The Theory of Planned Behavior and Japanese Student Intent to Study Abroad

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Abstract

Increasing accessibility, interconnectedness, and global collaboration have made the practice of study abroad a global phenomenon. As participation grows at higher education institutions around the world, involvement amongst Japanese students is decreasing. The presenter will report on an explanatory sequential mixed methods study (N=311, N=10) that aims to address this decline while generating actionable knowledge that may lead to more authentic cross-cultural interactions and interest in international opportunities. Through a theoretical framework involving the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1985) and second language (L2) acquisition models (Gardner, 2010; Dornyei, 2005), the presenter will summarize key differences between first-year Japanese students with strong intent to study abroad and students with weak intent. These differences provide the basis for seven self-selection criteria, or a set of qualities particular to the group of students with strong intent to study abroad. These qualities include (1) greater achievement with English language proficiency testing; (2) prior cross-cultural interactions and international experiences; (3) tendency to connect purpose, meaning, and goal-directed behavior with the study abroad experience; (4) ability to negotiate risk and see study abroad barriers as surmountable; (5) less inclination to pursue lifetime employment; (6) willingness to delay job hunting activity to one’s fourth year of study, thus creating a greater window of opportunity for study abroad; and (7) a significantly greater degree of international posture. Based on the study’s empirical findings and its potential for enacting change in higher education institutions, the presenter reflects on the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology and theoretical framework.

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