

# STUDY ABROAD SELF-SELECTION AMONGST FIRST-YEAR JAPANESE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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**Abstract:** Applying a mixed-methods design, this study aims to generate knowledge regarding decreasing study abroad involvement amongst Japanese students. Based on data collected from a group of first-year Japanese university students, the authors propose six qualities of a predominantly willing, or self-selecting, group of study abroad participants, including 1) achievement in English-proficiency testing; 2) prior international experience and authentic cross-cultural interactions; 3) purpose and meaning connected to international experience, 4) a perception of barriers to study abroad as surmountable; 5) flexible beliefs on job hunting and lifetime employment; and 6) greater international posture. This paper concludes with a discussion on the applicability of our findings to universities across Japan and in the Asia-Pacific region. Furthermore, we discuss the potential of fostering study abroad intent in the second language classroom, thus leading to greater study abroad interest and participation.

**Keywords:** higher education, Japan, L2 curriculum, self-selection, study abroad

## Introduction and Context

Increasing accessibility, interconnectedness, and global collaboration has made the practice of study abroad at higher education institutions (HEIs) around the world a global phenomenon. Defined as “students who cross national borders for the purpose or in the context of their studies” (Kelo, Teichler and Wächter 2006, p. 5), study abroad is often promoted as an academic activity that expands worldviews while helping participants acquire knowledge of foreign language and culture (Kinging, 2009; OECD, 2017). In 2015, around 4.6 million students were involved in study abroad, and while this number has plateaued, compared to the exponential growth seen from 1970 to 2010, participation is projected to gradually increase with rising wealth in emerging economies and a demand for international education, often in the *lingua franca* of English (OECD, 2017).

Study abroad participation has been increasing amongst higher education students in China and South Korea; however, Japan has been experiencing a decline since the mid-2000s (MEXT, 2013; OECD, 2017). As of 2018, less than 1% of all Japanese higher education students were enrolled in HEIs abroad, compared to 1.9% of Chinese students and 3.3% of South Korean students (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2018a). One factor related to the decline relates to Japan’s demographics, especially its ageing society and the corresponding decrease of those under 19 years old (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017). Some identify recent troubles with the national economy and increased costs of higher education as reasons why more students lack the means to take overseas sojourns (Lassegard, 2013; Yonezawa, 2013). While these factors are associated with slumping participation numbers, it is important to note that enrollment in Japan’s HEIs – especially in the more elite

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institutions – has remained relatively stable over recent decades (MEXT, 2014), leading to criticism of the massification of Japanese higher education (Yamada, 2015).

College registration in Japan has been trending upwards, with a 2015 historical high of 63.24% of university-aged citizens being enrolled in tertiary institutions (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2018b). This is partially due to the loosening of acceptance criteria set by the government in the 1990s, implemented under the assumption that diversification and competition would have a synergistic effect on graduate outcomes (OECD, 2017). A negative consequence of the top-tier universities maintaining their enrollment numbers, despite the ageing population, is that the pool of qualified and academically inclined students is decreasing; resulting in some institutions undermining their academic standards to maintain enrollment (Huang, 2011). This may result in students who are not as intellectually curious about the world outside of Japan, thus less interested in studying overseas.

In response to the decline in study abroad by Japanese university students, and recognizing that study abroad intent is significantly correlated with eventual participation (Luo and Jamieson-Drake, 2015), this paper is concerned with identifying qualities of *self-selecting* students, that is, those with particularly strong intent to study abroad. The literature provides limited understanding on the qualities of students with strong intent to study abroad, and the authors consider this knowledge as critical for eventually reversing the participation decline. As an initial step in generating such knowledge, the following research question is explored and answered in this paper: In the Japanese context, what are the qualities of self-selection that could be applied to university students with strong intent to study abroad?

This paper first examines certain unique features of Japanese society and how these manifest in higher education, according to the literature. The methodology will be summarized before providing the results and discussion of the study. The authors conclude the discussion by examining the potential of increasing study abroad intent at the micro level, via the second language (L2) classroom. Focus is placed on the L2 classroom due to the primary author's role as an instructor of foreign language and culture, and English being the target language for most Japanese study abroad participants. The notion of study abroad, as reflected on by the students in this study, can involve varying durations and types. Opportunities range from short two-week study sessions outside of the usual Japanese university semester, to one year sojourns where students are enrolled in classes with local students.

## Literature Review

### *Japanese Society*

According to the literature, one of the most dominating social characteristics of the Japanese population is the adherence to groupism, defined as “harmonization within the in-group, achieved when members downplay their individualism for the well-being of the group” (Hinenoya and Gatbonton 2000, p. 229). Asiatic and Confucian beliefs align people of East Asian countries to a group consciousness (Hinenoya and Gatbonton, 2000). This reflects the parlance and collective vernacular of Japanese people when describing how an unspoken consensus exists amongst them, alongside the belief that non-Japanese people are unable to fully comprehend such silent communicative dynamics (Greenholtz, 2003). The belief in a unique and collective mindset, accompanying the ability to understand each other without words is termed *haragei*. This attitude can manifest in English discourse when Japanese interlocutors use the phrase “we Japanese” in speaking definitively about the preferences and inclinations of all Japanese people. As a grouping society, classifying all citizens as unified when explaining phenomena and attitudes reaches back to 1939 when Suma describes the potential of invading China: “We Japanese are not under the illusion that we can conquer China” (Suma 1940, p. 233). This is prevalent in modern day Japanese society, as someone may claim that Korean food is “too spicy for we Japanese”.

The Japanese brand of groupism has unique attributes, when compared to regional neighbors. Japan values the collectivistic trait of harmony, yet small groupings (e.g. the nuclear family unit) and a preference for privacy explain why Japanese society is considered as more individualistic than Chinese and South Korean society (Hofstede et al., 2010). Despite this, evidence of groupism can be displayed in the classroom, the boardroom, and the streets to the extent that Japan has been described as a “herd society” (Tsuneyoshi 1992, p. 31). The virtues of groupism result in a population that is generally polite, serious, modest, yet resistant to change (Hofstede et al., 2010). These traits can be misconstrued by non-Japanese people, who may label certain Japanese individuals and groups as exclusive or elitist (Hofstede et al., 2010). Japanese society is one driven by achievement, competition, and success (Hofstede et al., 2010), as reflected in long-working hours and the desire to make superior products, such as automobiles and electronics. If extending these values to HEIs, some contradictions emerge, including apathetic attitudes and a lack of motivation in learning (Clark, 2010).

### *Japanese Higher Education*

Infamously described as a “motivational wasteland” (Berwick and Ross 1989, p. 207), Japanese HEIs have been criticized for a student body depicted as inward thinking, risk averse, and not interested in the world outside of Japan (Asaoka and Yano, 2009; West, 2015). Ota (2011) reinforced this notion by suggesting that younger generations of Japanese people have an apathetic attitude towards living abroad due to the cultural and linguistic challenges that are expected, alongside a belief that foreign countries are dangerous. This perception of danger and safety could enact uncertainty avoiding tendencies, resulting in students who are unwilling, unmotivated, and poorly prepared for study abroad.

Regarding language, one study revealed that a majority of Japanese university students (55.9%) believe that their English education was not useful (Hirai, 2014), with a claim that “the Japanese education system lacks teaching students how to use English in their daily lives and business scenarios” (para. 18). This lack of relevance is exacerbated by low achievement in standardized English testing. Despite the financial woes that have plagued the country since the economic bubble burst in the 1980s, Japan continues to spend a significant amount of capital on the acquisition of English language skills. Because of this investment, one might expect a population proficient in the L2; however, Japan has produced disappointing results. When compared to the rest of the non-English-speaking world in proficiency tests such as the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), Japan scores relatively low (The TOEIC Test, 2012). While there are some indications that performance in these standardized language tests is improving, Japan still ranks as only “moderately proficient” in English use (EF Education First 2013, p. 6). Considering that the Japanese education system has valued test-taking preparation for more than 100 years (Fujimoto-Adamson, 2006), the evaluation of L2 proficiency continues through tests such as the TOEIC, the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), and *Jitsuyō Eigo Ginō Kentei* (EIKEN), despite the criticism that they do not focus on practical language skills (Kubota, 2011). In Japan, research identifies a weak association between the target L2 group and one’s future (Miyahara, Namoto, Yamanaka, Murakami, Kinoshita and Yamamoto, 1997). This is a concern for stakeholders, as it complicates assimilation of the international dimension (Knight, 2004) and discourages desire to acquire the international L2 skills needed to compete in the global job market (Yonezawa, 2010).

A unique feature of the Japanese higher education experience is the process of finding post-graduate employment, which is a rigid system that has been in place for decades. It involves information sessions hosted by employers, lengthy application processes, and multiple interview stages. Occurring over the course of a student’s final two years of study, it is often perceived as an obligation, and one that students express fear of missing or delaying (Okano, 2009). The official job-hunting process begins during the third year of a student’s four-year degree and can continue until graduation. If students are concerned with being on campus for the duration of the process, then this significantly limits one’s window of opportunity to study abroad. The perception of job hunting

as critical to one's future is influenced by the tendency and tradition for Japanese people to seek lifetime employment, that is, dedication to a single company for one's entire working career. This is becoming less of a promise that companies can deliver on, due to the current economic conditions (JICA, 2011; Mouer, 2009; Kato, 2001).

### *Study Abroad Intent and Self-Selection in Japan*

In recent years, elite (i.e. higher ranking) Japanese universities have expanded their opportunities for students to go abroad with the help of government funding. Funding has been received through programs including Global 30 and Top Global Universities, which share the common goal of exposing foreign culture to Japanese students, while promoting more destination institutions and flexible programs to those who want to study abroad.

Global 30 was introduced in 2009 under the premise that Japan's HEIs are falling behind in global university competitiveness, especially compared to the emerging regional economic powers of China and South Korea. The program goal is for selected Japanese universities to offer programs that will attract a total of 300,000 foreign students, while sending at least 120,000 abroad by 2020 (Global 30, 2012). The current Top Global Universities project will run for 10 years (from 2014) and aims at placing 10 Japanese HEIs in the list of 100 best universities in the world. Recent manifestations of these programs have resulted in more foreign faculty members and an increasing number of foreign exchange students on Japanese campuses; endorsed by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who claimed that "the number of foreign students at a university will define its success" (Ince, 2014, para. 2). Some see these strategies as a superficial way of becoming internationalized, while others defend them as opportunities for domestic students to gain more exposure to the ideas, culture, and beliefs of visitors from abroad (Chapple, 2014; Maruko, 2014).

In the literature, foreign exchange students have been defined as a self-selecting group (Cushner and Karim, 2004; Daly, 2011), and research conducted outside of Japan has identified self-selecting students as more social, predominantly female, and curious about foreign countries and cultures (Daly, 2011; Luo and Jamieson-Drake, 2015; Salisbury, Paulsen, and Pascarella, 2011; Stroud, 2010). Stroud (2010) also found a relationship between self-selection and living more than 100 miles from home. While it has been determined that students enrolled in the liberal arts are more likely to study abroad (Salisbury, Umbach, Paulsen, and Pascarella, 2009), these fields tend to have flexible graduation requirements, thus conducive to lengthy student mobility commitments (Goldstein and Kim, 2006). Furthermore, exchange students have a history of being well traveled (Brooks and Waters, 2009; Daly, 2011) with fewer financial restrictions (Whatley, 2017), and a desire for individual growth (Pope, Sánchez, Lehnert, and Schmid, 2014; Twombly, Salisbury, Tumanut, and Klute, 2012). Relyea, Cocchiara, and Studdard align student mobility with "high risk propensity" and career value (2008, p. 346). Study abroad self-selection is discussed throughout this paper as a student who is particularly inclined to participate in student mobility opportunities (Daly, 2011).

In the Japanese context, discussions on study abroad intent have been limited to perceptions of the activity, such as barriers and benefits (Asaoka and Yano, 2009; Lassegard, 2013). A study defining the qualities of Japanese students with strong intent to study abroad has yet to be conducted, therefore this paper aims to address this gap. In recognizing that Japan is a starkly different context, compared to multicultural societies that have been the focus of past self-selection studies (i.e. America, Australia, Western Europe), self-selection qualities amongst Japanese students could differ from those defined in the literature. A better understanding of Japanese students and their willingness to study abroad could potentially help HEIs meet their student mobility participation objectives, while allowing L2 educators to develop curriculum to include intercultural elements that will benefit learners.

## Methodology

To better understand the decision-making process of students, the authors utilized Ajzen's (1985, 1991) theory of planned behavior as the primary theoretical model. Often used in social psychology to determine consciously intended behaviors – including study abroad intent – this model was used alongside L2 acquisition models (Dörnyei, 2005; Gardner, 2010), which reflect the inherent nature of studying abroad involving an L2 for all Japanese participants. Mixed methods were employed, not only because of the weaknesses of single-method designs, but on account of the applied pragmatic philosophical perspective. Some academics express skepticism in mixed method approaches (Snape and Spencer, 2003), although others argue that higher education problems involving new knowledge and power regimes call for such a design (Slaughter, 2001). Of the many variations of mixed method models, we adopted the *sequential explanatory design*, involving an initial quantitative survey to identify statistically significant and anomalous outcomes, followed by a secondary qualitative investigation to provide deeper insights into the survey results (Creswell, 2015). To draw the conclusions, presented later in this paper, a triangulation technique was adopted where multiple methods were sequentially performed in order to validate results. The first step in this process involved an analysis of the literature to identify possible qualities of students with strong intent to study abroad, both outside and within Japan. Second, findings from the literature were applied to questions in a quantitative survey, thus allowing for a comparison of results. Finally, results from the survey and literature were used to develop a qualitative line of questioning in order to better explain data deemed as particularly important, unexpected, and inconsistent.

## Sample

Quantitative data were collected from students taking an elective four-skills language course (i.e. speaking, listening, reading, writing), called Intensive English. Students in the sample were beginning the second semester of their first year of higher education study. This group was targeted since they share common characteristics (e.g. age, nationality, interest in L2), while being enrolled in an early stage of the undergraduate experience (i.e. first year), which theoretically allows for the greatest window of opportunity to study abroad. Intensive English comprised of 30 classes with a total of 763 first-year students enrolled across various majors of study offered by the institution (i.e. humanities, sociology, law and politics, economics, business administration, and human welfare). It was believed that having a diverse mix of students from different majors and with varying English proficiency scores would allow for a more profound comparison, since a student's major has been identified as influencing intent to study abroad in the American context (Salisbury et al., 2009; Stroud, 2010). Table 1 shows the enrollment numbers of Intensive English based on the university's different majors, and those who participated in the study generally composed a representative sample, with most coming from Humanities, Business, and Sociology.

**Table 1: Enrollment of Freshmen in Intensive English**

School	Total enrollment	IE enrollment	% of total
Humanities	820	226	28
Sociology	670	140	21
Law and Politics	679	116	17
Economics	708	100	14
Business	608	154	25
Human Welfare	300	27	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>3816</b>	<b>763</b>	<b>20</b>

Note. IE = Intensive English

### *Mixed Methods*

The sequential explanatory mixed methods design adopted for this investigation included an initial quantitative data collection phase, executed through a survey. Results from the survey were then analyzed before establishing the qualitative line of questioning through in-depth email discussions. This secondary qualitative phase was designed to add depth and understanding to the survey data.

### *The Quantitative Phase*

Three hundred and eleven students satisfied the selection criteria and completed the survey (see Table 2). The survey contained five multi-scale questions related to study abroad intent, such as “studying abroad during my time at university is a goal of mine” and “I intend to study abroad during my time at university”. For these items, Cronbach’s Alpha was computed in SPSS (ver. 23) at .95, which is considered as excellent internal consistency reliability (Kline, 1999; Plonsky and Derrick, 2016). Using this data, 69 students were defined as having particularly strong intent, 66 had weak intent, and 176 students composed a group with an intermediate degree of intent. Other questions in the survey included validated items, aimed to determine qualities of the participants (Bandyopadhyay and Bandyopadhyay, 2015; Kasravi, 2009; Stroud, 2010). Some original, simple, single-item questions were also integrated into the survey instrument that addressed unique Japanese phenomena, such as desire for lifetime employment and intention to engage in the job hunting process.

**Table 2: Respondent Numbers – Quantitative Phase**

<b>Groups</b>	<b>Total N</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Ratio</b>
All respondents	311	221F, 90M	71:29
Strong intent	69	48F, 21M	70:30
Weak intent	66	44F, 22M	67:33
Intermediate intent	176	129F, 47M	73:27

Note. N = number; F = female; M = male

Yashima’s (2009) *international posture* instrument was integrated into the survey, which measures the degree to which someone sees him or herself as belonging to the international community, instead of one specific L2 group. It seizes both integrative and instrumental aspects of motivation and is specifically designed for contexts that may lack authentic cross-cultural contact with speakers of the target L2 or culture. Validated and applied primarily to Japanese higher education contexts, international posture is an attitudinal variable that can be potentially influential on study abroad intent. After establishing the strong and weak intent groups, the authors used SPSS to see whether there were significant differences in international posture between them. The internal consistency of Yashima’s (2009) 28-item instrument ( $\alpha = .89$ ) was measured, and data from the 311 complete survey responses were processed to determine correlation between intent and the five individual variables composing international posture: approach avoidance tendency (seven items), interest in international vocation (six items), interest in foreign affairs (four items), ethnocentrism (five items), and willingness to communicate to the world (six items). Finally, a MANOVA (i.e. univariate analysis on multiple dependent variables) was employed to ascertain whether there was a difference in overall international posture between the strong and weak groups.

### *The Qualitative Phase*

In the final question of the quantitative survey, respondents were asked if they would be willing to join the second phase of the study: the qualitative email questionnaire. After all willing participants

from the strong and weak groups were contacted, six strong group members and four weak group members confirmed their participation. While not an ideal number to ensure saturation of qualitative data, it is recognized that studies involving multiple methods and in-depth interviews – such as this one – require few qualitative participants (Lee, Woo and Mackenzie, 2002). Furthermore, a homogenous sample comprising Japanese students of similar demographic backgrounds would require fewer participants in order to be “sufficient to enable development of meaningful themes and useful interpretations” (Guest, Bunce and Johnson, 2006, p. 78). Since all willing students who represented both strong intent and weak intent groups were contacted, this group of 10 email questionnaire participants represents a purposive, nested sample since they embody specific qualities being sought for this study (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). This approach of *extreme case sampling* in mixed methods has been done in situations where the researchers are concerned with collecting qualitative data only from those who exhibit polarizing qualities, and it is understood that participants who are both qualified and willing may be few (Onwuegbuzie and Collins, 2007; Way, Stauber, Nakkula and London, 1994). Ongoing email discussion was chosen in lieu of face-to-face interviews or focus groups due to the language restrictions and inconsistencies of both students and researchers. All data (quantitative and qualitative) were collected in Japanese and later translated by a professional translator. The remote email approach was also adopted to maintain respondent anonymity and to ensure that responses were not influenced by location, bias, and power differences (Cohen et al., 2011).

Qualitative questions were conceived based on the survey results and the study’s theoretical framework to help explain and rationalize the survey results deemed as important, unexpected, or inconsistent. Respondents were presented with open-ended questions via email to generate greater insight into the survey data. For example, the survey revealed that “increased maturity and social confidence” was the top perceived benefit of study abroad, even more so than L2 improvements and learning about foreign culture. Since this perceived benefit has never been considered in prior Japanese studies examining study abroad intent, qualitative participants were asked “How can study abroad increase maturity and social confidence? Give some specific examples”. Respondents were sometimes contacted numerous times to ensure accuracy and clarity in their responses.

To achieve the objective of using the qualitative data to refine and explain the quantitative results, I conducted thematic analysis of the email responses through the lens of the theoretical framework and accompanying L2 acquisition models. Thematic analysis is a qualitative analytical method used to identify and analyze themes, or patterns of meaning (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is often applied to single method qualitative research; however, it is found in other mixed method studies (Trahan and Stewart, 2013). Due to the explanatory sequential design of the current study, where questions were conceived based on quantitative results, participants of the qualitative phase were asked to provide rich descriptions of specific phenomena related to study abroad intent. Analysis of the qualitative data was then conducted in a theoretical, deductive, or “top down” way, where codes and themes were derived from the philosophical and theoretical framework. For instance, the elements of Dörnyei’s (2005) three pronged framework - *Ideal L2 Self*, *Ought-to L2 Self* and *L2 Learning Experience* – were used as themes in comparing strong and weak intent students. Several studies have verified this framework as valid (Csizér and Kormos, 2009; Ryan, 2009), including in different cultural contexts, such as Japan (Taguchi, Magid and Papi, 2009).

### **Study Abroad Self-Selection Qualities in the Japanese Context**

From triangulating the literature, quantitative data, and qualitative data, the authors identified six common qualities of Japanese students with strong intent to study abroad. The qualities were established based on consistent findings across all three data sets, and for the six qualities below, exemplars from the data are provided. The authors consider Japanese students who embody all (or most) of the six qualities as self-selecting, or particularly inclined to enroll in student mobility opportunities. Based on our data, students described as self-selecting into study abroad:

- (1) have greater achievement in English-proficiency testing;
- (2) have prior international experience and have had successful, authentic cross-cultural interactions, both domestically and abroad;
- (3) can connect purpose, meaning, and goal-directed behavior with the study abroad experience;
- (4) have a greater tendency to see study abroad barriers as surmountable;
- (5) are more willing to delay job hunting activity and not as determined to pursue lifetime employment; and
- (6) have a significantly greater degree of international posture. These qualities are discussed in more detail here:

### **Achievement in English-Proficiency Testing**

The data in this study indicate that Japanese students with strong intent to study abroad have, on average, better achievement on TOEIC. All students from the sample were required to take the TOEIC before being placed in an Intensive English class, so the scores were self-reported in the survey. 30.4% of strong intent students had a TOEIC score of over 651, compared to only 15.2% of students with weak intent. Furthermore, only 20.2% of strong intent students had a score lower than 500, compared to 27.3% of weak intent students. A discrepancy in the scores between strong and weak members can be expected since a number of destination institutions require a minimum level of achievement; however, opportunities do exist where even a student with a relatively low TOEIC score can get admittance into a short-term overseas program.

### **Prior International Experience and Authentic Cross-Cultural Interactions**

Based on empirical data collected from two questions in the survey, we classified international experience as (a) the number of countries visited and (b) past involvement in study abroad. These items were adopted from Daly (2011) and Brooks and Waters (2009), who identified “a strong tendency for exchange students to be well-traveled” (Daly 2011, p. 63). In this investigation, students with weak intent were significantly more likely to have never been abroad – 37.9% compared to 17.4% – while those with strong intent had a greater likelihood of visiting three or more countries – 37.7% to 22.8%. In the qualitative email questionnaire, one student from the strong intent group described a prior international experience as “a major turning point in my life” and that it “extremely widened my perspective; however, I want to study abroad again to broaden my horizons more than ever before” (personal communication, 2016). Other responses associated “international experience” not only with overseas trips, but also domestic engagement with foreign people. In multiple cases, such domestic cross-cultural interactions affected the students’ study abroad intent. For example, one student claimed “I want to study abroad so I can meet my American friend who was an exchange student here in Japan” (personal communication, 2016).

### **Purpose and Meaning Connected to International Experience**

Study abroad participation has been connected to goal-directed behavior stemming from major of study, personal development, and future employment ambitions (Pope et al., 2014; Relyea et al., 2008; Salisbury et al., 2009). In the current study, students with strong intent to study abroad had more international experience, but the survey results alone did not reveal the motivational impact of past international experience and cross-cultural contact. The email questionnaire results yielded numerous associations between purpose and desire to study abroad amongst those with strong intent, while responses from those with weak intent were devoid of such connections. In examining these inclinations through the lens of the literature, we agree that study abroad participants have clear goals and desired learning outcomes aligned with the destination country and institution (Twombly et al., 2012). To illustrate this, one participant from our study was a British Literature major



with strong intent to study abroad in the United Kingdom because she could “get better access to materials and academics” related to her field (personal communication, 2016).

### Perceptions of Barriers to Study Abroad

In this study’s quantitative component, respondents were asked to evaluate the extent, from *strongly agree* (6) to *strongly disagree* (1), to which different barriers were a deterrent to study abroad participation. While the rankings of barriers were relatively consistent between strong and weak intent members; the overall weighted average score for each barrier was significantly lower for those with strong intent (see Table 3). In other words, it appears that weak intent members generally view barriers to study abroad as more challenging to overcome. In terms of deviations from the mean, the strong intent group exhibited more variation in responses, which could be caused by a small proportion of strong intent students with minimal barriers due to extensive prior experience and more favorable socio-economic conditions. When asked to elaborate on perceived barriers in the qualitative component, members from both strong and weak groups identified similar issues (financial, safety, etc.); however, the strong members provided solutions and methods to overcome them (i.e. detour behavior). For instance, one student with strong intent explained that “I can minimize the financial problem if I work a part-time job” (personal communication, 2016). In all cases, weak members simply stated the barriers without offering possible solutions.

**Table 3: Weighted Averages of Perceived Study Abroad Deterrents**

Perceived Deterrents	Total (N=311)		Strong (N=69)		Weak (N=66)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Financial issues	4.50	1.53	4.14	1.69	4.58	1.37
Low L2 ability	4.06	1.43	3.64	1.51	4.29	1.3
Troublesome application process	3.88	1.45	3.53	1.77	4.31	1.09
Insufficient grades	3.88	1.4	3.64	1.56	3.89	1.16
Delayed graduation	3.88	1.45	3.41	1.54	4.09	1.23
Dangers and disease abroad	3.74	1.44	3.15	1.47	3.91	1.44
Would miss out on events	3.50	1.49	3.10	1.64	3.89	1.24
Homesickness	3.41	1.59	2.94	1.77	3.83	1.49
Not confident in making friends	3.29	1.45	2.90	1.65	3.62	1.4
Travel abroad can be done post-grad	3.25	1.41	2.60	1.44	3.88	1.21
Hurt chances of finding good job	3.15	1.39	3.01	1.57	3.18	1.24
Lack of Japanese food	3.14	1.47	2.75	1.44	3.76	1.45
Friends / family would discourage	2.28	1.29	1.78	1.14	2.55	1.17

Note. M = mean / weighted average; SD = standard deviation

### Job Hunting and Desire for Lifetime Employment

The job-hunting process in Japan is a rigid system that students often begin during their third year of study. It involves information sessions at HEIs hosted by employers, lengthy application processes, and multiple interview stages. The quantitative data revealed a greater tendency of students with strong intent to delay the job hunt until their fourth year (24.6% vs. 15.2%). This finding was validated through a cross-check with the survey item on ideal time to study abroad, which indicated that weak intent members consider second year as the most opportune time to study abroad, to a greater

degree than strong intent members (84.9% vs. 72.5%). The qualitative phase clarified that students who are more willing to delay the job-hunting process until their fourth year have an extended window of opportunity for study abroad, as one strong intent member claimed “I’m not in a big rush to find a job” (personal communication, 2016).

In Japan, lifetime employment has been described as a “celebrated practice” and is defined as one’s dedication to a single company for his or her entire working career (Kato 2001, p. 490). A study in 2001 indicated no significant barriers to lifetime employment amongst those who desired it (Kato, 2001); however, research in 2013 identified a decline in mean tenure amongst workers in response to economic conditions (Kawaguchi and Ueno, 2013). Our survey data analysis revealed that weak intent members have a strong desire for lifetime employment, compared to those with strong intent (71.2% vs. 46.4%). In the qualitative phase, weak intent members associated lifetime employment with stability and security while raising concerns about studying abroad, since it potentially requires a period of time away from job hunting events. Strong intent members, on the other hand, exhibited more flexible attitudes about working for numerous employers, for example “I want to work for different international companies in different countries” (personal communication, 2016).

### International Posture

The literature reveals that study abroad participation can result in greater international posture (Yashima and Zenuk-Nishide, 2008); however, there are no studies that investigate the association between international posture and intent to study abroad. To address this, a MANOVA test was conducted in SPSS. MANOVA tests are generally performed to determine whether there are differences between two independent groups on more than one continuous dependent variable. In this study, the two independent groups were the strong and weak intent students, and the continuous dependent variables were the five elements of international posture. Since this study involved only two independent groups, no additional post-hoc test was needed. Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics for international posture between the two groups, with mean values shown for the attitudinal variable as a whole, and its five elements. Again, deviations from the mean are greater for the strong intent group with mean values that are also greater across all variables. To determine significance of these values, a MANOVA was done.

**Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for International Posture**

Variable	Group	Mean	Std. Dev.	N
<b>International Posture</b>	Strong	118.0	17.5	69
	Weak	96.4	13.4	66
Approach-avoidance	Strong	33.2	4.8	69
	Weak	27.8	4.7	66
Interest international vocation	Strong	28.3	5.6	69
	Weak	24.2	5.1	66
Interest foreign affairs	Strong	16.7	3.8	69
	Weak	13.9	3.4	66
Ethnocentrism	Strong	17.0	4.1	69
	Weak	16.1	3.5	66
Willingness to communicate	Strong	22.8	6.0	69
	Weak	18.6	4.0	66

Note. Std. Dev. = standard deviation; N = number

In executing the MANOVA, the assumption of homogeneity of variance (as tested by Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variance and Box's Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices) was not violated; therefore, Wilks' Lambda is reported for significant values. The Box's M value of 21.3252 was associated with a  $p$  value of 0.1548, which was interpreted as non-significant. Results of the MANOVA reveal a significant multivariate effect  $F(5, 129) = 18.68, p < .0005$  (alpha set at .05), Wilks' Lambda = .058, partial  $\eta^2 = .42$ , which indicates that there is a significant difference in international posture scores between the two groups, found in the direction of strong intent. In other words, the strong intent group has significantly higher international posture scores than the weak intent group, meaning that international posture has an influence on the students' intention to study abroad.

Given the significance of the overall test, differences in each dependent variable (i.e. univariate main effects) were examined and are presented in Table 5. Data in this table show that there are significant univariate effects (alpha set at .05) for approach-avoidance,  $F(1, 133) = 44.4, p < .0005$ ; interest in international vocation,  $F(1, 133) = 81.9, p < .0005$ ; interest in foreign affairs,  $F(1, 133) = 19.5, p < .0005$ ; willingness to communicate,  $F(1, 133) = 22.8, p < .0005$ ; and no significant effect for ethnocentrism  $F(1, 133) = 1.9, p = .17$ . Therefore, the strong intent group has significantly higher scores than the weak intent group in international posture as a whole.

**Table 5: Univariate Test Results**

	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	$\eta^2$
International posture				
Approach-avoidance	44.4	1	.00	.25
Interest international vocation	81.9	1	.00	.38
Interest foreign affairs	19.5	1	.00	.13
Ethnocentrism	1.9	1	.17	.01
Willingness to communicate	22.8	1	.00	.15

Note. *df* = degrees of freedom; *Sig.* = significance;  $\eta^2$  = eta squared

## Discussion and Implications

### *Applying Self-Selection to East Asian Contexts*

In comparing the results of this study to those in the literature, similarities and differences were discovered, as well as findings particular to the Japanese context. Our results diverged with those of prior studies since there were no significant differences in our sample related to gender and study abroad intent, as both males and females represented similar proportions of strong and weak intent members. Also, while Stroud (2010) identified a correlation between study abroad participation and living more than 100 miles from home, this relationship is difficult to apply in the Japanese context since most Japanese university students tend to live with their respective families. In the current study, nearly 80% of both strong and weak intent students lived with their families (79.7% vs. 77.3% respectively), and there were no significant differences amongst the few students who lived away from home. With research participants attending a liberal arts university, it was also difficult to establish relationships between study abroad intent and field of study. As a predominantly ethnically homogenous nation, Japanese higher education learning environments often lack opportunities to engage in authentic cross-cultural interactions, which would not be the case in countries where most of the research has originated (i.e. America, Australia, Western Europe). Despite this difference, both the current study and those in the literature identify exposure to other cultures, and interactions with people of diverse backgrounds, as a determinant of study abroad

participation. As an additional similarity, students in this study also site financial restrictions as the top barrier to study abroad participation.

Because of the unique cultural and geographic profile of Japan, several findings emerged that would not usually apply to a Western context. The first is the role of achievement in the L2, in this case, the TOEIC results. Study abroad for Japanese students inherently involves an L2 element (often English), so students are required to have some proficiency in the target language, where this is not always necessary for sojourners from other countries. Also, the uniquely Japanese tradition of job hunting, as well as the desire and expectation of lifetime employment make this an unparalleled finding in the field of study abroad intent.

This study's sample comprised of students from only one HEI; however, the six qualities of students with particularly strong intent to study abroad can be generalized and applied to higher education students across Japan. Being 98.5% Japanese (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017), Japan is one of the most ethnically homogenous countries in the world, and theoretically, the student profile of the institution under investigation would be similar to other domestic universities. For instance, all students involved were first year, Japanese, enrolled in a number of different faculties (humanities, business, etc.), and had varying TOEIC scores. Also, both males and females were represented and there were differing degrees of academic achievement (based on grade-point average). In short, the sample seems to represent a group of typical first-year Japanese students enrolled in an English program. When conducting a more in-depth evaluation of the student profiles involved in this research, certain qualities of the overall sample cast doubt on the potential for precise generalizability with other Japanese institutions. The sample could represent "typical" higher education students of English, but they may have L2 abilities, and possibly cross-cultural experiences, that would exceed those of university students who are not interested or enrolled in elective English classes.

The stated definition of self-selection, or a derivative of it, could be applied to other global contexts, especially East Asian countries. China, South Korea, and Japan are Confucian culture heritage countries, meaning they are collectivist societies with roots in Confucian thought (Phong-Mai, Terlouw and Pilot, 2005). Although there are differences in how collectivistic traits manifest in greater society, traits and attitudes towards educational experiences are often shared. For instance, higher education students in Hong Kong and South Korea report more financial and social support than those in Germany and the USA, and like Japan, students in these East Asian contexts tend to live with their families while studying (Fingerman, Cheng, Kim, Fung, Han, Lang and Wagner, 2014). Some aspects of the Japanese self-selection criteria (e.g. lifetime employment and job-hunting traditions) may not be germane to other regional contexts, but literature indicates congruency in variables that could impact study abroad intent. In terms of subjective norms, Chinese students "can never separate themselves from obligation to others" (Wen and Clément 2003, p. 20) resulting in a similar dynamic to Japanese students, where they do not want to risk making mistakes in front of peers. Other studies determine barriers to study abroad (i.e. family, financial, psychological, and social) as being similar in China and Japan (Sánchez, Fornerino, Zhang, 2006). Also in the Chinese context, Ulu, Weiwei and Yu (2015) establish a relationship between international posture and intercultural willingness to communicate, which has been aligned with study abroad intent.

Having a more profound understanding of students with strong study abroad intent has implications for study abroad program developers, recruitment departments, and individual educators. For educators and other higher education stakeholders, the question should be asked of whether the six qualities of students with strong intent, as defined in this paper, can be assimilated in the classroom. If this can be achieved, then study abroad participation could increase.

### *Fostering Qualities of Students with Strong Intent to Study Abroad*

Based on the outcomes of this study, we feel that several qualities of students with strong intent to study abroad can be fostered in the L2 classroom. First, a common goal of L2 classes is to improve

language proficiency for the purpose of achieving higher scores on standardized tests, such as the TOEIC. With studies correlating exposure to authentic input and development of target language skills (Ahmed, 2017), an L2 instructor can integrate material that will develop skills necessary for success in English proficiency tests. Second, instructors can create opportunities in the L2 classroom for authentic cross-cultural interactions by inviting foreign exchange students or guest speakers to the class (Aubrey, 2017; Wang and Nowlan, 2011), thus satisfying the quality of strong intent students as having more international experience, even if it occurs within Japan. These cross-cultural encounters are ideal for challenging students' biases and pre-conceived notions about otherness, and the instructor can provide follow-up opportunities to reframe perceptions through self-reflection. Third, L2 instructors can implement lessons that will give students greater purpose and meaning to study abroad, while diminishing perceived barriers. Through administration of a needs analysis at the beginning of the semester, the instructor can develop international material that relates to common student interests and ambitions. Developing problem solving skills and detour behavior through topics of interest can help students think more critically about overcoming barriers to study abroad participation. Finally, if students can begin to understand the possible positive impact of study abroad on future careers, both from the perspective of the educator and the employer, then greater interest and acceptance of international posture elements could manifest, for instance, greater interest in international vocation and issues.

For students without the means to join sojourns overseas, we hope that domestic L2 curriculum will allow students to assimilate some of the qualities of students with strong intent to study abroad, such as purpose, meaning, international posture, and other intercultural competences. This may seem difficult to realize in an ethnically homogenous country such as Japan; however, studies have indicated that domestic cross-cultural training can yield some of the same benefits as actual sojourns overseas (Jon, 2013; Soria and Troisi, 2013; Yashima and Zenuk-Nishide, 2008). If stakeholders such as departmental heads and language instructors can succeed in creating more intercultural experiences, then this could further increase the likelihood of fostering the six qualities of students with strong intent to study abroad.

## Conclusion

The decreasing number of Japanese students studying overseas has caused alarm for higher education stakeholders, since participation is often considered as an indicator of overall institutional prestige. To generate knowledge that can help reverse this undesirable trend, the current study addresses a critical gap in the literature by providing the qualities of Japanese students who have strong intent to study abroad, that is, they 1) perform better on standardized L2 tests, 2) have more cross-cultural experience, 3) align purpose and meaning to international experience, 4) perceive barriers to study abroad as surmountable, 5) have more flexible views on job hunting and lifetime employment, and 6) have greater international posture. Since it is posited that Japanese students with strong intent are more likely to engage in overseas sojourns; educators and administrators can develop action plans to foster the aforementioned qualities at HEIs, and specifically, the L2 classroom. Through integration of more cross-cultural and international content in L2 programs, students can develop L2 and cultural skills that may lead to increased participation in study abroad.

The participants of this study were first-year Japanese students from one region of the country; however, results could apply to the greater Japanese context as well as other regions in the Asia-Pacific region. To more firmly establish this, cross-cultural comparative research could be conducted to determine similarities and differences between self-selection qualities of university students in other countries of the Asia Pacific region. Another future direction of this study involves a longitudinal approach to determine if intent to study abroad results in actual participation. Also, the researchers intend to empirically establish whether an internationalized L2 curriculum can foster the six qualities outlined in this paper, and if that leads to increasing study abroad intent and participation.

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