

# KANSAI GAIDAI UNIVERSITY

## Current Trends in Study Abroad for One IES Program : Students' Attitudes and Perspectives

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# Current Trends in Study Abroad for One IES Program: Students' Attitudes and Perspectives

Marc Metzler

## Abstract

During the recent pandemic and in the immediate aftermath there has been a lot of speculation about the effects on the study abroad attitudes of students. Significant questions have arisen about whether the desire of students to study abroad have diminished or, conversely, if those attitudes have instead shifted and increased the hopes of experiencing the study abroad program. In the following paper the results of a survey of over 40 IES students will be examined and analyzed in order to determine what the general attitudes of the study program are and if these attitudes have shifted and changed as a result of the recent pandemic and the recent aftermath. By analyzing student feedback, teachers and curricula may be adjusted to better focus on the goals and achievements of learners and the study abroad experience.

**Keywords:** Study Abroad, Super IES, Students' Perspectives

## 1. Introduction

The study abroad experience has become an integral part of many Japanese students in the past few decades. Many high school students have the opportunity to study abroad or do homestays early in their education and the results are apparent in their cultural and linguistic development later in in life. Many of these students continue their education in foreign universities and then return to Japan and make remarkable contributions to the business, scientific, and innovation communities. As higher education instructors, there should be as much encouragement and assistance towards giving the opportunities to students to progress and flourish to the highest apexes of their abilities. Katori (2016) notes that for students “many of them noted that their motivation to study had become stronger, not only for English but also for other subjects such as history or sociology. Others mentioned mental growth, changing values, or self-discovery. Some said that they become

aware of their Japanese identity, something they had not previously thought of; or that now when they watch world news, they do so with a wider and more international perspective than their previous Japan-only view.” In addition, the social, educational, economic, and innovative benefits should be recognized by the higher education community as a means to strengthen and improve the country as a whole. Ikemoto (2013) asserts that “people who are able to be globally active seem to be increasingly needed by companies which aim to branch out overseas in the future. Therefore, university students especially need the experience studying abroad and gaining communication skills in foreign languages.” Additionally, Su (2021) argues that “In recent years, as Japanese firms expand their overseas operations, they increasingly demand employees capable of going abroad and working hands-on in foreign countries. As a result, these firms increasingly prefer new hires with previous experience living abroad during their student years.” Therefore, in order to accomplish these goals, the opportunities for study abroad must be analyzed, interpreted, and adapted to the contemporary higher education student.

## 2. The Survey

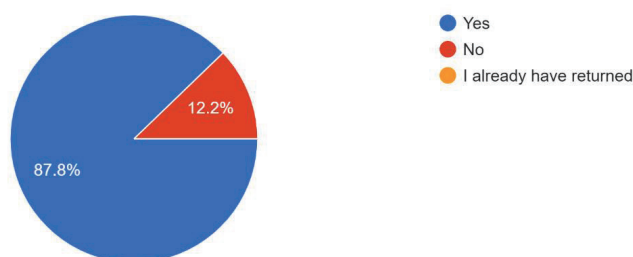
In order to analyze this process, 100 IES students from the past 4 years (AY 2017-2021) were given a survey of their attitudes and accomplishments toward and during their study abroad process. Of the 100 asked to voluntarily complete the survey, 41 submitted their responses (this may be due to that fact that some had not continued at the university, did not retain their university email address, or had already found employment). All of these students followed a one and half year preparation program before departing for their host institutions. This program included one year of intensive English language courses that included reading and writing, speaking and listening, integrated language skills, content-based courses that focused on academic skills and two electives offered each semester. In addition, these learners also were required to achieve a TOEFL PBT score of over 500 in order to participate and be accepted to their host institution. Most, if not all, students were planning on a long-term stay ranging from one semester to one academic year in various participating destinations including the United States, Australia, Canada, and various European countries. Their responses were illustrated graphically while also allowing them the opportunity to elaborate about their responses in an open forum. All of these responses were included under the graphic representation.

### 3. Results

#### Question 1

Do you want to study abroad?

41 responses



#### If not, why?

1. I feel my English skill is not enough to study abroad, and I'm not confident.
2. I want to focus on my job hunting.
3. I think it's like hard to go study abroad because of the level of own grade
4. The reason is COVID-19. The number of infected people in the United States is incomparable to that in Japan, so I'm afraid of going abroad.

It is clear from the above chart that an overwhelming number of learners enrolled in the IES program wish to study abroad and have every intent to continue toward a pre-departure program. Nearly 90% of the students surveyed desire to study abroad after finishing their IES program, and this is a significant departure from most statistics, notably from Bradford (2015) who cites the “representative study of 2,004 students and new graduates conducted by the British Council found that 45 percent would like to, or have already participated in, a period of overseas study”. This is also significant in the fact that the KGU program should be aware that a high percentage of its currently enrolled learners have the goal of participating in either a long term or short-term study abroad experience.

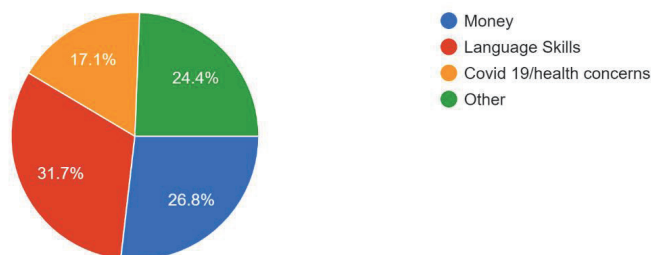
Because this is the case, faculty should be especially sensitive to the fact that students require both curricular and administrative assistance in reaching these goals in order to have a successful university experience. Instructors in particular should focus on the productive

skills for students so that they may be appropriately prepared for study abroad and have the linguistic competence and confidence. From an administrative point of view, the comments suggest that perhaps the job-hunting predicament might prevent students from studying abroad. Ikemoto (2013) mentions these preventing factors when citing that “these include financial reasons, falling English ability, lack of interest in foreign culture and language, and clashes with job-hunting schedule. Of these, the most pressing would seem to be a harmful effect of increased time, energy and money being expended by students in their job hunting efforts.” Though he goes on to suggest that the job-hunting schedule should be more flexible, practically speaking for both instructors and administration, this might not be possible. However, an increased awareness of these factors could allow more learners to achieve their study abroad dreams.

## Question 2

What had the biggest effect on your decision to study abroad?

41 responses



### Other:

1. It's because I'm worried that studying abroad may delay my job hunting.
2. I want to “experience” study abroad while I am a student.
3. Job hunting and the fact that I would still need to pay tuition while I study abroad.
4. Seeking something new experience
5. Experience in study abroad
6. I feel top of the clever students can go study abroad
7. I have a teacher-training course

This question resulted in a mixed response. Foremost was the lack of language skills,

and this should certainly concern EFL instructors. The JAOS (2019) notes that “companies having higher and higher expectations for new-hire to possess English ability at the time of application, and English proficiency is rapidly becoming as a critical-criteria for management-level positions in Japanese companies aiming to expand to the global market.”

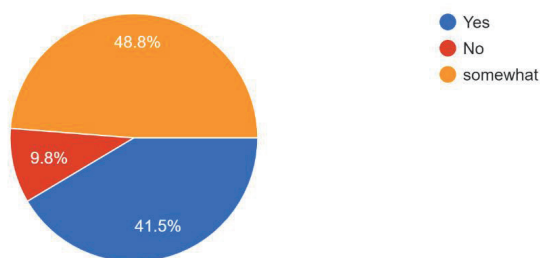
Therefore, it appears that students are most concerned about the level of their language skills and the proficiency and linguistic competence in the language. This is a critical area for instructors to rectify. Academic topics, advanced vocabulary, and an emphasis on interactive language production skills may give students more confidence in their linguistic abilities. Furthermore, emulating the first-year university experience to the highest degree of realism may also challenge students so that their progress could become more apparent to themselves. By means of learner self-reflection or the use of academic portfolios that demonstrate progress are clear indicators to learners that they do indeed have the abilities to succeed in a university environment. Many students doubt their own abilities or fear the unknown, and this is understandable; however, by giving them an authentic interactive experience, mimicking the academic rigors of university, and clearly indicating their progress and improvement, these fears and doubt may be allied.

Regarding the Covid-19 health and financial concerns, these may be remedied in the future months because of vaccines and the availability of scholarships and financial aid once students are accepted for study abroad. These factors, though significant in the choice of students to study abroad, may be diminished with the higher prevalence of vaccines, and the offers of financial opportunities after study abroad program acceptance.

### Question 3

Did you feel prepared to study abroad?

41 responses



**If you answered "no" please explain.**

1. Especially for me studying in the US now, more listening and speaking skills should have been built because everyone in class are American, who speak so fast. I realized as a student studying in Chicago, you should be able to understand movie without subtitles almost fully
2. To speak more in class.
3. I'm not confident yet
4. speaking & writing skills
5. During the Super IES program, I was desperate to keep up.
6. I think I have to study English more.

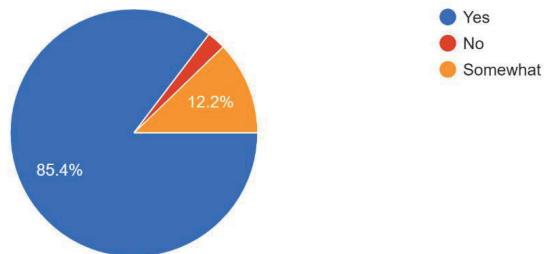
Addressing the “no” responses a priori it is apparent that very few (4-5) students did not believe that they were not prepared to study abroad. As stated above, this result, in conjunction with the “somewhat” responses, may be a result of learner doubt and apprehensiveness regarding their own skills. Although this is significant, the responses may shift once the actual study abroad experience is initiated. For instructors, building learner confidence and utilizing authentic materials and student-centered teaching approaches may be an adequate remedy to address these responses.

In addition, it is clear that productive skills are tantamount to effectively prepare students to study abroad. Although every skill is important in the learning experience, students believe that their weak points are located in the production of language, specifically the academic speaking and writing skills. Therefore, to mollify these concerns, instructors could focus on interactive learner participation, academic skills, and authentic materials. By continuously emphasizing these techniques, learners may become better prepared for the experience abroad.

#### Question 4

Were your teachers/professors supportive for you to study abroad?

41 responses



If you answered "no" please explain.

2 responses

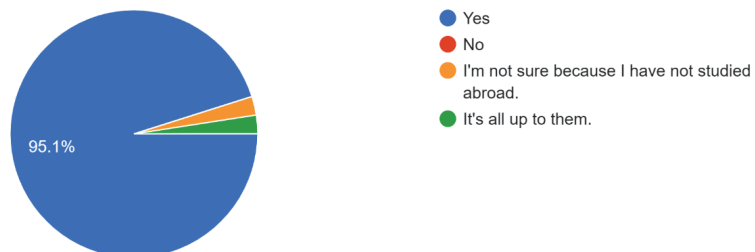
1. Some teachers set up a meeting with me to basically try to persuade me to study abroad.
2. They didn't tell anything about study abroad

The vast majority of respondents felt that their instructors were supportive of their choice to study abroad with some instructors meeting with students in order to encourage them to study abroad. This indicates that current faculty recognize the benefits of the study abroad experience and the benefits that may be derived from such an endeavor. However, any difficulties students may have in completing the process could be an indication referenced in Question 3 that outside influences are major factors in inhibiting students from completing the process of international education.

#### Question 5

Would you recommend to other students the study abroad experience?

41 responses



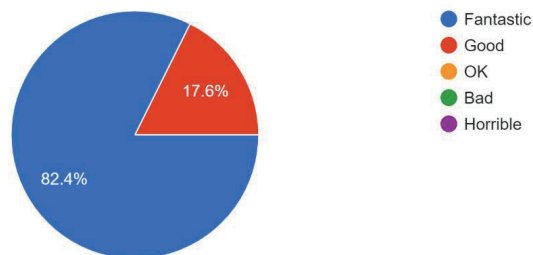


Here it is indicated that of the 41 respondents, an overwhelming majority of the students would encourage their peers to have the experience of education abroad. This demonstrates that the study abroad experience is one that is most often quite positive and with long lasting effects so strongly felt that returnees would not hesitate to recommend to others the benefits of such an experience. In fact, these students who return from the experience very often become fantastic ambassadors for the study abroad program and can be utilized in testimonials for those considering the experience to read.

## Question 6

If you studied abroad, how would you rate your experience?

17 responses



If you answered negatively, please give any reasons for the bad experience.

1 response

1. Although I got full scholarship, I wasn't expecting to have not enough money to go abroad.

I should have been more aware of my parents' financial states.

This response illustrates that the study abroad experience is overwhelmingly positive and beneficial to students. Of the 17 students, almost half of the total surveyed that have yet to study abroad (many are still waiting to study abroad because of Covid-19 concerns and visa restrictions) all of them classified it as an enriching experience both intellectually and culturally.

However, the comment referencing the student's financial difficulties should be noted as a factor in choosing the study abroad experience and an unfortunate but practical influence in completing the process of international education. Scholarships are available in many cases, but it should be noted that the international student faces many more challenges when abroad than domestic students face. A lack of family support both morally and financially

can be a significant complication for students pursuing the study abroad experience.

### Question 7

**What was the most difficult part of studying abroad or preparing to study abroad?**

40 responses

1. for preparation, because of Covid, every decision by kgu was late and I had to prepare all the documents in such a short time. For studying abroad, language barriers were the most difficult part.
2. To improve a language ability.
3. To express my opinion in unconfident English. I always afraid to fail because of my lack of English ability.
4. I think documents which are needs to get a visa and letter of acceptance are difficult to prepare.
5. -
6. Getting used to pre-departure classes where native/high level English is used
7. One of my challenges for studying abroad is to prepare for classes since I have to do a lot of reading assignments.
8. Getting a baseline score on Toefl ibt
9. Have to pass conditions such as TOEFL score
10. Being confident to speak English.
11. Insurance
12. Reading a lot of English materials is the most difficult.
13. The exam made me feel very pressured, but now I think it was necessary.
14. What we have to get 530 TOEFL score.
15. For me the most difficult part of studying abroad is speaking in front of people. It is difficult because I still don't feel confident in my English to speak in front of the native speakers.
16. I'm not sure because I still haven't prepared
17. Financial
18. Language skill
19. TOEFL ibt or IELTS
20. To get enough grade
21. Language barrier

22. Having to go through a lot of unfamiliar procedures in English.
23. Maintaining motivation
24. Homework
25. To write resume.
26. to remember vocab was most difficult part for me
27. To join and be used to the international classes.
28. a lot of assignments
29. Keeping my scores above average, and trying to gather money to go abroad at the same time.  
keeping good grade while doing other activities
30. I think having a debate was the most difficult part. It is because, we couldn't choose our opinion for the subject, so sometimes we had to think the opposite opinion.
31. Culture differences.
32. understanding rules that the KGU impose on students
33. To gain the courage to study abroad alone.
34. It's difficult to express my thoughts to non-Japanese people in English, I'm concerned about it
35. The most difficult part was mentally preparing my self. It was my first time living in a different country so I was really worried that I might be homesick.
36. It was communication. If I need to talk about the topic with which I'm unfamiliar with someone, I don't know how I explain or what words I should use in English.
37. All the paper works to submit to apply as an international student
38. There was little information about the paperwork that KGU provided, so it wasn't easy to complete it.
39. Submitting application form to the university in the USA.
40. in KGU, we have to take score that is required from KGU

This may be the most difficult response to interpret as there are a variety of responses and perspectives.

## Question 8

What helped you the most to study abroad?

26 responses

1. to learn about Japan so that I can answer questions from either professor and friends here about Japan
2. What I learned in IES classes.
3. Intensive English lectures on Super IES. Thanks to that, my ears have become accustomed to English and can speak more fluent English than before.
4. I think IES program was so helpful and wonderful. I miss and appreciate it!!
5. Pre departure classes helped me a lot. I can learn about Japanese religion and cultures which even Jaoanese people do not know.
6. Teacher's support
7. Unlike general English education in Japan, the part that students must speak English in class.
8. Presentation skills
9. Many opportunities to speak English during the UA classes helped me the most.
10. Communication with Professor, and preparation for presentation
11. Super IES program
12. speaking skill
13. I haven't studied abroad
14. That I have learned how to write essay or paper in this program's class.
15. Experiences
16. Discussion and news reports
17. nice teachers
18. The practices for speak up in classes.
19. I don't know.
20. UA Super IES
21. The classes that we are taught in English and by native speaker
22. There are a lot of things that helped me but the main thing was that I was able to be a bit confident in myself and I was able to grown up as a person.
23. IES program
24. Learning English that we don't learn from school. Natural English conversations.
25. My family, teachers, and friends helped me a lot. They were supportive and always helped me.
26. My professors in Super IES.

## 4. Conclusion

The following are a few key results from this survey on student perspectives toward studying abroad, and both instructors and administrative personnel should take note of the challenges that our students face.

First and foremost, the study abroad experience is beneficial and enriching for students, and many Japanese companies and corporations value the student who has studied abroad. Furthermore, linguistic and cultural competence is an important factor in the continued development toward Japan's role in the global economy.

Second, the job-hunting schedule and linguistic competence have a significant effect in the ability to study abroad and are two of the leading factors in the choice to study abroad. In addition, although supportive, instructors should enhance their pedagogical techniques to address learner goals of becoming more confident and competent in their productive skills particularly speaking and writing.

Finally, learners that have returned from study abroad are overwhelmingly in consensus that the experience is positive and beneficial for their future lives.

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