

Fostering “Glocal” Awareness Through a Short-Term Study-Abroad Program on Poverty and Sustainable Societies in the Philippines

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Abstract

Study abroad programs have become increasingly popular in Japanese tertiary education in response to the nationwide campaigns and movements for fostering “global human resources” (Yonezawa 2014). In the current discourse of development of human resources with a global perspective, students’ acquirement of global awareness and intercultural skills is often emphasized. Given that Japan’s regional communities are in an urgent need of revitalization, considering various local issues such as declining birth rate, depopulation, and declining provincial industries, we advocate a new perspective about study abroad programs that cultivate understanding and awareness of both global and local issues (“glocal”) as well as their interconnectedness. This paper aims (1) to foster glocal awareness among students through short-term, content-based study abroad programs related to poverty and sustainable society issues in the Philippines and (2) to examine whether participants acquire glocal awareness and a sense of ownership by thinking through both global and local issues. Glocal awareness is examined under the following three categories; (a) awareness of the interconnectedness of global and local issues, (b) personal growth and development, and (c) motivation to take an action to positively influence global and local issues. Such programs are found to have a significant self-perceived impact on participants’ glocal awareness with respect to poverty and becoming motivated to take actions on global, local, and personal levels.

Key word: short-term study abroad program, Philippines, poverty, glocal

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Introduction

1. Global human resources

Nurturing global human resources has recently become a prioritized agenda in tertiary education in Japan. The Global Human Resource Development Committee of the Industry–Academia Partnership for Human Resource Development (2010) reported that Japan’s economic stagnation for more than two decades has had grave consequences for the competitiveness of the Japanese economy and society in the international market. Japan is facing challenge from the rapidly aging society. According to a national survey conducted by the Ministry of International Affairs and Communication, 25.2% of the total population was 65 years or older in 2013; furthermore, the youth and working age population is decreasing continuously, mainly because of the low birth rate. The Japanese enterprises are of the opinion that to revitalize the Japanese economy, it is necessary to employ foreign labor and expand their businesses in the global market. Because of these circumstances, the industry had expressed a demand for new university graduates, ready to conduct business in the international environment. However, the committee (2010) pointed out that the number of Japanese students going abroad to study has been decreasing since 2004. Furthermore, students increasingly appear to have inwardly looking attitudes, preferring to stay in Japan. A discussion to globalize universities in Japan and foster globally competitive human resources through the universities has started to result in changes. In addition, financial support has been provided to enable programs to promote international education. In response to the nationwide campaigns and movements to foster global human resources, a study-abroad program has become extremely popular in tertiary education in Japan (Yonezawa, 2014). In the current discourse of the development of human resources with a global perspective, emphasis is often placed on the participants’ acquisition of global awareness and intercultural skills.

2. Glocal leaders

Glocal is a coined word; it was created from two words, namely, “global” and “local.” Iwate Prefecture faces various local problems such as a declining birth rate, depopulation, out-migration of youth to urban cities, and declining industries and social infrastructure. Consequently, Iwate University has advocated a new way of viewing a study-abroad program that will foster glocal leaders by cultivating an understanding of both global and local issues; in other words, glocal awareness and its interconnectedness. The Short-term Content-based International Program (SCIP) was created to foster glocal leaders.

Short-term Content-based International Program (SCIP)

1. Concept of SCIP

SCIP started as a pilot program in 2010 with a focus on sustainable energy. In 2012, SCIP Sustainable Energy was launched; it had 12 students who were divided into two teams: the Iceland team and the Sweden team. Subsequently, new programs with different topics have been developed. As shown in Figure 1, there are five topics with their relevant destinations. Each topic was selected because of its importance in the

local society, especially in relation to the global perspective and the availability of a knowledgeable faculty. The duration of study-abroad program is up to two weeks. To maximize their study-abroad experiences, the programs are carefully planned so that the students are able to not only understand commonality but also develop a sense of ownership of the issues discussed.

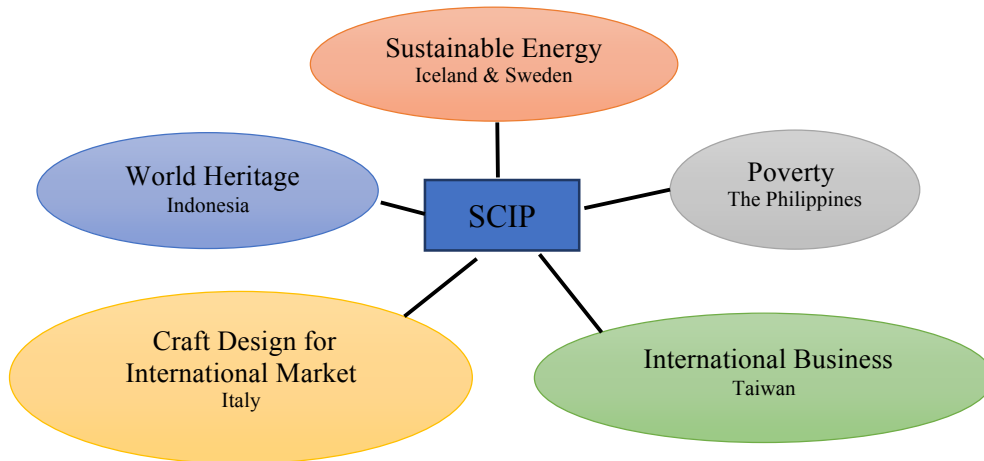


Figure 1: Program Map of SCIP

2. Structure of a program and function of each component in the program

The program consists of three parts: a pre-departure session, study-abroad, and a session after the students have returned home. Before the students go abroad, they read reference books in Japanese and English to deepen their understanding of the issue and learn equivalent technical terms in English. In addition, they attend lectures on campus and visit relevant facilities that will enlighten them about the topic such as energy power plants, NPOs, and local government offices. These learning opportunities are expected to bridge the gap between theory and reality. There are also several sessions devoted to discussions. Based on information that they collect during the pre-departure sessions, they compile a list of questions and issues for the study-abroad period.

Once they visit the particular country, they go on field visits to relevant sites and meet people through whom they are able to develop an in-depth understanding of the issues. The visits and interactions are carefully programmed so that the students meet the relevant stakeholders; these include service providers, beneficiaries, government officers, policy makers, and local residents. Students are continually asked relevant provocative questions so as to ensure that they pay attention and further deepen their understanding of the themes.

Once they have returned home, they collate the information that they collected, conduct further discussions on the topic, write a report, and deliver oral presentations about their learning through the SCIP.

SCIP Philippines

In this study, the SCIP conducted in the Philippines is examined. The theme thereof was poverty and sustainable society. Accordingly, the aim of the study is, first, to foster glocal awareness among students through short-term, content-based study-abroad programs that are related to poverty and sustainable society issues in the Philippines and, second, to examine whether participants acquired glocal awareness and a sense of ownership by examining both global and local issues. While poverty was measured using the absolute poverty index in the Philippines and the relative poverty index in Japan, it is a pressing issue that is similar in both countries. The Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council (HUDCC) of the Philippines defines slums as buildings or areas that have deteriorated, and are hazardous and unsanitary or lack standard conveniences. Slums have also been defined as the squalid, crowded, or unsanitary conditions under which people live, irrespective of the physical state of the building or area (UN-Habitat, 2003). According to these definitions, slum dwellers are identified as the urban poor: individuals or families residing in urban areas whose income or combined household income is below the poverty threshold. In 2009, approximately 1.4 million children in the Philippines were living in such informal settlements (Reyes, Tabuga, Asis, & Mondez, 2014).

On the contrary, it is often believed that Japan, as a developed country, does not have to deal with issues related to poverty. However, the relative poverty rate, which is the percentage of people of all generations who live in households with an income below 50% of the national median level, is 15.6%. Furthermore, 13.9% of children under 18 live in households that exist on less than the relative poverty rate (Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry, 2017).

The aim of SCIP Philippines, which was developed on an understanding that poverty is a common issue in the Philippines and Japan, was to raise students' awareness of the structural commonalities and differences and to further engender a sense of ownership of the issue at a global and local level by means of both a theoretical approach and an interaction between the stakeholders of the two countries.

The pre-departure session

The pre-departure session was conducted by employing an active learning style that involved discussions after lectures, students' presentations, role-play games, photo language sessions, and visits to local stakeholders that assist marginalized families. The topics included theories of development, poverty and social exclusion, international aid and assistance, poverty in Japan and the Philippines, field work, and interviewing methodology. The students were required to read related literature to improve their basic knowledge and listening and comprehension English skills through the ICT platform so as to become familiar with English terminology that they would encounter during the fieldwork in the Philippines. The students also practiced their presentations on poverty in Japan, which were subsequently delivered before local university students and urban poor children in the Philippines. During the pre-departure training, a visit to local government and non-governmental organizations that assist marginalized families and children in Iwate Prefecture was organized. Accordingly, the students learned that poverty is also a problem in the community and consequently, developed a sense of ownership toward the issue.

Program in Cebu province, the Philippines

The program in the Philippines consisted of two parts. During the first week, the students attended English language classes at the language academy of the University of San Carlos, Cebu City. The purpose of the English language course was to enhance their oral communication skills by conducting interviews with local students and residents, attending classes facilitated by language instructors, and interacting with local student partners. The purpose was to integrate communication skills with fieldwork during the following week. This is illustrated in Figure 2.

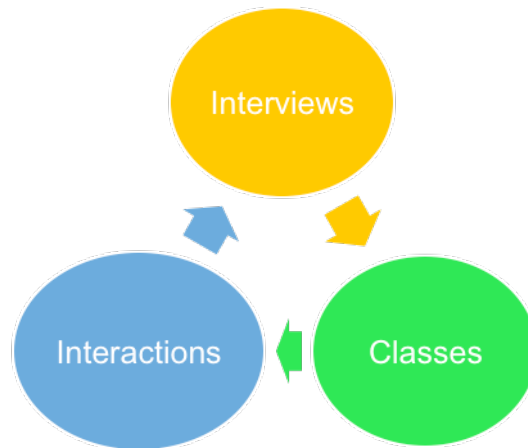


Figure 2: Cycle of English language program

During the second week, a series of fieldwork was conducted in urban informal settlements or slums in Cebu City and Mandaue City through partnership with local NGOs. Bidlisiw Foundation and JPIC have a history of assisting marginalized urban poor children and families. The visits and interactions conducted with children and families in need of special protection during the fieldwork involved the following.

- Visit slums/informal settlements in Cebu City and Mandaue City including a community on a dump site and a relocation project facilitated by JPIC.
- Interact with and interview children that are involved in prostitution, and children in conflict with the law as well as their families who have been assisted by the Bidlisiw Foundation.
- Participate in a feeding program at Balay Salamaritano, which is a day care center for street children and elderly people.
- Participate in programs on health and nutrition, education, vocational training, and livelihood that are conducted by Bidlisiw Foundation under “Child and family: healing, recovery, and re-integration framework.”
- Presentation before the children of the students’ own lives including their daily lives, dreams, families, and financial struggles.

Post-arrival reinforcement

During the post study-abroad reinforcement, the students reflected on what they had learned in the field and provided analytical feedback through active learning sessions. They analyzed the interconnectedness, structural commonalities, and possible actions to be taken so as to improve the conditions related to the poverty of the two countries.

A pre-departure and a post-arrival questionnaire were administered to examine the impact of the program on their glocal awareness.

Method to evaluate students' learning

From 2015 until 2017, three programs were conducted. In total, 13 students from all the faculties participated; namely, the Faculty of Education, Faculty of Humanities and Social Science, Faculty of Engineering, and Faculty of Agriculture. Furthermore, the students received four credits. This is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Profile of the participating students

Number of programs conducted	Academic year	Number of students participated	Female: Male	Faculties	Credits given
3	2015 2016 2017	13	10:3	Engineering Humanities and Social Science Education Agriculture	4

The students' learning outcomes on glocal awareness and sense of commitment and understanding of the commonality of the issue were evaluated through discussions and observations, reports written by the students, and a pre-departure and post-arrival questionnaire. The pre-departure and post-arrival questionnaires employed a 5-point Likert scale to assess the degree to which the respondents agreed or disagreed with each statement in the questionnaires.

Results

1. Understanding structural commonalities

The structural commonalities of poverty between the Philippines and Japan that were discussed are thus explained. First, a cycle of poverty exists wherein poor families become trapped in poverty for generations as a result of limited or no access to critical resources such as education and financial services. Second, the poor tend to be excluded from the mainstream society; furthermore, it is not easy to extricate a community from the trap of poverty. However, government support is insufficient and families have a tendency of relying on social welfare in both countries. Third, under these circumstances, NGOs play an important role in uplifting the well-being of the poor. Finally, the students also play a part in providing opportunities to urban poor children to have a new perspective by interacting with them.

2. Results of questionnaires

The pre-departure and post-arrival questionnaires revealed that the students raised their awareness on the commonality of the issues between the Philippines and Japan through the study-abroad program. In the question that assessed the extent to which the respondents agreed with the statement: "I feel that poverty is an immediate

problem for myself and my own community,” three of five students rated it higher in the post-arrival questionnaires in comparison to their rate in their pre-departure questionnaire and all rated it either “I agree.” or “I strongly agree.” during the post-arrival period. Similarly, with respect to the statement, “I feel that developing countries including the Philippines are close/related to me.”, 8 of the 9 students rated it as higher in the post-arrival questionnaire and five rated it as the highest “I strongly agree”, after they had returned from Cebu. The responses to these particular questions are presented in Figures 3 and 4.

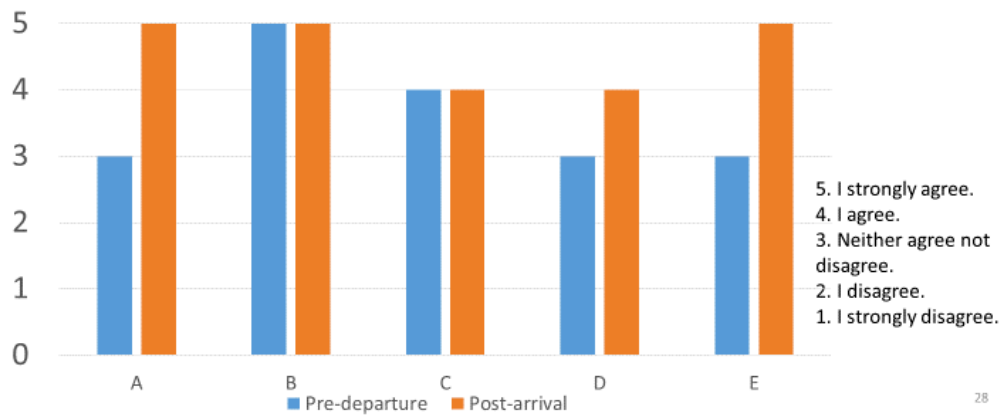


Figure 3. From questionnaire 1
 “I feel that poverty is an immediate problem for myself and my own community.” (n = 5)

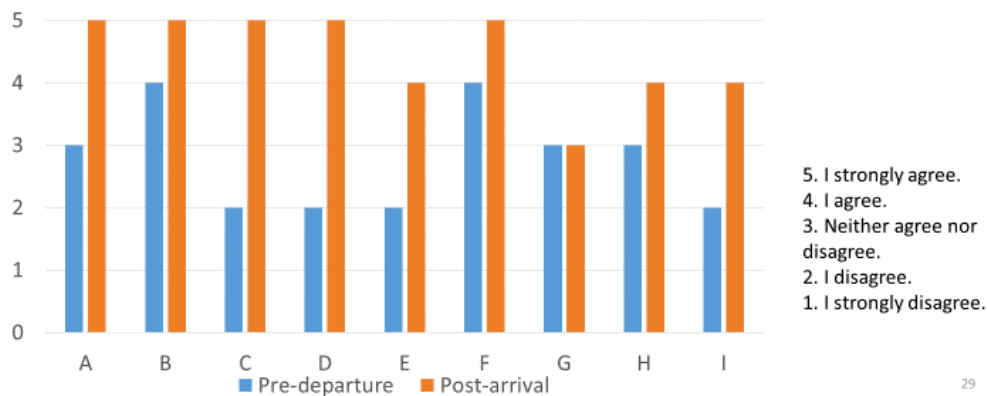


Figure 4. From questionnaire 2
 “I feel that developing countries including the Philippines are close/related to me.” (n = 9)

All the students responded in affirmative to the following statements: “Do you want to be engaged in activities to improve situations of the poor in Japan?” and “Do you want to be engaged in activities to improve situations of the poor in developing countries including the Philippines?”

3. Actions taken by students

After spending two weeks in the Philippines, immersed in intensive interaction with stakeholders and critical global issues, the students wanted to remain involved in social change when they returned home. The actions taken by the students after the program are as follows. In protecting the privacy, their names have been modified.

Social actions on campus

Haru, a second-year Education major student, and Sei, a second year Humanities and Social Science major student, organized a photo language session with other students so as to share their experiences in the Philippines with other students on campus in 2017. Similarly, Sao, a second year Humanities and Social Sciences major student, organized a workshop to ask for donations to assist poor urban children in Cebu in 2017. Furthermore, Kaz, a third year Humanities and Social Sciences major student, presented at a global symposium on student loans and financial struggles of current Japanese university students. While he was preparing his presentation, he realized that the issue of the student loan was not merely a personal issue that he was facing, but rather a current social issue faced by thousands of Japanese youth. The participants' actions were based on feeling empowered and knowledgeable because of the study program; they felt a sense of obligation to become involved. Consequently, they became a solution-based gathering that brought together a diverse audience in order to bring about positive changes in their communities.

Return to the country

To explore possibilities for further involvement to make a difference, Haru returned to Cebu in the spring holiday and became engaged in volunteer work recommended by a local student of the University of San Carlos with whom she had connected during the study program.

Connecting study-abroad and career development

The program impacted the students' academic motivation and career choices. Masa, an Engineering student studying for a master's degree explored new career options in the education sector after he had arrived home; he had come to the realization that education plays a vital role in alleviating poverty. Sei was motivated to study and decided to enroll for an advanced degree in Psychology.

Integrate study abroad experience into daily lives

It has been observed that the students used the study-abroad experiences in a variety of ways in their daily lives. Shin, a third year Agriculture major student, participated in an international joint class conducted in English because he wanted to be challenged to use English. Several students noted that they tried to communicate with their families and talk about themselves more after they had been inspired by the children and families that they met in the Philippines.

Positive feedbacks from stakeholders in the Philippines

In addition to the students' learning outcomes, positive feedback was given by the stakeholders in the Philippines. JT, a 15-year-old boy who joined the students in an interactive session, stated that it was a great opportunity to learn about the Japanese culture. The staff of Bidlisiw Foundation noted that they were not aware of the financial struggles that Japanese students experienced as well as the fact that they worked in order to study at the university; the staff believed that this would inspire and encourage the children. Furthermore, a discussion has started between concerned faculty member of University of San Carlos and Iwate University to have a joint session where Japanese student would present their experience and observation about poverty both in Japan and Cebu before the Filipino students for mutual understanding and discussion. It is notable that the interaction of the university students may create opportunities to broaden views and perspectives not only of Japanese students but also of Filipino students; for instance, the Filipino students were surprised when they learned that Japanese students often had to undertake part-time jobs to pay for their tuition fees and participate in university activities.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to foster glocal awareness among students through SCIP Philippines with a focus on poverty and sustainable society. Whether the participating students developed a sense of ownership toward global and local issues or glocal awareness was examined. Positive impacts of their understanding of the commonality of the issue, sense of connection/commitment to the issue, the people and the country, and becoming motivated to take tangible actions on global, local, and personal levels were observed.

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