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Moving Beyond on Home Country: Developing Global Citizenship through International Learning in Japan

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Abstract

Globalization causes increasing competition in facing future challenges become more intense. Students as new generation the future need to improve their ability and talents in term of foreign language proficiency, knowledge, intercultural competency to remain viable. Students mobility to abroad as platform to build student's knowledge, skills and character and the experience become more reflective to the workforce needs of today. Meanwhile, the 21st century, global interaction become more importance and students will increasingly focus on develop intercultural communication skill and will cause them to be exposed to different perspectives and learn to develop their own ideas and perspective. This paper examine the impact of study abroad program among Malaysian students (N=245) who studying in Japan. Quantitative analysis of the data revealed that strongest influenced study abroad participation that (a) enhanced their tolerance towards people who different culture, (b) enhanced their awareness about cultural difference, (c) influenced their awareness of the importance of diplomatic relations between Malaysia and Japan and (d) increased their desire to engage in employment sector organization or international company and enhanced their Japanese language skills. The result gives an insight that study abroad program will give them opportunity to get out from their own culture and society to explore new worlds, build their own identity and competencies, and challenge ourselves to work or living together with people who have different cultural background. Study abroad program will provide first-hand learning experience to students.

Keywords: *Personal, Intercultural, Global perspective, skills and career development*

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1. Introduction

Globalisation makes the world now moves across borders. It is supported by the technology that allows a person to move across countries, meet and interact with people of different cultural backgrounds. Nowadays, technology has become a “bridge” from one culture to another culture. For example, the transportation technology allows one to visit and discover other countries directly, businessmen to meet their peers in order to conduct businesses and students have the opportunity to pursue their studies abroad. Therefore, intercultural experience is said to be an important element in improving the efficiency of interaction and communication in encountering different cultures. Ritzer (2009) define globalization as “*a transplanetary process or set of processes involving increasing liquidity and the growing multi-directional flows of people, objects, places, and information, as well as the structures they encounter and create that are barriers to, or expedite, those flow.*”

The other things, today global economy influenced the changes of job market and multilingual communication competency give advantages in the workplace. For those who will involved international community organizations or companies, understanding of intercultural relationships have strongly positive benefit and willingness to dealing with various workplace environments. To respond with the demand of 21st century, mobility of students become a necessity and gain more opportunities to develop their personal attributes, intercultural and global competence. Various dimensions needed to ensure students are able to develop and maximize their talents and abilities such as knowledge, skills and character. Study abroad program as a best of platform to preparing our students become responsive to facing the challenges of globalization. As globalization advances, our students need capacity to collaborate with people who have cultural background to their own. The findings from previous studies proved that learning outside of classrooms provided meaningful experiences for students. It is not just a trip across national borders, but it involves how they face challenges when dealing with different cultures and environment.

2. Sending Malaysian Students To Japan

On February 8, 1982, former Malaysia Prime Minister Tun Mahathir Mohamad has announced the Look East Policy (LEP) during the Fifth Joint Annual Conference MAJECA/JAMECA at Hilton Hotel, Kuala Lumpur. LEP has been introduced with the aim of which is to emulate and apply the value of good work ethics and positive attitudes, knowledge and technology skills and learn about management and organizational systems of developed countries, such as Japan and South Korea, which can increase productivity and may contribute to Malaysia’s development.

“We have come to realise that the basic of your rapid development is your sense of comitment and your continued willingness to work. Thus, when we ask Malaysian to Look East,”... “that it is not just skills we are after, but more importantly, the correct attitude to work, including the sense of belonging which breeds loyalty”... “Malaysians to emulate the Japanese, particularly in work ethics and ethical values.”

(The speech delivered by Tun Mahathir Mohamad during the Fifth Joint Annual Conference MAJECA/JAMECA in Kuala Lumpur, February 8, 1982).

LEP was introduced with emphasis on the concept of craft and discipline of work, loyalty to the country, organizations and work places, priority to the group and not to themselves, the emphasis on productivity and quality, increased efficiency, reduction of the gap and the separation among the executives, general workers and management systems. Mahathir stated that;

“What it means is that we must learn the reasons and the factors for Japanese success in modernisation: a good work ethic, social consciousness, honesty, and discipline, a strong sense of social purpose and community orientation, good management techniques, Japan Incorporated, sogoshosha, aggressive salesmanship and so on.” “We want to learn how the Japanese (and the Koreans) have been able to advance so fast, without losing their cultural identity. The factors that we discover like the good work ethic, extremely close co-operation between the public and private sectors, very goood rapport between managers and workers, loyalty to company through to nation, are qualities which we should want to inculcate. We still have a lot to learn.” (Tun Mahathir Mohamad, 1 Januari 1985)

Based on the statistics, through training and courses, a total of 5, 895 students from Malaysia have extended their studies in Japan from 1982 until 2010 under the LEP (Source: Embassy of Japan in

Malaysia. Table 1 shows the number of Malaysian students to Japan following certain programs under LEP from 1982 until 2010.

Table 1. Malaysian Students Admission in Japan Under Look East Policy

Year	University (Undergraduate)	Technical College	Program			HELP*	Total
			Postgraduate	Japanese Language Teacher Training			
1982-94	914	485	-	67	-	1,466	
1995	123	89	-	17	53	282	
1996	128	88	-	11	62	289	
1997	145	96	-	10	79	330	
1998	143	94	-	6	31	274	
1999	127	84	-	-	28	239	
2000	96	54	19	-	-	169	
2001	107	-	18	-	52	177	
2002	147	47	17	-	49	260	
2003	149	56	16	4	69	294	
2004	148	69	19	10	54	300	
2005	172	79	18	10	56	335	
2006	182	61	18	7	-	268	
2007	154	71	23	8	-	256	
2008	168	76	11	6	75	336	
2009	165	74	11	Program discontinued in 2008	85	335	
2010	130	72	4		79	285	
Total	3,198	1,595	174	156	772	5,895	

*HELP: Higher Education Loan Fund Program

Source: Embassy of Japan in Malaysia

Table 2 shows that the top six countries for international students pursuing studies in Japan in 2003 until 2011. Based on the table, Malaysia ranked fifth after China, Republic of Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam and Thailand.

Table 2. 6 Major Countries International Students in Japan by Region of Origin

Year	Countries					
	China	Republic of Korea	Taiwan	Vietnam	Malaysia	Thailand
2003	70,814	15,871	4,235	1,336	2,002	1,641
2004	77,713	15,533	4,096	1,570	2,010	1,665
2005	80,592	15,606	4,134	1,745	2,114	1,734
2006	74,292	15,974	4,211	2,119	2,156	1,734
2007	71,277	17,274	4,686	2,146	2,582	2,090
2008	72,766	18,862	5,082	2,873	2,271	2,203
2009	79,082	19,605	5,332	3,199	2,395	2,360
2010	86,173	20,202	5,297	3,597	2,465	2,429
2011	87,533	17,640	4,571	4,033	2,417	2,396

Source: Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO)

3. Previous Research

Culver (2011) conducted a study among students in an architectural design programs. The result showed that students who studied and travelled abroad became more aware and understanding about architecture and it increased their independence and self-reliance. Yang, Webster and Prosser (2010) found that the outcome of studying abroad are consistent with the objectives of studying abroad, consisting of personal, intercultural and career development. In addition, Zielinski (2007) conducted a study on cross-cultural adaptability as the outcomes of studying abroad. The findings showed significant differences in all five areas of cross-cultural adaptability among students who participated in study abroad program of varying lengths. Those who had studied abroad for longer terms had higher overall scores on the Cross Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI) than those short-term students.

Meanwhile, Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen and Hubbard (2006) found that the studying abroad increased intercultural sensitivity by looking at other cultures as better than their own culture thus improving their abilities to accept and adapt to cultural differences.

While Chieffo and Griffiths (2004) found that students abroad reported developing a greater appreciation for arts than those on campus. Besides that, those abroad were more disposed to communicating a foreign language and considered themselves more patient with people who do not speak English well. Finally, the findings also demonstrate that students who go abroad, learning how to perform tasks associated with international travel and they are engaging in activities to learn more about their host site and host culture. Zhai and Scheer (2004) found that students who had more contact with people from other countries increased their level of global perspective significantly. Student attitudes towards cultural diversity were also found to be more positive. Robbins, et al., (2004) & Kitsantas (2004) found that the experience of study abroad has implications for cross-cultural understanding. Dwyer (2004) concluded that full academic year study abroad experience had a more significant and longer lasting effect on student participants. Medina-Lopez Portillo (2004) conducted a study focusing on the link between the development of intercultural sensitivity and program duration. Findings suggested that duration did significantly impact intercultural sensitivity. Armfield (2004) found that a significant increase in the intercultural sensitivity development after students participated study abroad program.

Farrell and Suvedi (2003) conducted a study focusing on impact of study abroad program in Nepal in terms of academic, personal, intellectual, global perspective and career. Result showed that the highest scores to the implications of understanding and knowledge and increase the desire to travel abroad. While result from case studies showed that, the experience in Nepal has increased their personal development, appreciation of cultural difference, awareness and understanding of the like of a developing country and career planning in the future. Murphy-Lejeune (2002) investigated specific experience of interculturality that of student travellers who spend a year in a European country. The researchers found that four general areas of development- knowledge, strategic skills, social competences and personal and interpersonal attitudes. Wortman (2002) conducted a study on effects of studying abroad upon students' openness to diversity. The result of a study indicated a significant increase in openness to diversity among students who studied abroad program than group of student who still remained in United States. Also, students who studied in English speaking countries showed an increase in openness to diversity whereas those in non-English speaking countries showed no change.

Kitsantas and Meyers (2001) examined the role of study abroad program on a students' cross-cultural awareness using Cross Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI) test. CCAI scales including emotional resilience, flexibility and openness, perceptual acuity and personal autonomy. The finding reported students in the study abroad program had scored significantly higher than the control group who even reported higher initial CCAI scores than the experimental group. Zorn (1996) found that the most impressive impact of study abroad experience on nursing students was the growth of their international or global perspective and personal development. Result indicated a significant correlation between the length of the international program and global perspective. The study found nursing students who completed programs of sixteen weeks or longer reported greater effects than those who completed program of four weeks or less.

4. Research Questions

This study is designed to address the following research questions:

- RQ 1: To what extent the level of personal development of Malaysian students is based on their involvement by studying abroad in Japan?
- RQ 2: To what extent the level of intercultural development of Malaysian students in Japan dealing with different culture and environment?
- RQ 3: To what extent the level of global perspective development of Malaysian students in Japan is based on interaction experience with people of different cultural background?
- RQ 4: To what extent the level of skill and career development of Malaysian students based in their involvement of studying abroad in Japan?

5. Research Methodology

5.1 Instrument

This study has developed a questionnaire to assess the implications of involvement of studying abroad program in terms of personal development, intercultural development, global perspective development and skills, as well as social development. The questionnaire was divided into three parts;

Part A, Part B and Part C. Part A was comprised of demographic items, including gender (male/female), age (18-20, 21-23, 24-26, 27-29, 30-33 and > 34), university in Japan, field, place of residence (hostel, rent house, Japanese host family), approximate number of friends from abroad, foreign language and prior experience abroad. Meanwhile, Part B contained several items, such as personal development, intercultural development, global perspective development and skills and social development. Likert scale was used as a measurement tool, consisting of 1 = very much, 2 = quite a bit, 3 = sometimes, 4 = very little and 5 = not at all. ("Please indicate what extent you think that your overseas involvement experience contributed to your growth in the following aspects...")

The items were then broken down to several sub-items. Firstly, personal development was measured by eight sub-items, which were self-confidence, tolerant attitude towards people of different cultures, open-mindedness, adapting to a new environment, maturity, self-esteem, self-reliance and friendliness while interacting with people of different culture. Next, intercultural development encompassed 11 sub-items consisting of understanding other culture, appreciation towards different culture, curiosity about other culture, understanding own culture, positive attitude towards people from other culture, self-confidence when interacting with other people from other culture, understanding about host country culture and so on. Another item was global perspective development, measured by nine sub-items: accepting the views of people of other culture, more alert to global issues, willing to work with people different cultural background and so on. Lastly, skill and social development item was measured by 11 sub-items: time management skills, self-evaluation, communication skills, awareness about diplomatic relation, and openness to diversity of perspective, political and social awareness, and so on.

5.2 Respondents

A total of 245 Malaysian students who were pursuing their studies in Japan

5.3 Procedures

Based on the pilot study, there were a few things that needed to be modified in terms of data collection method. This study chose to use the online questionnaire or online survey as data collection method. Prior to field work, researcher had contacted some respondents in Japan to discuss about this study. As a result, some suggestions were made. Researcher then began her field work by contacting the presidents of the Malaysian Students' Association in Japan (MSAJ) according to regions, such as Kansai, Tohoku, Kyushu, and Kanto. Researcher went on to express her desire to seek the cooperation of the students association. In addition, the researcher had also contacted several Malaysian students association in Japan, such as Ikatan Persaudaraan Islam Jepun (IPIJ) and others. All associations expressed their willingness to inform fellow Malaysian students about this study in their respective areas. The researcher also utilised a social networking site, namely Facebook, in order to identify the respondents. Results obtained seemed to indicate that the researcher might contact respondents directly to participate in this study. Before the online survey was distributed, researcher had sent an application or request consent to the respondents who participated in this study. After approvals were received, only then the online survey were distributed. The data obtained were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

6. Result

6.1 Profile of respondents

A total of 245 respondents participated in this study consisting of 149 (60.8%) male and 96 (39.2%) female ($M=1.39$, $SD=.48$). In terms of age, 43 (17.6%) respondents are between 18-20 years, 169 (69.0%) respondents between the age of 21-23 years, 24 (9.8%) respondents are between 24-26 years, while five (2.0%) respondents age between 27-29 years. Only one respondents age between 30-33 (0.4%) and three (1.2%) respondents age more than 34 years ($M=2.02$, $SD= .76$). Regarding place of residence, a total of 196 (80.0%) respondents are living in rented house, 48 (19.6%) are staying at hostel, and one respondent (0.4%) are living with a Japanese host family ($M= 1.80$, $SD= .40$). Descriptive analysis shows that out of the $N=245$ respondents, a total of 66 (26.9%) respondents have more than 44 friends from abroad, 57 (23.3%) respondents stated that they had about 11-20 friends from abroad, while 53 (21.6%) respondents had 6-10 friends, 29 (11.8%) respondents who had 21-30 friends, 25 (10.2%) had 0-5 friends, and 15 (6.1%) respondents had 31-40 respondents. Meanwhile, for frequency of speaking foreign languages, the analysis shows that almost all respondents ($N=123$) stated that they often use a foreign language, a total of 93 (38.0%) of respondents are very often and 29 (11.8%) of respondents are not often. Participants were asked to provide details regarding their previous

abroad travel experience. Of those that responded, 170 (69.4%) had never travelled abroad before and 75 (30.6%) respondents had travel abroad before studying in Japan.

Table 3. Profile of respondents (N=245)

Demographic item	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender		
Male	149	60.8%
Female	96	39.2%
Age		
18-20	43	17.6%
21-23	169	69.0%
24-26	24	9.8%
27-29	5	2.0%
30-33	1	0.4%
>34	3	1.2%
Place of residence		
Hostel	48	19.6%
Rent	196	80.0%
Japanese Host Family	1	0.4%
Approximate number of friends from abroad		
0-5	25	10.2%
6-10	53	21.6%
11-20	57	23.3%
21-30	29	11.8%
31-40	15	6.1%
>41	66	26.9%
Speak use foreign languages		
Very often	93	38.0%
Often	123	50.2%
Not often	29	11.8%
Prior abroad experience		
Yes	75	30.6%
None	170	69.4%

Source: Rahimah (2012)

6.2 Personal Development

Personal development consists of 10 items: self-confident, tolerant attitude, flexible, maturity, self-reliance, friendly, open-mindedness, self-esteem, knowledgeable and curiosity about other cultures. According to the previous studies, these are all components that are important to dealing with different culture and environment. In term of personal development, a majority of students remarked that they become more tolerance and open-mindedness because of their study abroad experience. The table 4 shows that score of respondents in term of personal development. Of those responded (N=245), the strongest influence of study abroad involvement on personal development related to their tolerance attitude toward people who have different culture with 67% (N=164) of students are “very much” score and 22% (N=53) are “quite a bit” score. In addition, the second highest with 67% (163) of students felt that their study abroad participation enhanced their open-mindedness to adapt of new environment in Japan with “very much” score and 24% (N=58) are “quite a bit” score. Meanwhile, 53% (N=130) students felt that study abroad in Japan influenced their self-reliance with “very much” score and 34% (N=82) are “quite a bit” score. While, 45% (N=111) of students said that their experience abroad enhanced their flexibility to living in Japan with “very much” score, 36% (N=89) are “quite a bit” score. In addition, descriptive analysis indicated that 53% (N=130) of students with “very much” score that study abroad influenced their curiosity about another cultures. A respondent stated that, *“I think this program chance me in a lot a ways. One of them is that it open my mind. Living in a place of difference culture and tradition teaches me how to be more open to new changes in life, like new habit or practices of the new culture. It helps me in being independent when it comes to life decisions as well.”*

Table 4. Score of Respondents in term of Personal Development (N=245)

Item	Score (Percent & Frequency)				
	Very much	Quite a bit	Sometimes	Very little	Not at all
1. I have confidence when I am faced with a different culture and environment.	36.3% (89)	35.9% (88)	25.7% (63)	2.0% (5)	0%
2. I have a tolerant attitude towards people from different cultures than mine.	66.9% (164)	21.6% (53)	10.6% (26)	0.8% (2)	0%
3. I have an open mind regarding cultural differences.	66.5% (163)	23.7% (58)	9.4% (23)	0.4% (1)	0%
4. I can adapt (flexible) to a new situation or environment.	45.3% (111)	36.3% (89)	17.6% (43)	0.8% (2)	0%
5. I have the maturity to face a different culture and environment.	43.7% (107)	37.1% (91)	17.1% (42)	2.0% (5)	0%
6. I have high self-reliance in the face of the new environment.	53.1% (130)	33.5% (82)	13.1% (32)	0.4% (1)	0%
7. I have high self-esteem when interacting with people from different cultures than mine.	44.5% (109)	30.2% (74)	22.9% (56)	2.0% (5)	0.4% (1)
8. I am friendly even while interacting with people of different cultures than mine.	31.0% (76)	31.8% (78)	30.2% (74)	6.9% (17)	0%

Source: Rahimah (2012)

6.3 Intercultural Development

Table 5 indicated that score of respondents in term of intercultural development. Result from descriptive analysis, of those responded (N=245), a total of 87% (N=213) students said that their abroad experience enhanced their awareness about diversity of cultures, while 79% (N=186) of respondents said that their study abroad in Japan enhanced their respectful towards people who have different values and customs with "very much" score. In addition, a total of 72% (N=177) students with "very much" score felt that study abroad participation enhanced their appreciation about cultural differences. In addition, a total of 67% (N=164) of students felt that their abroad experience influenced enjoyment to learn about others cultures with "very much" score. More than half, a majority of 61% (N=150) of students said that their overseas experience influenced their enjoyment interacting with people who have different cultures. Also, a total of 59% (N=145) of students with "very much" score said that their experience in Japan enhanced their acceptance others people, while 56% (N=136) of students interested to know about way of life who from different culture. Overall score of respondents (N=245) in terms of intercultural development shows that respondents felt that experience abroad give them a lot of opportunity to know and learn about other culture. The experience also made them build intercultural relationship, respect and accept of different cultural and better understanding about their own culture. According to the literature, these are all components that are important to being intercultural competent. A respondent stated that; *"I got to learn the good manners, responsibility, punctuality, hardworking culture of the Japanese people."* Other respondent; *"It makes me see our country Malaysia from a different perspective. I get to know more about the strength and weakness of our countries compare to Japan and other countries too."*

Table 5. Score of Respondents in term of Intercultural Development (N=245)

Item	Score (Percent & Frequency)				
	Very much	Quite a bit	Sometimes	Very little	Not at all
1. I enjoyed interacting with people from different cultures.	61.2% (150)	26.1% (64)	12.7% (31)	0%	0%
2. I respect the values and customs of those who have a different cultures than mine.	75.9% (186)	19.2% (47)	4.9% (12)	0%	0%
3. I appreciate the cultural differences with culturally-distinct persons.	72.2% (177)	21.6% (53)	5.7% (14)	0.4% (1)	0%
4. I enjoyed learning different cultures.	66.9% (164)	21.6% (53)	11.0% (27)	0.4% (1)	0%
5. I am aware there exists a variety of way of living, values, ethics, beliefs and philosophy in world community.	86.9% (213)	6.9% (17)	6.1% (15)	0%	0%

6. I understand the lifestyle and culture of the host country (Japan).	35.1% (86)	47.8% (117)	15.5% (38)	1.6% (4)	0%
7. I can explain about my own culture to someone who come from other cultures.	38.4% (94)	39.2% (96)	20.0% (49)	2.4% (6)	0%
8. I feel confident when interacting with people from different cultures.	26.1% (64)	40.8% (100)	27.8% (68)	5.3% (13)	0%
9. Communicating with people from different cultures makes me feel uncomfortable.	0.4% (1)	10.2% (25)	24.9% (61)	40.0% (98)	24.5% (60)
10. I have a positive attitude toward people with different cultures.	53.1% (130)	30.6% (75)	14.7% (36)	1.6% (4)	0%
11. I am always sensitive to the feeling with culturally-distinct person from me.	41.2% (101)	34.3% (84)	22.0% (54)	1.6% (4)	0.8% (2)

Source: Rahimah (2012)

6.4 Global Perspective Development

Table 6 shows the score of respondents in terms of global perspective development. The below table shows, the strongest influence of the study abroad experience in term on global perspective related to enhanced their willingness to work people from different cultural with a total of 67% (N=163) of respondents are “very much” score this statement. Meanwhile, a total of 64% (N=157) of students strong agreed that their experience in Japan influenced their awareness about importance of diplomatic relation between Malaysia and Japan. In addition, a total of 59% (N=144) of students reported that their experience living with different cultural and environment strongly enhanced their acceptance people who have different religious and spiritual traditions. Also, the result indicated that a total of 55% (N=134) of students with “very much” agreed that their overseas study abroad influenced their acceptance views from people who different cultural, while more than half 54% (N=133) of students believe that their study abroad participation increased their interest to exchanges views and idea with people from different cultures. Overall score of respondents (N=245) in term of global perspective shows students felt that their study abroad participation in Japan made them more opened of other perspectives, as preparation to build their perspective on the world and all this related to being globally competent. A respondent stated that; *“I feel that my way of understanding the world, as a person and also as a citizen of Malaysia and the world has changed in lots of ways, making me more of a liberal-minded person.”* Other respondent stated that; *“it broaden up my view of the world. This is because it gave me a chance to see and feel the other country culture.”*

Table 6. Score of Respondents In Term of Global Perspective Development (N=245)

Item	Score (Percent & Frequency)				
	Very much	Quite a bit	Sometimes	Very little	Not at all
1. I see myself as a global citizen.	33.9% (83)	31.0% (76)	27.3% (67)	5.7% (14)	2.0% (5)
2. I can accept views from people who have different cultural background from mine.	54.7% (134)	32.2% (79)	13.1% (32)	0%	0%
3. I become more alert to global issues.	34.7% (85)	33.5% (82)	25.3% (62)	6.5% (16)	0%
4. I am willing to work with people who have different cultural backgrounds from my own.	66.5% (163)	26.1% (64)	6.9% (17)	0.4% (1)	0%
5. I can express my own perspective on an issue with people of different cultures.	31.8% (78)	41.2% (101)	24.1% (59)	2.9% (7)	0%
6. I feel threatened when I'm with people with different perspective from my own.	3.7% (9)	9.8% (24)	21.6% (53)	33.5% (82)	31.4% (77)
7. I can accept people from different religious and spiritual traditions.	58.8% (144)	27.8% (68)	12.2% (30)	0.8% (2)	0.4% (1)
8. I am interested to exchange views and ideas with people who have different cultural.	54.3% (133)	24.1% (59)	18.4% (45)	2.9% (7)	0.4% (1)
9. I have a awareness of the importance of diplomatic relations between Malaysia and Japan.	64.1% (157)	22.9% (56)	11.0% (27)	2.0% (5)	0%

Source: Rahimah (2012)

6.5 Skill and Career Development

Table 7 shows that score of respondents in term of skill and career development. The result indicated that students were also found to improve their Japanese language proficiency, enhanced their desire to employment of international organization; understand their strengths and weakness, problem-solving ability and influenced their behaviour changes like more become punctual. Descriptive analysis reported a total of 51% (N=125) of students with “very much” score felt study abroad participation influenced their desire to work in international organizations or companies. While, 47% (N=116) of students said their abroad experience enhanced their understanding about their own strengths and weaknesses and 45% (N=110) of students with “very much” score reported that the experience enhance their foreign language skills. In other words, students also said that the overseas experience increased their understanding about own abilities, interests and personality with 35 % (N=82) are “quite a bit” score and 41% (N=100) are “very much” score. A respondent stated that; *“since I came to Japan, I became more punctual with time and I also became really good in managing my schedule. I could really feel the difference with when I’m in Malaysia, because now, although I have 14 subject but I still can score my exam without studying hard until late night because I really punctual with my schedule.”* Other respondent stated that; *“studying here has made me accustomed to the rigidity and sense of order that the Japanese usually practice in daily life in various aspects. I can’t say that I am already assimilated in this kind of culture; but I do know of the benefits it offers to me and my society back home.”*

Table 7. Score of Respondents In Term of Skill and Career Development (N=245)

Item	Score (Percentage & Frequency)				
	Very much	Quite a bit	Sometimes	Very little	Not at all
1. I have a good planning and time management skills.	21.6% (53)	40.4% (99)	27.8% (68)	9.8% (24)	0.4% (1)
2. I have more better an understanding about my abilities, interests and personality.	33.5% (82)	40.8% (100)	20.8% (51)	4.5% (11)	0.4% (1)
3. I have ability to critically analyze ideas and information.	25.7% (63)	36.7% (90)	28.6% (70)	9.0% (22)	0%
5. I have more confidence when facing new situation.	27.8% (68)	36.3% (89)	26.9% (66)	8.6% (21)	0.4% (1)
7. I can see myself more objectively (i.e., I see my own problems in a broader, more realistic context).	37.6% (92)	31.0% (76)	24.9% (61)	6.1% (15)	0.4% (1)
8. I understand my own strengths and weakness.	47.3% (116)	34.3% (84)	15.1% (37)	2.9% (7)	0.4% (1)
9. Enhanced my communication skill using Japanese language.	44.9% (110)	38.0% (93)	15.1% (37)	1.6% (4)	0.4% (1)
10. I have career plan more clearly.	36.7% (90)	36.7% (90)	18.0% (44)	7.3% (18)	1.2% (3)
11. I have desire to engage in employment organizations or companies at international (overseas).	51.0% (125)	27.8% (68)	14.7% (36)	4.1% (10)	2.4% (6)

Source: Rahimah (2012)

7. Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this quantitative study is to assess the impact of studying abroad in Japan in terms of personal development, intercultural, global perspective and skills and career development (N=245). Findings in this study are consistent with previous research in which students experience abroad increased cross-cultural adaptation (Zielinski, 2007), increased their intercultural sensitivity (Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen & Hubbard, 2006; Armfield (2004), personal and global perspective development (Zorn, 2004) and etc. Based on the findings, international experience provides positive outcomes in terms of student’s development. Meanwhile, in terms of personal development, students felt that their experience increased their open-mindedness regarding cultural differences, tolerant attitude with people of different culture, self-confidence about new culture and environment, maturity, adaptability (flexibility) over new environment, increased their self-reliance and became more friendly. The benefits of intercultural experience in Japan helped students to develop understanding of foreign cultures, enhanced student’s world view, cross-cultural skills, appreciation and openness to diversity.

Langley and Breese (2005) state that “direct travel provided more explicit knowledge of the facts of the culture and it was more efficient in providing the best use of time to see highlights. Serendipitous travel, on the other hand, offered opportunity for more informal observation, for development of self-esteem and independence.” Besides that, travel abroad influenced their intercultural development such as increase their interest to explore about cultural differences, increase their respect and appreciate cross-cultural awareness. Stanitski and Fuellhart (2003) stated that “traveling to experience diverse cultures, interpreting the physical landscape by seeing it with one’s own eyes and learning about sustainability issues through meetings with representatives abroad enlighten students in a way not possible in a traditional classroom setting.”

Carlson, Bum Useem, and Yachimowicz (1990, in Dekaney, 2008) stated that “globalization fosters a greater demand for people who understand and can apply the complex processes of global communication. It is expected that today’s world citizens will be proficient in foreign languages, familiar with economic systems, aware of political and social structures, and show an appreciation for the historical, cultural, and artistic traditions that have molded the thoughts and behaviours of those with whom they will interact on the international scene. Study abroad program have had a significant role in accomplishing this goal.” The success of adapting to new environments will make students develop positive values such as the ability to communicate, friendly, forward looking, independent, mature, self-confident and etc. Students mobility internationally and globally will develop their competence and skills to make adjustment, adaptation, and acceptance of different culture and environment. Also, the experience will maximize students’ talent and skills in the face of challenges. Learning outside the classroom will provide a more meaningful experience about the real world.

Meanwhile, as a global community, we are not able to prevent anyone from meeting and interacting with individuals who have different cultural values, norms, belief, philosophy and etc. Today, intercultural interaction has become increasingly important in line with the globalization process. Interacting with people of different culture will expose them to different perspectives and views and enabled them to learn and develop their own ideas and perspective. Also, in the intercultural context, students must be able to maintain the original cultural identity as well as openness and willingness to learn and accept differences in a new cultural and environment. Students should have the strength to maintain their cultural identity and able to make a assessment of some aspect of the cultural differences encountered. Pandian (2008) stated that “the basis for effective adaptation to cultural differences is by engaging oneself to learn culturally appropriate behaviours and experiencing problem-resolution procedures which will pave the way to adapting inter-cultural effectiveness to manage psychological stress, communicate effectively, establish interpersonal relationships, adapt to another culture and successfully merge with the various social system.”

In the context of international relations, students play an important role in further strengthening relation between Malaysia and Japan. Intercultural interaction between people of Malaysia and Japan will create a lasting relationship. Intercultural understanding will create a more harmonious relationship and build mutual understanding between cultures. Students role as promoting intercultural understanding between the both countries. Their relationship with individuals who have different cultural backgrounds will make them feel part of the global community and create sustainable intercultural friendship. The experience also influenced their awareness of the importance of diplomatic relations between Malaysia and Japan. Malaysia and Japan’s younger generation plays an important role for stability and good relations between both countries for the future. Intercultural understanding will provide intercultural awareness, sensitivity, respect and appreciation to each other and will create a more harmonious relationship. Indirectly, through this program, young people will be more openmindedness about cultural differences and have better understand about Japanese culture. In addition, we must build platforms and encourage young people from Malaysia, Japan and other countries also to continue interact and exchange views with each other.

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