

Factor Analysis of Students' Perceived Needs Prior to Studies Abroad

HIROSHI NAKAGAWA*

Faculty of Informatics, Kindai University, Japan

MICHAEL KELLAND

Language Education Center, Tokai University, Japan

DANIEL LUMLEY

Department of Global Governance and Collaboration, Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, Japan

Corresponding author email: hirona@kindai.ac.jp

Article information	Abstract
<p>Article history: Received: 23 May 2023 Accepted: 30 Sep 2023 Available online: 17 Apr 2024</p> <p>Keywords: Study abroad Factor analysis Internationalization</p>	<p><i>This paper presents a midterm review of a 4-year factor analysis project aimed at validating an outcome-based assessment of study-abroad programs attended by Japanese students. This paper outlines how the results from the initial two years captured changes in perceptions and reasons for studying abroad. It found that students have become increasingly focused on how the experience will impact their future careers. This is a shift from those who studied abroad before the COVID-19 pandemic. Those students motivations for studying abroad were primarily internal and experiential, such as wanting to improve their language skills and experience life in another country, or external and passive reasons arising from the circumstances or opinions of family or friends. The research also indicates how awareness of this shift could assist administrators in designing and conducting successful international experiences.</i></p>

INTRODUCTION

Academic study abroad programs give students unique opportunities to achieve outcomes that are conducive to global citizenship (Douglas et al., 2018). Study abroad programs are a crucial aspect in the effort to foster internationalization in Japanese universities, led by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT).

The Japanese government is actively encouraging domestic students to study abroad. In 2011 they announced their intention to invest 2 billion yen annually in scholarships for studies at overseas universities “to meet the growing needs of society to become more internationally oriented” (Tanikawa, 2011). Since then, they have continued to build on this program. However, the COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted key governmental policies. The program continues to be influenced by multiple factors that are not yet understood. A need for overseas study exists, as evidenced by the fact that some Japanese universities have made it a graduation requirement for students to study abroad at least once during their enrollment. In a 2020 survey of Japan’s super-global universities, nearly 90% of the 49 institutions in Japan said they

would review their international programs to blend physical study abroad and online education, whereas half planned to emphasize quality over quantity in sending and receiving international students in the post-Corona era (MEXT, 2020). Therefore, it was determined that an outcomes-based assessment of study-abroad programs was needed (Yonezawa, 2014).

To address this uncertainty, it was decided that it would be useful to conduct a four-year detailed investigation involving a factor analysis on students' pre-departure reasons for wanting to study abroad. Although students' specific motivations for studying abroad were sought, these variables are latent and cannot be measured by simple questioning. Factor analysis can utilize observed variables as clues to identify common factors that influence the latent variable. This analysis can enable the researchers to better understand the wants and needs of students contemplating continued education abroad as well as what universities are currently offering to ascertain whether these two interests align.

The preliminary results presented offer insight into the changing wants and needs of Japanese students considering study-abroad programs from 2020 to 2021. This will help program administrators create a blueprint for successful international experiences that appeal to the needs of Japanese university students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Japanese government has recently been promoting international exchange, career development, and language learning by focusing on human resource development at universities through large-scale subsidies for universities, such as the University Globalization Cooperation Program and the Super Global University Creation Support Program. Additionally, the Japanese government announced the *Tobitate!* study abroad initiative in 2013 to increase the number of Japanese university students studying abroad from 60,000 to 120,000 by 2020, the year of the Tokyo Olympics (MEXT, 2013).

According to official figures from the Ministry of Education, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of domestic Japanese university students actively studying abroad had been decreasing overall (Nowlan & Wang, 2018; OECD, 2016). In particular, there was a decline among students opting to study abroad for longer than six months, alongside an increased interest in programs lasting less than six months (Ota, 2018). However, these statistics only include students studying at international higher education institutions. Statistics from the Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO) include students studying not only in universities, but also in vocational schools, technical colleges, and other specialized study abroad programs. Including these alternative providers of study abroad programs in the data revealed that the total number of students studying abroad had been increasing prior to the pandemic—from approximately 36,000 in 2009 to a peak of approximately 115,000 in 2018 (JASSO, 2020). The Japanese Association for Overseas Study (JAOS) attributed this trend to Japanese companies' increasing demands for practical skills. Therefore, Japanese students have progressively been enrolling in language training programs and internships rather than academic study abroad programs (JAOS, 2019).

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, trends in studying abroad both in Japan and internationally changed drastically. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) claimed that over 3.9 million international students were affected by university shutdowns and border closures during the pandemic (OECD, 2021). The number of Japanese students going abroad declined drastically from 115,146 in 2018 to 1,487 in 2020 (JASSO, 2020). The OECD (2021) suggested that governments and universities had lost the trust of internationally mobile students who began to demand better guarantees of safety and security in the post-pandemic era. However, international education will arguably remain a coveted experience for many students, and promoted by universities, governments, and employers post-pandemic (Bista et al., 2022).

Prior research conducted in countries other than Japan has identified several factors that motivate students to study abroad. Students may be motivated by factors related to immigration, as the case of students in South America (Bikos et al., 2019). Nghia (2019) observed that Vietnamese students were not only motivated by immigration opportunities but also the desire for international friendships, experience living abroad, and potential benefits to their future careers. The motivation to study abroad for career benefits has been reported in research conducted in Canada (Salyers et al., 2015) and China, where a qualification from a foreign institution can help graduates gain an edge in the job market (Walsh & Walsh, 2018; Zhai et al., 2019).

Research in the Japanese context found that students were less motivated by career opportunities than by the opportunity to gain international experience, make international friends, and grow personally (Lumley, 2020). Earlier research found that only 30% of Japanese companies considered study abroad experience when hiring new employees (Murakami, 2012). However, it is still unclear how the pandemic impacted students' motivations to study abroad.

As international borders opened, students began once again considering their study abroad options. International universities have the opportunity to reverse the pre-pandemic trend of declining numbers of Japanese students choosing to study in universities abroad. Accordingly, an analysis of how the pandemic may have affected student motivation for studying abroad will help universities design programs that are more appealing to Japanese students.

Research questions

This paper addresses the following research questions:

- Q1. Did the number of students interested in studying abroad change from 2020 to 2021?
- Q2. What factors influenced students' decisions to consider studying abroad in 2020 and 2021?

METHODOLOGY

To establish the questionnaire items, student reports from short-term study abroad programs spanning the past five years were analyzed. From these reports, 33 items deemed relevant to Japanese students were derived by comparing acquired knowledge and experiences from their overseas journey with a pre-survey form developed by Anderson and Lawton (2015) on motivations and expectations for study abroad programs. Respondents were asked to rate each item using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Additionally, an open-ended section was incorporated into the questionnaire to obtain further insights from students into their motivations and aspirations for studying abroad, as well as any other remarks.

A pilot study was conducted at universities in the Kanagawa and Aichi prefectures at the onset of the spring 2020 semester. This study sought to identify reasons why students considered studying abroad. Twenty individuals, randomly chosen from these institutions, participated in this preliminary survey. Feedback from this study influenced the refinement of the questionnaire items. To ascertain the reliability of the survey items, the internal consistency of the questionnaire was measured using Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951). This coefficient, which assesses the uniformity with which participants consistently respond to analogous questions, was 0.8, indicative of high reliability. Consequently, the 12 reasons from the pilot study were reformulated as questions in the main survey, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1
List of survey question: Why do you want to study abroad?

Q1	Because I want to live in a foreign country	1	2	3	4	5
Q2	Because I want to improve my foreign language skills	1	2	3	4	5
Q3	Because I like foreign culture	1	2	3	4	5
Q4	Because I want to make foreign friends	1	2	3	4	5
Q5	Because I can go abroad	1	2	3	4	5
Q6	Because it will aid my future career	1	2	3	4	5
Q7	Because I want to get a degree in a foreign country	1	2	3	4	5
Q8	Because I want to marry a foreigner	1	2	3	4	5
Q9	Because my family recommends it	1	2	3	4	5
Q10	Because I know someone around me who is studying a foreign language	1	2	3	4	5
Q11	Because my family has a job related to a foreign country	1	2	3	4	5
Q12	Because I can earn money	1	2	3	4	5

Note. 1. Strongly Disagree, 2. Somewhat Disagree, 3. Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4. Somewhat Agree, 5. Strongly Agree

Research participants

This research was conducted in 2020 and 2021 at two private universities in Japan: one in Kanagawa prefecture, which has an enrollment of over 24,000 students, and the other in Aichi Prefecture, with a student population of 4,500. From each university, participants were selected from among the Japanese students between their 1st and 4th years and beyond. Out of 131 respondents in 2020, two were excluded because they provided incomplete responses to the survey, leaving a sample of 129 participants for that year. In 2021, 214 students participated. All participants signed an informed consent form and were assured that withdrawal from the project would not adversely impact their academic standing or course grades.

The research employed convenience sampling as a basis for utilizing exploratory factor analysis (EFA). Designed to reveal inherent structures within a dataset, EFA is especially fitting for convenience sampling, despite its potential biases, owing to its competency in handling voluminous and varied data sets (Fabrigar & Wegener, 2012). With a combined sample size of 343 across both years, EFA was well-suited for this study. The voluntary nature of participation promoted authenticity in responses, thus bolstering the accuracy of the factor analysis.

Data collection

EFA was utilized to uncover latent factor structures within the main survey dataset. EFA's primary function is to streamline data interpretation by condensing its complexity (Fabrigar et al., 1999). For this research, EFA was conducted on 12 identified potential reasons influencing students' motivation to study abroad.

Survey items with factor loadings less than 0.4 were discarded because they revealed a weak correlation with the respective factor. Factor loadings depict the degree of association between an item and a factor, and values exceeding 0.4 denote a robust correlation. Weak correlations can impede factor interpretation and potentially jeopardize the reliability and validity of the analysis. Removing such items enhances the model's fit and reduces the risk of misinterpretation. The objective of factor analysis is to extract shared factors across multiple variables, so each variable must accurately mirror its factor (Costello & Osborne, 2005). Consequently, the dataset was refined to achieve a unified factor structure.

For the rotational strategy employed in this analysis, the promax method was given precedence over the varimax technique. Unlike the orthogonal varimax approach, the promax approach, as an oblique rotation, permits the factors to correlate. This choice was predicated on the postulation that the 12 reasons cited for studying abroad could exhibit interrelatedness. Compared to orthogonal methods, the promax approach more accurately reflects complex data dynamics (Costello & Osborne, 2005).

Eigenvalues were pivotal in delineating the number of factors retained for the EFA. These metrics signify the variance portion attributable to each specific factor. Following Kaiser's (1960) criterion, only factors with eigenvalues over 1.0 were retained, signifying their significant contribution to the variance within the dataset.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Excel statistics were pivotal in the factor analysis. This analysis was instrumental in identifying the key factors influencing students' overseas education aspirations. Notably, in 2020, 90% of participants indicated a preference for foreign academic experiences. This dropped to 67% in 2021, representing a significant 23% decline in interest. To extract the factors influencing the desire to study abroad from the data, the authors conducted a factor analysis using Excel statistics. The results of the factor analysis for the data from 2020 are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2
2020 Results of factor analysis promax rotation

	Average	SD	Factor 1 Internal/ Experiential	Factor 2 External/ Passive
Because I want to improve my foreign language skills	4.42	0.80	0.82	-0.08
Because I want to live in a foreign country	4.29	0.87	0.78	-0.16
Because I like foreign culture	4.25	0.78	0.76	-0.16
Because I want to make foreign friends	4.00	1.16	0.64	0.17
Because it will aid my future career	3.97	1.14	0.63	0.17
Because I can go abroad	3.96	1.07	0.52	0.00
Because I want to marry a foreigner	2.44	1.17	0.44	0.16
Because I want to get a degree in a foreign country	3.16	1.12	0.41	0.30
Because I know someone who is studying a foreign language	2.43	1.25	0.10	0.81
Because my family recommends it	2.14	1.16	-0.13	0.60
Because my family has a job related to a foreign country	1.89	1.23	-0.03	0.55
Because I can earn money	2.67	1.19	0.14	0.50
Contribution rate (%)			28.54%	14.48%
Cumulative contribution rate (%)			14.48%	43.01%
Factor Analysis Promax Rotation				N = 116
Correlation of Factors after Rotation				
			Factor 1	Factor 2
	Factor 1		1.00	0.09
	Factor 2		0.09	1.00

After analyzing the data, two factors were identified and then defined based on the correlation of each item within: *internal/experiential* or *external/passive*. Notably, after the promax rotation to quantify the factor correlations, no correlation was found between factor 1, *internal/experiential* and factor 2, *external/passive*.

The first factor had a contribution rate of 28.54% and was defined as *internal/experiential* because it contains items related to language improvement, a desire to live in foreign countries, cultural exploration, and making foreign friends. This factor also contains items that go beyond language and culture, including the survey items pertaining to future career, wanting to marry a foreigner, and getting a degree.

Focusing on the items within *internal/experiential*, the highest rated survey item was "Because I want to improve my foreign language skills" with an average score of 4.42 on a 5-point Likert

scale, with a standard deviation of 0.8, as shown in Figure 2. This indicates that the participants' primary reason for wanting to study abroad was language improvement. The next highest scores were for "Because I want to live in a foreign country" (4.29) and "Because I like foreign culture" (4.25), which revealed what students expect from studying abroad is the cross-cultural experience and new perspectives that they will be exposed to when they go abroad.

The second factor had a contribution rate of 14.48% and was defined as *external/passive* because it consisted of survey items such as "Because I know someone around me who is studying a foreign language," "Because my family recommends it," and "Because my family has a job related to a foreign country." The items within *external/passive* factor contained much lower average scores on the 5-point scale. The survey item "Because my family recommends it" had an average a score of 1.89 (SD = 1.16). The item "Because my family has a job related to foreign countries" had an average score of 2.14 (SD = 0.87), suggesting that respondents were not inclined to study abroad due to external factors. Rather, the interest in studying abroad mainly came from the first factor, internal/experiential.

Another factor analysis using Excel statistics was conducted on the 2021 data set. The results are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3
2021 Results of factor analysis promax rotation

	Average	SD	Factor 1 Internal/ Experiential	Factor 2 External/ Passive	Factor 3 Future Career
Because I want to live in a foreign country	4.24	0.97	0.86	0.06	-0.10
Because I like foreign culture	4.07	1.04	0.74	0.13	-0.04
Because I want to make foreign friends	4.10	0.98	0.74	0.07	-0.03
Because I want to improve my foreign language skills	4.61	0.68	0.64	-0.31	0.15
Because I can go abroad	4.08	1.03	0.60	0.06	0.13
Because I want to get a degree in a foreign country	2.94	1.10	0.40	0.20	0.01
Because my family recommends it	2.17	1.11	-0.05	0.79	0.10
Because my family has a job related to a foreign country	2.11	1.27	0.11	0.62	-0.11
Because I know someone around me who is studying a foreign language	2.78	1.17	0.10	0.52	0.11
Because I can earn money	2.92	1.19	-0.08	0.27	0.68
Because it will aid my future career	3.91	0.97	0.30	-0.12	0.55
Contribution rate (%)			27.88%	14.17%	4.72%
Cumulative contribution rate (%)			27.88%	42.05%	46.78%
Factor Analysis Promax Rotation					<i>n</i> = 134
Correlation of Factors after Rotation					
			Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
		Factor 1	1.00	0.00	0.34
		Factor 2	0.00	1.00	0.25
		Factor 3	0.34	0.25	1.00
*Because I want to marry a foreigner	2.60	1.12	0.27	0.26	0.07

*Excluded question

After data analysis, three factors were extracted, and one item was excluded. The survey item, "Because I want to marry a foreigner" was excluded because it scored below 0.4 within each

factor and therefore did not correlate at all with any of the factors. The three factors were defined based on the correlations of each item. The first two factors remained the same, *internal/experiential* and *external/passive*. A new third factor was defined as *future career*. After promax rotation to quantify the factor correlations, no correlation between the factors was found. Therefore, each factor was independent. *Experiential/internal* had a contribution rate of 27.88%, whereas *external/passive* had a contribution rate of 14.17%. The new factor *future career* had a contribution rate of 4.72% and consisted of only two survey items: “Because I can earn money” and “Because it will aid my future career.” As a result of the creation of this new factor, all factors became more well-defined in 2021. In the 2020 data, both “Because it will aid my future career”, *experiential/internal* and “Because I can earn more money”, *external/passive* notably did not fit with the other items and the factor labels that we chose. With the creation of *future career* in 2021, these items now stood independently as a distinctive factor, subsequently ensuring that the first two factors contain items more closely related to the factor names chosen.

DISCUSSION

The shifting tides in study abroad amidst a pandemic

The study’s findings indicate a complex shift in student interest in studying abroad during 2021 compared to the previous year. While interest in improving foreign language skills declined, as shown by a decrease in factor loading from 0.82 in 2020 to 0.64 in 2021, the desire to live in a foreign country actually showed an increase, with factor loadings rising from 0.78 to 0.86. The upheaval caused by the COVID-19 pandemic significantly influenced these findings, correlating with travel restrictions, safety concerns, and the uncertainty of international exchanges (Aristovnik et al., 2020). This suggests that while some aspects of study abroad became less of a priority, other elements gained importance. Nevertheless, the consistent interest in foreign culture, with factor loadings slightly changing from 0.76 to 0.74, highlights the resilience of the appeal of international education amidst these challenging times.

These nuanced shifts prompt a reevaluation of the role of global crises on student mobility and the future structure of study abroad programs. Educational institutions and policymakers are called to revisit program designs to address these changing dynamics. The emergence of ‘future career’ as a new factor with a loading of 0.55 in 2021 points to the growing importance of aligning study abroad experiences with career objectives. In response, universities might consider incorporating a mix of remote learning and in-person experiences to create flexible, hybrid programs. Such programs could combine online coursework with shorter on-site interactions abroad, preserving the essence of cultural immersion while adapting to the realities imposed by global health concerns.

Additionally, the analysis suggests that enhancing the career relevance of study abroad programs may bolster student interest, particularly during economic uncertainty. The survey item “Because it will aid my future career” underscores the shifting focus of students toward practical outcomes from their international experiences. Institutions may, therefore, focus on developing



global competencies that are increasingly sought after by employers, such as cross-cultural communication and adaptability. Highlighting these competencies can appeal to students' evolving professional aspirations and may counterbalance the observed decrease in participation.

As the educational landscape continues to evolve in response to the pandemic, innovative approaches to study abroad programming are required. Educational providers may consider expanding virtual exchange initiatives, developing international internships that begin remotely, or utilizing technology to simulate intercultural experiences. Programs may also highlight the independent factor *future career*, which has become more defined, as evidenced by its separate contribution rate of 4.72% in 2021. Such innovations could serve to sustain and potentially reinvigorate student engagement in international education under and beyond the influence of the pandemic.

A new priority in study abroad programs

The motivations driving the desire to study abroad are multifaceted and have evolved notably. For instance, the survey item "Because it will aid my future career" increased significantly in factor loading from 0.63 in 2020 to 0.55 in 2021, illustrating the growing emphasis on career benefits. Personal growth factors, such as experiencing new cultures and environments, have consistently motivated students. In contrast, the emergence of the *future career* factor in 2021 signifies a shift toward valuing international experiences for their potential career benefits. This shift may stem from a recognition of the competitive advantage provided by such experiences in a global job market. Amidst the pandemic's economic challenges, students' priorities have expanded noticeably, from seeking educational and cultural enrichment to pursuing opportunities that enhance their employability.

To address these changing motivations, study abroad programs may need to recalibrate their design to emphasize and integrate career development components. For instance, programs can incorporate international internships or project-based learning that engage students with partners in global industries. Such enhancements can clearly articulate the alignment between international experiences and professional skill development, thereby maintaining the attractiveness and relevance of study abroad programs.

Reflections on broad educational trends

The current trend toward digital learning platforms and the integration of online courses raises questions regarding the enduring appeal of traditional study abroad formats. As universities adopt curricula with a greater global orientation and utilize technology for intercultural exchanges, the distinct value of physically studying abroad may be perceived differently. To remain compelling, study abroad programs can adopt hybrid models, such as combining virtual classroom engagement with short-term physical experiences abroad, thus allowing students to develop international competencies in a variety of contexts.

It is also crucial to consider domestic initiatives for "internationalization at home" that include international perspectives and opportunities for virtual exchange. This approach can broaden

access to global learning experiences for a larger cohort of students, thereby democratizing the benefits of international education.

In adapting to these shifts, higher education institutions are encouraged to consider innovative program structures that accommodate both current constraints and evolving student expectations. Programs that offer flexibility, such as modular components or virtual international collaborations, may be particularly effective in the current educational landscape. By proactively addressing these trends, universities can enhance the resilience and appeal of their study abroad offerings, thus ensuring that they continue to provide students with meaningful and relevant international experiences well into the future.

Shifts in study abroad toward career building

The factor analysis comparing data from 2020 and 2021 highlighted substantial shifts in the factors influencing students' decisions to study abroad. While in 2020 motivations were steeped in aspects of the *internal/experiential* factor, such as language acquisition and cultural immersion, the 2021 data reflected a distinct emergence of motivations related to students' future careers. This reflects a broad shift in higher education, as students' pursuits of international experiences are increasingly shaped by the goal of professional advancement and job readiness, especially given the economic instabilities brought on by the pandemic (Aristovnik et al., 2020).

The study's results indicate a significant shift in student interest towards studying abroad in 2021 as opposed to the previous year. Specifically, there was a notable decrease in the eagerness to improve language skills, as demonstrated by the diminished factor loadings for the item "Because I want to improve my foreign language skills" from 0.82 in 2020 to 0.64 in 2021. Conversely, the factor loading for "Because I want to live in a foreign country" actually rose from 0.78 in 2020 to 0.86 in 2021, reflecting an increased interest in the stability and cultural engagement aspects of studying abroad, despite or perhaps because of the pandemic's challenges. These trends suggest a reevaluation of priorities in the face of global travel disruptions, health risks, and the uncertainties of international engagement caused by the pandemic. Yet, the consistent value placed on experiencing foreign cultures, only marginally changing from 0.76 to 0.74, signifies a sustained intrinsic value placed on international education.

Furthermore, an opportunity to create structured partnerships with organizations for remote international projects exists. This aligns with the broad digital learning trends, thus accommodating students' growing preference for flexibility and varied learning modalities, as indicated by the sustained interest in the survey item "Because I like foreign culture" maintaining a factor loading above 0.70 across both years. Such partnerships would enable students to apply their academic learning in real-world contexts, fostering a suite of employable skills and establishing a network of professional contacts. This approach would not only bolster the future career component but also serve as a crucial bridge connecting academic pursuits with tangible career outcomes.

It is paramount that universities adapt their study abroad programs to reflect students' shifting priorities. By foregrounding the career-enhancing potential of international education,



institutions can better align with the emergent needs and expectations of the student body, thereby ensuring the sustained appeal and efficacy of study abroad programs in a landscape reshaped by the pandemic.

CONCLUSIONS

Although the pandemic temporarily reduced the number of students actively looking to study abroad, Japanese universities continue to promote and respond to globalization. If this is to be realized, it will be increasingly important to further consider students' perceptions about studying abroad.

This study revealed that the number of students who expressed a desire to study abroad had decreased and the factors affecting their decisions have shifted. To remain attractive as higher education destinations for Japanese students, institutions that offer study abroad programs need to understand these points and effectively re-construct study abroad programs and the overall curriculum to meet students' evolving needs and wants. It will be interesting to note the extent to which the changes seen in the first two years of this project evolve over the full four-year period, and to observe whether further shifts occur, and new factors emerge.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

One notable limitation of this study pertains to the ambiguity in the distinction between the intentions for short- and long-term study abroad among participants. This is crucial as the perceptions and factors influencing decisions may vary based on the intended duration of the program. For future research, more granular examination, categorization, and comparisons of the distinct perceptions and motivators between these two groups would provide clearer insights into the nuanced differences and specific needs of short- versus long-term study abroad students.

Furthermore, the temporal context of this research, notably the overarching influence of the global pandemic, may have shaped the responses and perceptions of participants. As the effects of the pandemic diminish or a new normal establishes itself, some of the factors and sentiments identified may evolve or give way to new ones. Therefore, periodic longitudinal studies conducted across various phases of the post-pandemic era would elucidate the sustained impact or evolving nature of these perceptions and decisions.

Lastly, our study's reliance on students' subjective perceptions could introduce potential biases, swayed by transient factors such as personal experiences, peer influences, or media narratives. Thus, combining qualitative insights from perceptions with more quantitative or objective measures, such as actual study abroad enrollments, academic performances, or even socio-economic metrics, could offer a more holistic and balanced understanding of the factors affecting study abroad decisions.

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THE AUTHORS

Hiroshi Nakagawa is an English instructor at Kindai University in Japan. He holds an Ed.D. from Northcentral University in Arizona, and is the author of several Japanese textbooks. His current research interests include study abroad programs and a factorial analysis of student perceptions of overseas internships and study abroad experiences.
hirona@kindai.ac.jp

Michael Kelland has been living in Japan for over fifteen years and is a lecturer in the Language Education Center at Tokai University in Japan. Research interests include studying the effects of working memory capacity on L2 learning, as well as study abroad programs for Japanese students.
kj6677@tokai.ac.jp

Daniel Lumley is a lecturer in the Department of Global Governance and Collaboration at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies. He holds an EdD in Higher Education from The University of Liverpool. His research interests include study abroad preparation programmes, outcomes of study abroad, and the internationalisation of Higher Education.
lumley@nufs.ac.jp

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