

The Impact of Studying Abroad over Time and Place: A Longitudinal Study of Indonesians Who Studied in Japanese Higher Educational Institutions

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Abstract. It is important to examine the influence of study abroad in long-term perspectives. Although there have been many studies on international students who study abroad, there are still few studies which examine the longitudinal impact of studying abroad, especially with the focus on those students who have had such studying abroad experiences in the past. The author has been conducting ethnographic follow-up studies on former Indonesian students in Japan, who currently have positions in universities and government agencies in Indonesia. This paper will examine how the learning and knowledge gained in Japan, through their experiences as international students in Japan, are described by those Indonesians, and how such knowledge is and is not used in their current professional life in Indonesia. It was found that there were some similarities in the way they explained as the influence of Japan, such as work ethic and team work. It was also found that not only the learning in Japan but also the context and environment that the informants were in Indonesia influenced the way they described and used their experience of study in Japan. Based on these findings, this paper will clarify how the experience of studying abroad influences their life and career over time and place.

1. Introduction

It is important to research the long-term impact of studying abroad, in order to clarify how international experiences influence those who study abroad over time and place. There are many factors involved in international education. In this research, both micro-level of individual international students, and macro-level factors such as historical, political, economic, and higher education itself, need to be examined as both micro-level and macro-level factors may interact and influence each other.

This paper is part of the author's longitudinal ethnographic studies on culture learning, focusing on Indonesian students who study at Japanese higher education institutions. This paper in particular is based on her follow-up studies in 2011, 2012, and 2013 on those Indonesian returnees who have positions either in a university or in a government agency in Indonesia.

Through the analyses, this paper attempts to clarify the importance in examining the long-term influence of studying abroad experiences on the individual's life and career. In addition, it will study how macro-level factors of policy and systems of higher education are closely related with the life and career of those international students over time and place.

2. Research on Studying Abroad

2.1 Past research on studying abroad

There have been many studies on study abroad. For example, Altbach, Kelly, and Lulat (1985) [1] reviewed past studies on international education, which included extensive bibliography. Although published about thirty years ago, they raised some important points from reviewing the past research of international students, which are still relevant today. For example, they already identified the areas in which past research on international students lacked, which included what they called “postsojourn issues” after studying abroad (Altbach, et al., pp.38-39).

What was more, while admitting the need for micro-level studies on individual international students, they discussed that much more studies were needed to deal with macro-level problems such as political and economic aspects of international study (p.35). To overcome those limitations in the past research on international education, Altbach (2007) [2] and Altbach and Peterson (2007) [3] conducted macro-level studies on higher education in international perspectives.

More recently, Guruz (2008) [4] discussed international student mobility in the context of how higher education developed historically as well as the current situations in today’s global knowledge economy. He made extensive use of the statistics, such as the number of international students some major countries send and receive over a period of time, in his analyses on international student mobility in global context.

2.2 Studying abroad and higher education

Studying abroad is closely related with the conditions and systems of higher education institutions in those concerned countries that send and receive students. There have been many studies on higher education, such as comparing the systems and organizations of higher education cross-nationally (Clark, 1983) [5], and the system of research and advanced education in developed countries (Clark, 1995) [6]. In recent years, there are more international studies of higher education dealing with those in developing countries (Sadlak & Altbach, 1997) [7]. The previously mentioned studies by Altbach (2007) [2] and Altbach and Peterson (2007) [3] can be regarded as those studies on higher education with global perspectives.

There have been more studies which deal with higher education in specific regions or country. For example, Welch (2011) [8] described changes and challenges of higher education in Southeast Asia, including the case of Indonesian higher education. He describes Indonesian higher education in its historical development and the current problems and challenges, which are faced by public and private educational institutions in Indonesia. Among those challenges, Welsch addresses the problems of staff qualifications with advanced degrees (p. 40), which continue to concern international graduate education in Indonesia.

2.3 Studying abroad and political and economic relations of concerned countries

The political and economic factors may affect the kinds of programs and scholarships available for those international students in the concerned countries. For example, Bastiaens (2009) [9] examined in detail the development and impact of international assistance to Indonesian higher education since the 1970’s, which include Dutch and other organizations such as World Bank. Overseas training is one of the important assistances provided to Indonesia. The number of students studying abroad in total, as taken from UNESCO data, has increased from 3,497 in 1970 to 23,760 in 1998, with USA, Australia, and “Other” which includes Japan and the UK as host countries (Bastiaens, p. 79).

2.4 Japan-Indonesia relations

If we look at Japan-Indonesia relations, education related programs and funding also reflect their historical and economic relations. Japanese government provided scholarships to those students from the Southeast Asian countries, prior to war in early 20th century such as with “Nanpo Tokubetsu Ryugakusei [Special International Students from South]” (Goto, 1989; Goto, 1991) [10, 11], and after

the war, such as with “Baisho Ryugakusei [International Students on Reparations]” as part of the war reparations agreement in 1960 between Indonesia and Japan (Komiyama, 1979) [12].

The political and economic ties also influenced education between Japan and Indonesia in late 20th century. There were many Indonesian students who were sent to Japan as well as to other Western countries for advanced degrees especially in the science and engineering fields (Arikawa, 1999) [13].

It is important to examine the long-term impact of those study abroad programs, which brought many Indonesian students to Japanese higher education institutions in the late 20th century, how such programs have influenced those who were sent to Japan, not only during the time of study, but also after their study in Japan.

3. Methodology

3.1 Background of the research

This paper is part of the author’s longitudinal study on culture learning, focusing on Indonesian students who have studied in Japanese universities. The author first conducted the fieldwork in 1991-1992 at a Japanese research university. The majority of the informants were in the graduate programs in Engineering. They came to Japan after finishing their undergraduate programs in Indonesia, seeking graduate education with a goal of obtaining doctoral degrees. In addition, there were those young government employees who were sent for undergraduate programs in Japan as well as to other developed countries. They were government employees supported by government scholarships, and had positions in universities or government agencies in Indonesia.

From late 1990’s to around 2000, the author conducted follow-up studies on those who newly finished their doctoral programs and returned to Indonesia. The follow-up studies then examined how the new returnees were restarting and adjusting their life and career in Indonesia. Although they had positions in Indonesia, they were away for many years while they were studying in Japan. They needed to be very active and become engaged in various kinds of activities such as teaching, research, and social activities (Arikawa, 2004) [14].

3.2 Follow-up studies in early 2010’s

This paper in particular is based on the author’s follow-up studies in Indonesia in 2011, 2012, and 2013, about 20 years after the time those Indonesian informants in the author’s fieldwork were studying in Japan. The purpose of these follow-up studies was to examine the long-term impact of studying abroad from the perspectives of those Indonesian returnees who had studied and gained doctoral degrees in Japanese universities. It examined how the returnees interpreted and evaluated their international study 20 year later, and how they were and were not using what they had brought from Japan as they described and practiced their life and career in Indonesia.

In 2011, the author conducted ethnographic studies on those returnees of university faculty, whom she had known since her fieldwork in 1991-1992. There were six university professors whom the author interviewed. All of them had finished undergraduate programs in Indonesia and had completed master and doctoral programs in Japan, obtaining doctoral degrees. By 2011 two informants had already become professors and there were those who held some responsible positions in the university.

In 2012, the author conducted interviews on those returnees of a government agency, including the informants from previous follow-up studies in late 1990’s. Some informants had study experiences not only in Japan but also in other countries. Among the 18 informants interviewed, 10 had studied in Indonesia and Japan. 3 had studied in Indonesia, Japan, and another one, 2 had studied in Japan and another country. The remaining 3 had studied only in Japan, from undergraduate to graduate programs.

In 2013, the author conducted interviews on those university faculty members who had been to Japan and other countries, and those who were recent returnees from studying abroad. Among the 16

informants, there was much more diversity in the place of study. Besides the one who studied only in Indonesia and 4 who studied in Indonesia and Japan, 5 informants studied in Indonesia and another country, and 6 had studied in Indonesia, Japan, and another country.

In the follow-up studies of 2012 and 2013, the key informants from the fieldwork in 1991-1992 had helped the author in finding other returnees for interviews. Thanks to their kind cooperation and support, the author was able to have a number of interviews within the limited time of one to two weeks stay.

The questions asked in the interviews ranged from those during the time of studying abroad to the current life with family. For example, there were questions on the current work including positions and titles, educational and professional backgrounds, programs, activities, and relations during study in Japan (other countries), those aspects (beliefs, values, activities) which were brought from Japan (other countries of study), current contacts with the past place of study, and on family and children.

Interviews were conducted in one hour on the average, either in Indonesian or in Japanese, according to the informant's choice. After the informant's permission, the author took notes and recorded. After each question, based on the responses of informants, further questions and answers continued.

After the interviews, the author made records at the earliest possible time, either within the same day or the following day. The author went through those interview records many times, identifying those important points through the process. Further analyses were made, examining important points and issues such as those long-term influences of studying abroad.

In the following section, four points which became apparent through the analyses of the follow-up studies will be introduced, in attempts to clarify the long-term impact of studying abroad for those Indonesians who studied in Japan. The descriptions are made in a way so that the privacy of those informants who cooperated with the study will be protected.

4. Findings: Long-term Impact of Studying Abroad

4.1 Creating lab/ research community

There were those who were using what they had learned and brought from Japan. However, they were making selective choices in the way they would make use of their learning in their Indonesian context. Most noticeable was found among those informants who were university professors in mid-Java, in their teaching and advising of students in research.

One of the most interesting findings was that they made a system of lab community, so that students learn from each other during their research. They told the author that they created the system and practice it in teaching and advising students. Through their experiences in Japan as graduate students, the informants had learned the positive aspects of lab community, in which the professors and students work in groups and conduct research.

This was a new system and practice they started in respective fields and in their department after their return to Indonesia from Japan. It was different from the system in which the supervision and advising were done individually in Indonesia. There were those who made student groups or discussion seminars regularly. There was one case in which the informant made a spacious lab facility with open space for students and a mini kitchen, similar to the one he had experienced in his lab in Japan.

However, they were not merely taking everything from Japan. They did not take what they thought was not applicable in Indonesian context, such as the too strict senior- junior (senpai-kohai) relationship to the point of senior ordering and junior obeying. The relationship the informants created was more of a cooperative nature among students of different years. It became clear that they were selective in what they found valuable in making use of their learning from Japan.

4.2 Work style and ethics from Japan

Those returnees in a government agency worked as engineers or staff members, whose work were

linked to industry and other sectors. Their work environments were different from those who were university professors. When asked about what they had brought from Japan, those informants talked about the work style and interpersonal relations, such as team work and cooperation with colleagues. In addition, there were words and phrases related to work ethics, such as discipline, keeping promises, ganbaru (making the best efforts), working hard, responsibility, not giving up, which they said they had brought back from Japan.

One staff member who had spent ten years in Japan from undergraduate until graduate programs, together with two year work experiences in a Japanese company, kept the work style as in Japan in his contacts with Japanese companies and organizations on various projects he was involved. He was quick in response of e-mails and phone calls, whose work style was very different from those of his colleagues in the agency.

In addition, there were those informants who made comparisons of the work style of colleagues according to the country each studied. There were those who valued the work style of those who had similar backgrounds. The author's follow-up study took place around the time some returnees from Japan had gained some higher positions in the agency. One senior staff member made positive comments on those young staff members who come early and stay later in the office. He was making an evaluation based on Japan. It shows an example of the long-term impact of study abroad; those work styles from Japan were valued in this context where those from Japan held the power.

4.3 Influences of different teaching and research practices abroad

Those who had studied in other countries besides Japan had different experiences and had gained different perspectives in terms of education and work from those who had studied in Japan. For example, there were those from Japan who valued Japanese lab community style, such as professor-student relationship in which the professor takes responsibility and looks after the students. On the other hand, there were those who made critical comments on some Japanese practices such as strong power of professor and spending long hours in the lab.

The experience of studying abroad experiences continued to influence the returnees, which was also reflected in their beliefs and values in work.

4.4 Changes of higher education over time

There were changes taking place in Indonesian higher education, which became apparent in the follow-up studies. The number of graduate programs was increasing in Indonesian universities compared to before, allowing more Indonesian university faculties and professionals to seek advanced degrees inside Indonesia. As doctorate holders, there were returnees taking lead roles in those graduate programs in Indonesian universities.

It also concerned the availability of scholarships and the recent policies toward university faculties to have doctorate degrees. Those who gained the scholarships sought graduate education, whether it was in Indonesia or outside of Indonesia. In addition, there were those who were seeking graduate education in nearby Southeast Asian countries, whose higher education had become available and accessible for seeking advanced degrees.

One important change taking place in Japanese higher education became apparent in the follow-up study in 2013 from the story of one recent returnee from Japan. He had gone to an English graduate course in a Japanese university. The story of his experiences including those in his lab was very different from those stories of other informants who had gone to graduate programs in Japan.

There were some recent changes in the macro-level of higher education in Indonesia and Japan. Through the follow-up studies, it became apparent that these changes were making an impact on those who study abroad.

5. Discussions

Based on the above findings from the recent follow-up studies, several important issues will be

discussed in order to further examine the long-term impact of studying abroad for those international students.

5.1 Selective use of studying abroad experiences in work context

The follow-up studies have clarified some important influences of studying abroad after their return in their careers and activities. The cases of informants who have created a practice and system show the strong influence of studying abroad. At the same time, it is important to be aware of the initiative and selective choices made by the informants in creating such a system and practice, not merely following what they had experienced in Japan. Based on what they had learned abroad, upon returning home they made, as they believed, a new system of teaching and advising in research.

It must be remembered that it took some time before those informants could create such a new practice and system in their way in Indonesia. By the time of this follow-up study, they had to be in the position and power to make such changes in the departments or programs they were in at their university in Indonesia. It did not happen soon after their return from Japan in the late 1990's. At that time, they were trying their best to get settled in with family, trying to start their career as Doctors, engaging in various kinds of activities of teaching, research and other activities. Over a long period of time, the informants made their way in developing and making a system as they have received in Japan.

5.2 Influence of context and environment after studying abroad

The follow-up study in a university and a government agency provided important insights to the similarities as well as differences in the life and career of those who have gained experience in studying abroad. The focus was more on teaching and advising as university faculty professors, whereas the work ethics and styles and contexts were more in the focus for government employees. These reflected their respective careers. University faculties have teaching and research responsibilities toward students, among others, while government employees do not have teaching responsibilities on students, but more on working with colleagues. How the returnees valued and used their studying abroad experiences was different, but they had their own interpretation and meanings attached to their respective experiences of studying abroad and their respective contexts of work environment.

5.3 Diverse university system and international education

This paper has clarified, using the cases of Indonesian returnees, the differences in graduate education systems and practices that exist in Japan and in other countries, and how and what the influence could be over time and place for those Indonesians who experienced it as international students. These are very important issues which need to be explored more in detail from the perspectives of individual students.

Those different graduate education systems may make different learning experiences for those international students. What the long-term impact on their career would be after studying abroad is a very important issue to explore in international education.

5.4 Changes in higher education and their impact on studying abroad

The follow-up studies in the recent three years have shown also the changes taking place in Japanese universities as well as in Indonesian universities in twenty years. More development in graduate education programs in Indonesian universities as well as those changes in funding for advanced degree study was making the decisions and choices of Indonesian university faculty members for studying abroad different from twenty years ago.

In addition, there have been more Japanese universities which offer English courses and programs. These changes in the higher education system will influence the kinds of international study and experience of those who study in Japan. In addition, these changes may also influence further the life and career of Indonesian students over time and place.

These factors must be considered in the research on studying abroad if we are to clarify what is happening to those who study abroad and how this impacts those international students in the long-term perspective. Changes in programs, policies and systems in higher education are likely to result in different kinds of experiences while abroad, which will further have an impact on those individual students who do take part in gaining higher education as international and local students.

5.5 Challenges of future international education

Those who are in the position to make policies and practices of international programs in higher education need to be aware of these long-term impact factors of studying abroad. It is very important to take these factors into consideration in making policies and systems of studying abroad. It is important to learn the perspectives of those who actually do study abroad, together with both micro-macro-factors, for the further development of research on studying abroad and related areas of international education.

6. Summary and Conclusion

This paper has examined the long-term impact of studying abroad on those who had such experiences, based on the author's recent follow-up studies on those Indonesian returnees who had studied in Japan and who have positions at university and a government agency in Indonesia. It was found that there were those informants who had created their "Japanese" research system and practice, making use of their experiences as graduate students in Japan. It was also found that there were differences in the way their study experiences of Japan were described and used in their career, depending on the context and environment they were in. Furthermore, it became clear that there were different systems and practices which informants had experienced in their respective graduate programs in different countries. These could influence their views on studying abroad and further influence their beliefs, values, and activities in their career and work in Indonesia.

One of the important findings from the follow-up studies was the long-term influence of studying abroad in different systems and practices on research. How those research systems are taught and practiced in different programs of higher education institutions are important issues which need to be examined further in studying abroad as well as in higher education. The impact of different experiences in graduate research practices and activities will continue, crossing time and place, in the life and career of those who study abroad.

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