experiences intersected with what she learned in the course. For Hana, diversity seemed to bring back old memories, albeit in a positive light. Students watched a video on the topic of individuals who were biracial, with parents of different nationalities. After reading her reflections, I learned for the first time that Hana herself is biracial, as her father is Japanese and her mother, Korean. She uses the Japanese term "hafu" which is derived from the English word "half" that is used in the Japanese language to refer to individuals of dual heritage. Hana's reflection, which was originally written in Japanese, expresses how she identified with the biracial Japanese and African-American high school girl featured in the video. In the following English translation, the word "hafu" remains in Japanese to keep the nuance of the term in the way Hana intended to convey.

After watching the video, I realized there were differences and similarities among people who were *hafu*. Because I am an Asian hafu, I do not stand out, whereas the girl in the video did, due to her appearance. It made me think that even if one is hafu, there are differences regarding whether individuals who are hafu are easy to identify or not. The similarity I felt was the ability to speak the other language. The girl said she felt uncomfortable because she got judged by whether or not she could speak English. Although I never got judged because of my appearance, once I tell people that I am a Japanese and Korean hafu, they ask me if I speak Korean, which I am not good at... I felt that the issue was how others imposed their perceptions on us even though there are differences. Personally, I feel very positive about being hafu because I've had the opportunity to learn about two countries from

childhood. But, because we get to see and understand things from two sides, maybe we are not as hafu as the term was meant to be.

Finally, culture shock reminded Hana of experiences in the UK. In her presentation, she referred to the musical production and compared her experiences to those in Japan.

In the UK, the emphasis was on the results, whereas in Japan, it is more process-oriented. For example, in the UK, rehearsals were not as structured, and people didn't show up on time. Also, with our dance steps, I worked hard and made sure that I did them correctly, while the others didn't seem to get them right. But I was told that I wasn't doing them right and I had to do them like everybody else! So, I didn't feel like they cared as much regarding the details. The production was a success, but after it was over, I didn't feel the same sense of accomplishment like I did in Japan.

5. Discussion and Implications

After taking the online final examination, Hana's comments regarding her experiences taking my course were as follows.

Although this is a course which students generally take before they go abroad, it can be equally beneficial for someone like me who has taken it after coming back. For each session, I tried to remember what had happened in the UK. Through my reflections, I gained the knowledge I could apply in the future. During the course, I was able to see things objectively by learning from various situations.

Compared to students who have a nebulous picture of studying abroad, from an early stage, Hana had a very clear vision of what it entailed and what she intended to get out of the experiences. Furthermore, because she has been raised in a family with parents from different backgrounds, Hana may

have had the advantage over other students. It appears that she already had a strong foundation in an ethnorelativistic perspective and the seeds for intercultural sensitivity have been planted from a young age. Regarding how Hana's experiences intersect with the DMIS, her reflections seem to reveal her own developed intercultural sensitivity. Furthermore, in her reflections, she attempts to put herself in the shoes of others and even understand that they may not be at the same developmental level as hers.

Besides the reflections introduced in this paper, I am certain that Hana has had many other events which have honed her intercultural sensitivity. With every experience, she could be at a different ethnorelative stage in the DMIS; however, regarding her second reflection based on her experience being biracial, I assume she could be at a higher integrating stage, which is different from the other two (e.g., face masks and theatrical production) that she experienced only because she was in the UK.

There are several remarks which need to be made on this study. First, the scope of this paper is limited as it is focused on one participant's reflections. Second, including quantitative data such as Hana's post-sojourn IELTS™ band scores could add a linguistic dimension to her intercultural sensitivity. This could be studied with other participants and discussed in a future paper.

Finally, a longitudinal study may be of benefit, especially since intercultural learning has been reported to persist (Wilbur, 2016). As Hana already seems to be accustomed to thinking reflectively, I believe she will continue to evolve as she hones her intercultural sensitivity. While providing a structure may help some returnees, there could be students like Hana who have integrated self-reflection in their approach for ongoing development of their intercultural sensitivity.

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