Personal growth and change on study abroad programmes: Managing expectations and maximising outcomes

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Abstract

The exploratory interview study presented in this thesis was conducted in a university in Japan, and investigates both outcomes related to personal growth and change as a result of participation in a study abroad programme, and how an institution can manage expectations and maximise experiences for participants. Prior to departure, study abroad students in many institutions around the world usually take part in a pre-departure training programme, though the quality of these programmes have been described as "woefully inadequate" (Jackson, 2008, p. 222). Drawing a link between the preparation programme and the outcomes achieved by participants, this thesis proposes a four-strand preparation programme aimed at maximising participant experiences on study abroad programmes.

The data for this exploratory interview study was collected in two semi-structured interviews with 16 participants, before and after participation in a study abroad programme, and was analysed using thematic analysis. The theoretical framework for this exploratory interview study was Transformative Learning Theory, a theory of adult learning which describes how a learner's perspective can be transformed. This begins with a moment of emotional stress, known as a disorienting dilemma, and through a process of reflection and testing of new perspectives, the learner's perspective can be transformed.

The themes found within the data identify some potential outcomes for participation in a study abroad programme, including a growth in understanding of Japanese culture, a change in understanding of stereotypes, and a growth in maturity. With regards to study abroad preparation, two themes were identified; a theme regarding sources of influence on participant expectations, and a theme related to participant perceptions of the current preparation programme in their institution.

The discussion of these themes found that prior to departure, participant expectations were fairly undeveloped, focussing generally on curriculum-related outcomes, and in some cases were unrealistic. Upon their return, some participants were able to identify ways in which the study abroad experiences had an impact upon their worldview and self-image, and it was found that social interaction during the study abroad programme plays a large role in these outcomes. Finally, it was found that unrealistic, ill-defined goals at the outset of the programme can cause participants to withdraw from social interaction once they are in the host country, thus impacting on outcomes related to personal growth and change.

As a result, the conclusion to this thesis recommends a four-strand curriculum which can help both Japanese and international institutions running study abroad programmes to manage study abroad student expectations and maximise their experiences. These four strands aim to prepare students for social interaction and reduce the possibility of withdrawal from social interactions by focussing on due diligence, language preparation, goal setting, and managing expectations.

Keywords: Study abroad, Outcomes of study abroad, Study abroad preparation, Intercultural competencies, Exploratory interview study

1.0 Introduction

This chapter will provide some background to the exploratory interview study presented in subsequent chapters, with the aim of establishing both theoretical and practical warrants for the study. The introduction is divided into three parts. The first will provide background to the exploratory interview study by looking at relevant literature on study abroad, defining the scope of the exploratory interview study, and providing some context on the university in which this exploratory interview study was conducted. This will be followed by an analysis of the current status of study abroad programmes in the research site. The final section will conclude with an overview of the exploratory interview study presented in this thesis.

1.1 Background

This section will present some background for the exploratory interview study, and is structured to go from a more general, global perspective, and ending with a more local focus. Therefore, part one will give a brief overview of research into study abroad, including some statistics on the geographical location for this study, Japan. The second section will give an overview of the scope of this exploratory interview study. This will be followed by profiles of the institution in Japan which was used for data collection and finally a brief profile of myself and my interest in study abroad research.

1.1.1 Study Abroad as an Area of Research

According to data from the OECD (2019b), study abroad has seen a massive growth in recent decades, from around 2 million students studying abroad in 1998 to over 5 million in 2019. This is due to the fact that study abroad experiences are seen as an important experience for students to gain intercultural competencies, allowing them to compete in a

globalised economy. Statistically speaking, the OECD (2019) adds that the largest number of internationally mobile students come from Asian countries, with China being the top contributor to this statistic. Furthermore, the top five destinations for internationally mobile students are the UK, America, Canada, Australia, and Japan.

The exploratory interview study presented in this thesis was conducted in Japan, and although Japan has been identified as a top *destination* for study abroad students (OECD, 2019), the numbers of Japanese students *going* abroad has been declining, particularly for longer-term programmes (Nowlan & Wang, 2018; OECD, 2016). This is despite initiatives by the Japanese government to promote study abroad programmes domestically, which is discussed in detail in section 2.1.3 and 2.1.4. Contrary to national trends, the research site has seen an increase in study abroad participation, and will be profiled in more detail later in this chapter.

Due to the growth in study abroad participation internationally (OECD, 2019), academics from a wide range of fields have taken to conducting research into study abroad, making study abroad research an interdisciplinary area of research. Some example studies from study abroad research include that of foreign language education and second language acquisition, looking at items such as foreign language fluency attainment (Wood, 2007). Research from other fields include research on the study abroad experience of trans and gender-expansive participants (Michl & Kracen, 2019), research on the impact of study abroad on graduate career paths (Jon, Shin, & Fry, 2020), and outcomes of participation in a study abroad programme including global citizenship development (Kishino & Takahashi, 2019).

Research from all of these areas contribute to addressing items identified for further research, such as this list of thirteen items created by the Association of International Educators:

1. Programming
2. Program mobility models
3. Experience types
4. Curriculum integration
5. Career integration
6. Technology
7. Host community impact
8. Institutional impact
9. Financial issues
10. Participation
11. Global citizenship
12. Push and pull factors
13. Institution type

(Ogden, 2015)

The exploratory interview study presented in this thesis covers issues related to *programming* and *experience types*. Specifically, it is focussed on identifying potential outcomes and how these are connected to individual experiences, as well as preparing students for the study abroad experience in order to maximise these outcomes.

Potential outcomes of participation in a study abroad programme can be grouped into four general themes, though the extent to which they have been attained can vary across different contexts. The first group is based on employment outcomes and are related to how the study abroad experience can impact upon post-graduation employment (Allen, Lofgren, & Brady, 2019; Jiang & Kim, 2019; Wolniak & Engberg, 2019). The second group is academic outcomes, such as language skill development or knowledge related to the specific area of study for the participant (Benthuysen, 2012; DeGraff, Slagter, Larsen, & Ditta, 2013; Lindsey Parsons, 2010). This is followed by cultural outcomes such as knowledge of the host country (Allen et al., 2019; Benthuysen, 2012; Lindsey Parsons, 2010; Tanabe & Kiad, 2019; Twombly,

1995). The final group is based on personal transformation, such as changes in perspectives and greater understanding of the self (Allen et al., 2019; Bathke & Kim, 2016; Benthuysen, 2012; Lindsey Parsons, 2010). These outcomes are described in further detail in section 2.2.1.

Research into study abroad preparation has described the current preparation programmes as inadequate, focussing only on logistical matters of visa applications and completing paperwork. There is a call in the literature for preparation programmes to focus more on helping students to set realistic goals, equipping them with language and intercultural communication skills to facilitate social interaction, alleviating pre-departure anxieties which may hinder social interaction, and clearly articulating the programme content to the participants (Jackson, 2008; Kato & Reeder, 2015; Salyers, Carston, Dean, & London, 2015; Sutton, 2019).

Research into the areas of both study abroad preparation programmes and outcomes of participation in study abroad has suggested the need to ensure that participants depart on their programme with realistic goals (Jackson, 2008; Salyers et al., 2015) in order to allow then to take concrete steps to work towards their achievement during the course of the programme and to avoid a sense of failure at the end of the programme (Larsen & Howell, 2018). However, further research is needed to investigate the connection between participant expectations, experiences during the programme, and outcomes of participation in a study abroad programme (Salyers et al., 2015).

By way of conclusion, the research within this exploratory interview study sits in an interdisciplinary area, with scope for contribution in a variety of areas. Of particular interest to this thesis are the areas of *programming* and *experience types* (Ogden, 2015), particularly preparation programmes and participant outcomes. In addition, by looking at the connection between these two under-researched areas, a further contribution can be made in identifying

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links between participant expectations, experiences during the programme, and outcomes of participation in a study abroad programme (Salyers et al., 2015).

1.1.2 Research Scope

As identified above, there are four groups of potential outcomes for participants in study abroad programmes; employment, academic, cultural, and personal transformation. The exploratory interview study presented in this thesis is focussed on outcomes related to personal transformation. In other words, how the study abroad experience can impact upon a participant's perspectives of themselves, their future, and the world around them. It will not cover additional potential outcomes, such as measuring participants' language or academic development, nor will it focus on the ways that study abroad impacted upon participants' career path after graduation. Though these areas are valid and important areas to research, as identified above, they are beyond the scope of this exploratory interview study in terms of time and methodology.

First of all, a longitudinal study of the length required to measure the impact of study abroad on the careers of the participants would be beyond the scope of this doctoral thesis to the time limitations for submission. In addition, measuring participants' language attainment would situate this exploratory interview study in the field of second language acquisition or linguistics, and would require a different set of measurement tools than the ones used. Therefore, they will not be covered in both the analysis and discussion later in the thesis.

1..1.3 University Profile

The exploratory interview study presented in this thesis was conducted at a private university in central Japan, with a student population of 4,894. The university is known in

Japanese as a *Gaidai*, a university of foreign studies which specialises in foreign language and culture. Degrees are offered in various foreign languages, including English, French and Chinese, as well as degrees in international business and British and American studies (Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, 2019b).

The mission of the university is stated to be "to develop students with genuine international and global perspectives" (Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, 2019a), which is not only achieved through the main degree programmes, but also through campus life and the large number of study abroad programmes offered to students. The university describes itself as having a "Global Campus" (Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, 2015a) with over 50% of the teaching staff, both full and part-time, being native speakers of foreign languages (Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, n.d.-b). In addition to foreign teaching staff, the "Global Campus" also hosts 162 international students on various programmes from full degrees to short-term study abroad programmes (Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, 2019b).

Alongside the focus on hosting international students and teaching staff on campus, the institution also offers a wide range of study abroad programmes and scholarships for domestic students to participate in. The university currently has partnerships with over 145 institutions from 27 countries around the world (Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, n.d.-c) which offer reciprocal student exchange programmes with domestic students from my institution.

These study abroad programmes remain very popular, with a high rate of enrolment. The following chart is created from publicly available data on study abroad enrolment at my institution from 2014-2018. No further historical data is publicly available at the time of writing.

Figure 1 – Study Abroad Enrolment at Research Site

YEAR	GENERAL STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMME ENROLMENT	FACULTY-LED SHORT-TERM STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMME ENROLMENT	TOTAL ENROLMENT
2018	342	536	878
2017	462	577	1,039
2016	387	526	913
2015	398	520	918
2014	281	462	743

(Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, 2015b, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019c)

By way of conclusion, study abroad plays an important part in the institution in which this exploratory interview study has been conducted. Not only is it the number-one ranked university in Japan for sending students abroad, but also has seen a growth in participation since 2014, contrary to national trends (Nowlan & Wang, 2018; OECD, 2016), making it an ideal place for research into study abroad within the Japanese context. As a leading university for study abroad in Japan, research conducted in this institution has the potential for contributing to policy and practice among other universities around Japan and beyond.

1.1.4 Researcher Profile

The area of study abroad is something which I have been interested in for many years. I have been living in Japan for eight years, working as an English teacher and curriculum designer for two departments in the same institution used for this thesis, profiled in section 1.1.3. In my time working at this institution, I have seen countless students of mine embark on study abroad programmes. In my experience, when students in my institution return from study abroad, a great number of them return as totally different people from when they departed. They come back more confident, mature, knowledgeable about the world, and able to engage in a much deeper level of conversation than they had previously been able to do.

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It is also common talk among the teaching staff to discuss how much of a positive effect the study abroad experience had on students who we share.

From my own experience living in Japan, and witnessing the positive effects of study abroad on my own students, I have developed a worldview that no matter what the field of study a person is engaged in, a period of time spent living in a foreign culture can profoundly impact upon the individual and is an invaluable experience I would recommend anyone take part in. Not only does this impact upon the bias I bring to this exploratory interview study, but it was also the main motivation for me to engage in this research area for my doctoral thesis.

Up to now, I only have personal and anecdotal experience in the positive effects of participation in a study abroad programme. I saw this thesis as an opportunity to deepen and develop my understanding of study abroad programmes through supervised research. Before embarking on this exploratory interview study, my thoughts were only assumptions based upon my experience, and the assumed knowledge held by my colleagues. By conducting this exploratory interview study, I wanted to be able to test this assumed knowledge, and make any adjustments needed, based upon evidence found in the exploratory interview study and my engagement with the wider literature on study abroad that I read in preparation for this exploratory interview study.

Finally, as an English language teacher, study abroad plays an important part in my duties each academic year. Students of foreign languages at university often have an opportunity to go and study abroad as part of the curriculum. As a teacher in the students' home institution, I play a part in advising them on study abroad programmes, helping those who choose to participate in one to prepare for the experience, and finally in designing and delivering courses aimed at students who are studying abroad. Therefore, I felt that focussing

on study abroad research for my thesis also had the potential to have an impact upon my practice as an English language teacher.

1.2 Analysis of Study Abroad Preparation Programmes at the Research Site

For students participating in study abroad programmes at my institution, there is a series of preparation steps they must go through. The initial stages involve two lectures organised within each department to outline the study abroad application process and to measure student interest in applying for a study abroad programme. This is then followed by an application process which is again handled by each department individually, though the procedure remains the same throughout. Finally, for all students who are accepted onto study abroad programmes, the international office organises a series of four lectures aimed at preparing the students for the study abroad experience. Since the first stage is aimed at participant recruitment, the following will focus on analysing only the application process and the preparation programmes.

The application process contains two main parts, document submission and screening, followed by an interview. Both of these stages are managed internally within each department, and the vast majority of applicants proceed past this stage. The application documents and screening are mainly aimed at checking the applicant's academic record, permission from parents/guardians, and health history. The interviews, however, are aimed at prompting applicants to begin considering certain aspects of their study abroad experiences. As a result, interviewers are given a series of recommended questions, though they are free to interpret or adapt these as they see fit. The interview is around ten minutes in length, and held in both Japanese and English. Example questions include:

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- Why do you want to study abroad?
- Have you ever been abroad? If so, have you experienced any trouble, and how did you solve it?
- How will you take advantage of your study abroad experience in the future?
- What kind of problems do you expect to encounter when you study abroad?
- Do you have any concerns/anxieties about studying abroad?

Once the student has been accepted onto a study abroad programme, there is a series of four orientation sessions, organised as follows:

1. Orientation 1 (60 minutes)
   a. Overview of the scholarship application documents
   b. Advice on what to prepare mentally and physically
   c. Advice on financial matters
2. Orientation 2 (60 minutes)
   a. Further information on scholarship application and documents
   b. Advice on choosing a programme (Regular, ESL, or mixed programmes)
   c. Information on English language exams
   d. Overview of host countries
   e. Goal setting
   f. How to research the host institution and courses
3. Study abroad 1 (60 minutes)
   a. Meeting with returnee students
4. Study abroad 2 (60 minutes)
   a. Writing emails in English
   b. How to contact the host institution

These sessions are organised by the international office and delivered to all participants in a lecture-style presentation, usually over a lunch break for one hour. Following these orientation sessions, students are then aided by members of the international office to complete the required paperwork for visa applications, flight reservations, and any further paperwork required by the host university.

This process, from the initial orientation to study abroad programme options, to application, to orientation sessions, to paperwork completion, and finally departure takes around four months, and is delivered twice a year. This is due to the fact that there are two possible departure times available for study abroad students in my institution, the first being at the end of semester one in August, and the second at the end of the spring holiday in April.

Section 1.1.1 highlighted literature on study abroad preparation which criticises study abroad preparation programmes as being inadequate. Literature suggests that in addition to a focus on paperwork completion, there should also be focus placed on items such as helping students to set realistic goals, equipping them with language and intercultural communication skills to facilitate social interaction, alleviating pre-departure anxieties which may hinder social interaction, and clearly articulating the programme content to the participants (Jackson, 2008; Kato & Reeder, 2015; Salyers et al., 2015; Sutton, 2019).

It could be argued that the current preparation programme in the institution does not meet the additional requirements identified in the literature. Content regarding language and intercultural communication training is not currently present in the programme, whereas all the other items are touched upon, but not in great depth. Alleviating pre-departure anxieties, for example, is included in the suggested questions for the interview during the application process. However due to the flexible nature of the interview, and the ten-minute time limit, this may not be covered in great detail if at all.

A similar argument could be made with regards to goal setting. It also forms a part of the interview process, receiving the same limitations as alleviating anxieties due to the limited time available and the flexibility of which specific questions are asked by the interviewers. Goal setting appears as part of the second orientation lecture, though when reviewing the material, some further limitations arise. As a lecture-based class, this does not allow for the participants to get feedback or help with their goals. This is further hindered by the time limit of 60-minutes, and the fact that goal-setting is only one small part of a much wider set of information to be covered.

Finally, the same issue arises with regards to clearly articulating the content of the programme to the participants. Again, this is covered in the second orientation lecture,

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though rather briefly. The second orientation lecture material contains some generalised information on different types of study abroad programmes, as well as brief profiles of common countries for study abroad participants. This is not fully surprising, since the lecture is being given to all study abroad participants in a sixty-minute session, so the information would need to be brief and generalised. However, the brevity and generalised nature of the information may not be sufficient from the perspective of the need to *clearly* articulate the content of the programme.

By way of conclusion, the current preparation programme at my university is focussed upon ensuring study abroad participants are getting enough support in helping them to choose a programme and destination, and helping them to complete all the necessary forms for the study abroad experience. However, with regards to recommendations from the existing body of literature on study abroad programmes, more can be done, particularly with regards to helping participants set goals and managing their expectations by clearly articulating the programme of the content.

1.3 Conclusion

Sections 1.1 and 1.2 provided background information with the aim of setting a warrant for the exploratory interview study presented in this doctoral thesis. Within the existing body of research on study abroad programmes, there have been calls for more research on both programming and individual experiences (Ogden, 2015), as well as calls for research to identify links between participant expectations, experiences during the programme, and outcomes of participation in a study abroad programme (Salyers et al., 2015). Therefore, though the exploratory interview study presented in this thesis was

conducted in the context of Japanese higher education, it can also contribute to a wider, international discussion on study abroad programmes.

In addition, since the research site is seeing an increase in study abroad participation, the university in which I am currently employed provides an ideal context for this type of exploratory interview study. In comparison to the existing recommendations within the body of literature on study abroad preparation programmes, there is room for improvement for the current way in which my institution prepares their students for study abroad. Therefore, not only are the findings presented here important to my own institution, but as an institution in which study abroad continues to grow in popularity, it provides my institution an opportunity to influence how study abroad programmes are administered in other Japanese universities and beyond.

The rest of this thesis will now present the research addressing these issues. Chapter two is a larger literature review looking in more detail at the geographical context of the exploratory interview study, Japan, as well as looking in more detail at the existing literature on study abroad research. Chapter three covers the methodological approach used, and justifications for design choices. Chapter four will present the findings of the exploratory interview study, followed by a discussion in chapter five to answer the research questions. Finally, chapter six will conclude by considering the practical applications of the findings, recommendations for future research, and my plans for disseminating the findings from this thesis.

2.0 Literature Review

This chapter will provide an overview of the literature relevant to the exploratory interview study presented in this doctoral thesis, identifying both key themes and gaps in the literature, as well as discussing the theoretical framework used in this exploratory interview study. Section 2.1 will begin by looking at the context of this exploratory interview study, Japanese higher education, followed by the Japanese government's attempts to internationalise universities, and then finally highlighting areas in which contributions could be made to the field of research. Section 2.2 will review the literature on research into the area of study abroad programmes and identify some gaps in the research which need to be addressed. Section 2.3 will look at the theoretical framework for this doctoral thesis, transformative learning, and provide justification for its appropriateness to use in research on study abroad programmes. Finally, the conclusion, section 2.4, will bring the preceding three sections together to provide a basis for this doctoral thesis and introduce the research questions designed to contribute to the existing body of knowledge in these three areas.

2.1 Higher Education in Japan

This first section of the literature review aims to give context to this thesis by discussing key themes in Japanese higher education. The first part investigates key perspectives on Japanese higher education and the emergence of the third wave of Japanese higher education. Following this will be a discussion of factors involved in the internationalisation of Japanese higher education and key governmental policies aimed at promoting internationalisation. The end of this section will look in detail at the role of study abroad in Japanese higher education.

2.1.1 Perspectives on Japanese Higher Education

To begin this section on perspectives on Japanese higher education, attention will focus on criticisms found in the literature. A common criticism levelled at Japanese higher education is the view towards university as a place of rest rather than a place of learning, resulting in a lack of educational standards and the predominance of educational credentialism.

Educational credentialism refers to the concept that the future socio-economic status, and therefore future employment opportunities, is based upon the level of *education* attained and the level of the *university* from which one graduates (Breaden, 2013; Y. Sugimoto, 2014). The reason for this focus on educational credentialism is often placed on Japanese employers who, during the bubble economy of the 1980's, hired graduates based on the institution an applicant graduated *from*, regardless of the subject knowledge or performance grades attained during their time in university. This resulted in a system in Japan where the top positions in industry are held by those who graduated from the top universities (Nagamoto, 2012).

The effect of educational credentialism has created a system where the most important time for a university student is during the university application process, where students compete in high-stakes entrance exams for a place in a higher level university (Breaden, 2013; Nagamoto, 2012), otherwise known as examination hell (Y. Sugimoto, 2014). This period is characterised by long hours both in school and in out-of-school *juku*, or cram-schools, intensely studying for the entrance exams (Y. Sugimoto, 2014) and has been described as a rite of passage for Japanese youngsters (Breaden, 2013).

Once the examination hell period is over and a position in a university is secured, student life is often described as that of a rest period or moratorium. This period is

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characterised by a focus on having fun, getting a part-time job, participating in clubs and societies, and taking a break before beginning full-time employment (Goodman, 2010; Y. Sugimoto, 2014). In an investigation into students' understanding of the purpose of university, McVeigh (2002) lists items such as having free time, growing up, travelling, and finding a boyfriend or girlfriend. He also characterises students as being "remarkably uninterested in their lectures" and "[devoting] a lot of time to clubs and circles" (p.216).

The attitude towards university life as a holiday, and a break in which students can grow up and pursue their own interests is reflected in governmental policy, where universities are encouraged not to give a large amount of out-of-class study to students. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (hereby, MEXT) recommends 45-minutes out-of-class study per one-credit class, per-week (MEXT, 2009).

The impact of this governmental policy, educational credentialism, and an attitude of university life as moratorium has been criticised for resulting in a university environment lacking in academic rigour (Breaden, 2013; C. Burgess, Gibson, Klaphake, & Selzer, 2010) where class attendance is the predominant method of assessment, rather than academic performance (Askew, 2011; McVeigh, 2002). In this environment, university professors have expressed more of an interest in conducting research than teaching (Arimoto, Cummings, Huang, & Shin, 2015), and university administrations holding qualified educators in lesser regard than seasoned academics (Houghton & Rivers, 2013).

This perspective on Japanese higher education has been criticised due to a lack of research in general on higher education in Japan and a lack of good qualitative data backing up the claims laid out above (Nagamoto, 2012). In addition, other academics take an alternative perspective on Japanese higher education which views the system in a state of flux. They view the description given above as representative of what they term the second

wave of Japanese higher education, and view the current period as being in transition into what has been termed the third wave of Japanese universities (Breaden, 2013; Goodman, 2010).

The third wave of Japanese universities is one which is characterised as moving away from a research-focussed university, representative of the second wave, to a teaching and learning centred university (Yamada, 2014). In the teaching and learning centred university, educational outcomes are clearly stated and worked towards, particularly with regards to transferable skills, useful for students' entry into the job market (Arimoto et al., 2015; Breaden, 2013; Yamada, 2014). These changes are driven by three forces; Japan's demographic change, a change in social attitudes to higher education, and governmental reform (Breaden, 2013).

The main change affecting the demography of Japan is that of the declining birth rate and the ageing society. According to statistics from the OECD (OECD, 2019a), the five-year average growth of the Japanese population sits at -0.2%, indicating a declining population. This is having a profound effect on universities as the recruitment pool is shrinking for new enrolments, forcing some smaller universities to close due to competitiveness for government funding and student enrolment (Breaden, 2013; Goodman, 2010; Hendry, 2013; OECD, 2009, 2016; Y. Sugimoto, 2014; Zhang & McCornac, 2013).

The second major driving force of the third wave of Japanese higher education is that of changing societal attitudes towards higher education. There is a growing recognition in Japanese society that university education is an important factor in the economy of a knowledge-driven society such as Japan's (MEXT, 2015; Y. Sugimoto, 2014). As a result, public scrutiny has focussed on the quality of education given to their young people, and the cost efficiency of higher education institutions (OECD, 2009; Yonezawa, 2002). This scrutiny is also

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beginning to be reflected in industry, where employers are lamenting the quality of graduates in terms of skills and beginning to employ graduates based not on where they graduated *from*, but what skills they have graduated *with* (Goodman, 2010; OECD, 2009), indicating a move away from educational credentialism.

The final driving force behind the third wave of Japanese universities comes from governmental reform. In response to the criticisms described at the beginning of this section, and the drivers behind the third wave of higher education, the government has launched a series of reforms aimed at quality assurance in higher education, bringing the focus to outcomes-based education and vocational training (Breaden, 2013; MEXT, n.d.-a, 2015; Ota, 2018; Yamada, 2014), including the creation of a quality assurance framework for higher education in Japan (MEXT, 2009).

The two perspectives of Japanese higher education presented above show it as being in a state of change from the second wave of higher education, characterised by the criticisms of university life as moratorium and a focus on academic credentialism, to the third wave, characterised by a focus on the quality of learning and teaching, and outcomes-based practice.

It could be argued that the current rate of change is too slow considering the pressure from demographic changes in Japanese society, but as a culture with a long-term orientation resistant to change (The Hofestede Centre, n.d.), this is to be expected. As is tension between the university leaders from the second generation, and the up and coming leaders from the third generation (Goodman, 2010). However, there are some small signs of changing attitudes at the ground level, where research into the professional identity of university professors shows a growing understanding of their role in providing vocational education for graduates (Arimoto et al., 2015).

2.1.2 Definitions of Internationalisation of Higher Education in Japan

Before looking at the internationalisation of Japanese higher education in the next section, time will now be spent on the term *internationalisation* and its definition in the context of higher education. This is due to the fact that the definition of the term is not yet agreed upon, and can mean different things to different people (Knight, 2007). Furthermore, Knight also suggests that internationalisation has different meanings across cultural contexts. Since the following section will discuss internationalisation in the Japanese context and uses a variety of sources from both within Japan and outside Japan, this section will discuss the definition of *internationalisation* from these varied perspectives.

Outside Japan, international scholars have offered a variety of definitions for *internationalisation*. To begin, Knight's (2007) definition was one of the most common and widely used definition in the literature on the internationalisation of higher education (Sanders, 2019). Knight (2007) considers the definition of *internationalisation* to be "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post- secondary education" (p.214). This definition highlights the centrality of an international perspective at all levels of higher education, from policy to mission and into practice and includes the term 'intercultural' to refer to the diversity within cultures and institutions.

In practice, Knight's (2007) definition highlights activities and strategies that institutions can use to internationalise. This includes, but is not limited to, student exchange programmes, foreign language programmes, study abroad programmes, international students on campus, intercultural events on campus, and visiting lecturers from other countries. At the policy level this includes adequate funding allocated for internationalisation

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activities, integration of internationalisation activities into institution-wide planning, and recognition of international expertise within faculty members.

Building on Knight's (2007) definition, Yemini suggests a further definition not intended to replace the one proposed by Knight, but rather to add to it. The definition proposed is written as "…the process of encouraging integration of multicultural, multilingual, and global dimensions within the education system, with the aim of instilling in learners a sense of global citizenship" (Yemini, 2015, p. 21). This definition contains elements of Knight's, while making the learners' own subjective process more central by focussing on the outcome of fostering global citizenship within the learners.

A further revision to Knight's (2007) was later proposed (de Wit, Hunter, Howard, & Egron-Polak, 2015) and has now become widely used by scholars of internationalisation of higher education. The definition is written as "the intentional process of integrating an **international**, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, **in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society**" (de Wit et al., 2015, p. 29). The emphasis in this quote is also in the original and highlights the additions made to Knight's (2007) definition. These additions were made to ensure that internationalisation of higher education is less "elitist" by focussing on learning outcomes and quality education for all students, not only the minority who are internationally mobile.

Within Japan, the definition of *internationalisation* is not clearly defined, leading to a variety of uses and definitions, sometimes in contradiction to one another. Goodman (2007) outlines two distinct definitions of *internationalisation* in Japan throughout the 1980s, when the term became commonly used. On the one hand, internationalisation was seen as an extension of nationalism in Japan and was used to strengthen Japanese national identity as

distinct from the rest of the world, with the aim of spreading the concept of 'Japaneseness' internationally. On the other hand, internationalisation was viewed as an opportunity to develop global understanding and communication between countries, focussing on similarities rather than differences between people.

River's (2010) analysis of more recent government policies on the internationalisation of higher education concluded that the current focus of internationalisation in Japanese higher education seems to be in line with the first of Goodman's (2007) descriptions, outlined above. In other words, Rivers sees internationalisation policies at being aimed towards reinforcing the idea of Japaneseness, rather than being aimed towards the kind of curriculum that contains learning outcomes from an international and intercultural perspective (de Wit et al., 2015; Knight, 2007).

Finally, Yoshida's discussion on the cultivation of 'Global Human Resources' (2017) in Japanese higher education presents a description of internationalisation within Japan that contains elements of de Wit's definition (de Wit et al., 2015; Knight, 2007), and River's (2010) view towards internationalisation in Japan as being more nationalistic in focus. Yoshida considers the cultivation of Global Human Resources as the main focus of internationalisation in Japan and offers a three-part definition; "I. Linguistic and communication skills; II. Self-direction and positiveness, a spirit for challenge, cooperativeness and flexibility, a sense of responsibility and mission; III. Understanding of other cultures and a sense of identity as a Japanese". In addition, Yoshida highlights both foreign language skills and study abroad experiences as being central to the creation of Global Human Resources, similar to suggestions on activities related to internationalisation from international scholars (de Wit et al., 2015; Knight, 2007).

In summary, a definition of Internationalisation of higher education in Japan focusses simultaneously on fostering in strong sense of national identity, while providing students with skills suitable for work on the global stage though a focus on foreign language skills and study abroad experience. With this in mind, the discussion will now turn to governmental policy on the internationalisation of higher education in Japan.

2.1.3 Internationalisation of Japanese Higher Education

Chapter 2.1.1 identified one source of pressure on Japanese higher education, the declining birth rate and ageing population. In addition, another problem facing Japan is the stagnation of the national economy following the post-war bubble years, resulting in a series of reforms aimed at internationalisation, including relaxing immigration laws for foreign workers to enter Japan (N. Smith, 2019) and the creation of the Cool Japan project to promote Japanese culture and business internationally (Banyan, 2014; Cool Japan Fund, 2017; METI, 2014; A. Sugimoto, 2013).

Higher education in Japan has also been impacted by governmental reforms aimed at internationalisation. Due to the stagnant economy and declining birth rate, Japanese universities can no longer rely on governmental funding and an endless pool of students as a source of revenue. Instead, they are having to rely on alternative sources of funding (Askew, 2011; C. Burgess et al., 2010; Goodman, 2010). Recognising this, the Japanese government has launched a series of reforms aimed at making Japanese universities competitive on the international stage and encouraging more foreign students to enrol in Japanese universities (Askew, 2011; MEXT, n.d.-d, 2015; Rivers, 2010; Tsuruta, 2013; Yonezawa, Akiba, & Hirouchi, 2009).

Traditionally, Japanese universities have been underrepresented in global rankings (Askew, 2011; Breaden, 2013), perhaps due to the criticisms outlined in section 2.1.1

(McVeigh, 2002). Therefore, in line with the third wave focus on the quality of teaching and learning, governmental reforms aimed at increasing international student enrolment have focussed on improving the competitiveness of Japanese universities (Askew, 2011; Rivers, 2010). The Top Global University Project is a project aimed at getting 13 of the best Japanese universities into the top 100 globally ranked institutions (MEXT, 2014; Yonezawa et al., 2009) through higher funding levels, educational reform and promotional activities.

In addition to the Top Global University Project is another reform aimed at increasing the number of foreign students enrolled in Japanese universities, known as the Global 30 project (MEXT, n.d.-d; Rivers, 2010; Yonezawa et al., 2009). The Global 30 Project tasks the same 13 universities from the Top Global University Project with playing a central role in international student recruitment by creating more partnerships with international universities, creating courses taught in English, and improving support for international students on campus (Shimomura, 2013).

These projects are partially built on a previous reform from 2008, aimed at getting 300,000 foreign students studying in Japan before 2020, though the 300,000 foreign students plan was not aimed specifically at universities (Rivers, 2010; Yonezawa, 2014). It appears as though the target may be met in 2020, with the total number of foreign students increasing from 123,289 in 2008, to 298,980 in 2018. With regards to higher education specifically, the number has increased from 118,498 in 2008, to 208,901 in 2018 (JASSO, 2009, 2019a).

The reforms outlined above are based on encouraging more foreign students to come *into* Japan and improving the international recognition of Japanese universities. However, this is only one part of the Japanese government's internationalisation strategy. There is another set of reforms aimed at internationalising *domestic* students enrolled in Japanese universities,

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principally the Project for Global Human Resource Development and the Inter-University Exchange Project, also known as the Re-Inventing Japan Project.

As part of the third wave of Japanese higher education, industry has been calling for more skilled graduates from Japanese universities (Goodman, 2010; OECD, 2009). In particular, they have been calling for graduates who are more able to compete in a globalised economy and bring innovative ways of thinking and working (C. Burgess, 2015; Shimomura, 2013; Tsuruta, 2013; Yonezawa, 2014). The Project for Global Human Resource Development aims at university and curriculum-level reforms to address this by developing a more globalised mindset and skillset in Japanese graduates (MEXT, n.d.-c).

The Re-Inventing Japan Project is the final governmental policy aimed at the internationalisation of domestic university students. In order to foster global human resources, the Re-Inventing Japan Project aims to increase international exchange programmes for Japanese students, aiming to increase the number of Japanese students studying abroad up to 120,000 by 2020, encouraging universities to set up new partnerships and courses with international universities, and ensuring domestic students can transfer credits between institutions for graduation purposes (C. Burgess, 2015; MEXT, n.d.-b; Ota, 2018). As with the number of international students coming *into* Japan, it seems that the target set in this policy may be met. At the time the policy was formed in 2013, there were 69,869 Japanese students who were studying abroad. This has increased to 105,301 students in 2017 (JASSO, 2019b).

A review of the literature on the impact of these reforms on the internationalisation of Japanese higher education reveals a series of key observations. Firstly, not only is there a lack of qualitative research on Japanese higher education more broadly (Nagamoto, 2012), but there is also a lack of research into the impact of the policies outlined above due to the

fact that they are relatively new and not enough time has passed to measure success (Yonezawa, 2014). As a result, much of the literature focuses on analysis of the policies as written and tends to be critical in tone, particularly when identifying tensions between the rhetoric, substance, and reality of internationalisation policies, in addition to criticisms based on the varied perspectives on internationalisation as described in section 2.1.2. The following discussion will outline these criticisms at the governmental level, societal level and institutional level.

At the governmental level, internationalisation policies have been criticised as little more than rhetoric aimed at calming concerns over the impact of the declining birth rate on Japanese society and containing very little substance on how these reforms can be achieved (C. Burgess, 2015; C. Burgess et al., 2010; Rivers, 2010). Furthermore, Askew (2011) points to the government cutting budgets as evidence of an apparent lack of intent behind the implementation of these internationalisation policies.

Further criticism can be found in an article in the New York Times (Fitzpatrick, 2014), which refers to Japan's education strategy as "ambiguous" due it containing nationalistic elements, an argument which can be understood from the international definitions of internationalisation (de Wit et al., 2015; Knight, 2007). This prompted a response from the Japanese government, more in line with the Japanese definition identified in section 2.1.2, claiming that in order to develop graduates with a global mindset, they must first understand themselves and their own culture (Shimomura, 2014).

This dialogue between the New York Times and the Japanese government highlights the tension between differing interpretations of internationalisation. On the one hand, writers from outside Japan, who favour an interpretation of internationalisation similar to Knight (2007) and de Wit et al. (2015) consider internationalisation to be incompatible with a

more nationalistic agenda (C. Burgess, 2015; Knight, 2007; Rivers, 2010), whereas the Japanese definition places importance on fostering a strong sense of 'Japaneseness' alongside the internationalisation process.

As a result, critics who think of internationalisation along the lines of of a more international definition consider internationalisation reforms in Japan more as a policy management exercise, rather than an attempt at internationalisation, since it aims to balance both nationalistic reforms and reforms aimed at internationalisation (Askew, 2011; de Wit et al., 2015; Knight, 2007; Rivers, 2010). This criticism may not be without merit, since a government has a duty to the voters, and Japanese culture, broadly speaking, has traditionally been much more inward looking and wary of internationalisation, more interested in maintaining traditional Japanese culture (Y. Sugimoto, 2014; Yoshida & Ohmori, 2017). This may explain the inclusion of more nationalistic ideas in the interpretation of internationalisation by the Japanese government.

This raises the second criticism of governmental policies aimed at internationalisation, the question over whether there is a public appetite for such measures. Though there is recognition that something must be done to address the declining birth rate, critics point out that throughout history Japan has isolated itself from the outside world (Y. Sugimoto, 2014). As a result, the view of internationalisation held by Japanese society has been described, at best, as unprepared or ambivalent (C. Burgess, 2015; Yoshida & Ohmori, 2017) and at worst anti-internationalisation and even xenophobic (Rivers, 2010).

Government and society are not the only targets of criticism in the literature. The same goes for industry, which on the one hand has been a driving force in the call for development of graduates with international skills (Goodman, 2010; OECD, 2009; Shimomura, 2013). However, it has been pointed out that they have been unwilling to change

traditional hiring practices, where graduates are not placed in positions relevant to their skillset. Instead, they go through a period of on the job training, working in various positions throughout their first few years of employment, eventually being placed wherever the company decides (Yonezawa, 2014).

Hiring practices towards international graduates by industry are also criticised in the literature, with commentators noting that industry often prefers to recruit domestic students, and considers foreign workers to be temporary (C. Burgess, 2015; Rivers, 2010; Study International, 2017). In turn, this raises questions about policies aimed at recruiting international students, since if there are few post-graduation opportunities for them, they may decide to study in a country where more opportunities are available.

The final targets of criticism are higher education institutions themselves, which have been painted as unwilling to recruit top-class talent in either the student body or academic staff, preferring to focus only on recruitment of domestic students and staff. They also identify the use of words like 'internationalisation', 'global', and 'global human resources' simply as marketing tools for domestic students, rather than an honest attempt at any of the internationalisation strategies of the types outlined in section 2.1.2 (Askew, 2011; de Wit et al., 2015; Knight, 2007; Ota, 2018; Rivers, 2010; Tsuruta, 2013; Yonezawa, 2014). Finally, some academics have identified a feeling of scepticism towards internationalisation in Japanese university staff and students, causing a reluctance to buy in to the governmental policies described above (Ota, 2018; Tsuruta, 2013).

Tsuruta (2013) reminds us that when considering the policies outlined above, we should consider the context in which these policies were announced. Therefore, when looking at the impact of these policies on university campuses, we should acknowledge that Japanese higher education is in a process of moving from the second wave to the third wave of

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universities, causing some tension between the old system of education and the new system (Goodman, 2010). This tension is reflected in the response to internationalisation policies, where staff and students are seen to be reluctant to encourage more of a focus on improving the quality of education, with outcomes-based assessment and a focus on more time spent on studying for students (Askew, 2011; Yonezawa, Ishida, & Horta, 2014).

The criticisms and policies outlined in this section might also be considered in the same way. As tensions arise in the transition between the second wave and third wave of Japanese higher education, so does tension arise in governmental attempts at internationalisation. Tensions between nationalistic policy and internationalisation policies, tensions between a traditionally inward-looking society and one which needs to open its doors to fill the gaps in the workforce caused by a declining birth rate, and tensions in industry between traditional employment and business practices which were equally inward-looking but now need to expand and be competitive on the international stage to aid in Japan's stagnant economy.

2.1.4 Study Abroad in Japanese Higher Education

Study abroad is seen as a key part of the internationalisation of higher education, equipping participants with global knowledge and skills that they can use when they enter an increasingly globalised workforce (Altbach, 2007; Altbach & Knight, 2007; Knight, 2004). This has been reflected in policies from the Japanese government aimed at getting domestic students to study abroad during their time in university (C. Burgess, 2015; MEXT, n.d.-b; Ota, 2018).

In terms of impact, these policies seem to be having little effect. The numbers of domestic Japanese university students going to study abroad has been decreasing overall (Nowlan & Wang, 2018; OECD, 2016), with a large decrease in students opting to study abroad

for longer than six months, and an increase in interest in short-term programmes of less than six months (Ota, 2018). Ota goes on to comment that the change in focus to short-term study abroad programmes is not very desirable due to the fact that recommendations from business leaders and the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications recommends a period of six months or more abroad.

The reasons for this increase in short-term study abroad programme enrolment can be traced back to traditional views of higher education from the second wave of Japanese higher education. University was seen as a place for a holiday, with emphasis placed on having fun, including getting chance to travel (Goodman, 2010; McVeigh, 2002; Y. Sugimoto, 2014). Ota (2018) adds that alongside getting the chance to travel, students also view participation as an opportunity to gain study credits, rather than gain skills which would be beneficial in their future employment.

In addition to the effect of the second wave attitudes to education, students' lack of interest in gaining skills through participation in study abroad can also be explained from the point of view of post-graduation employment. As noted above, though industry has identified the need for graduates to enter the workforce with a greater skillset, employment practices are yet to reward those graduates who take the time to graduate with said skills (Goodman, 2010; OECD, 2009; Shimomura, 2013; Yonezawa, 2014).

Another hangover from the second wave of Japanese higher education is the lack of focus on quality assurance and assessment, or in other words a need for universities to focus more on outcomes of their curricula (Goodman, 2010; MEXT, n.d.-d; OECD, 2009; Rivers, 2010; Shimomura, 2013; Yonezawa et al., 2009). Study abroad is not exempt from this hangover, with some researchers considering institutional attitudes to study abroad in line with students' attitudes, giving only superficial assessment of the international experience for

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participants on study abroad programmes, rather than assessing actual outcomes (Yonezawa, 2014).

To conclude, universities are failing to provide students with meaningful study abroad experiences, viewing study abroad only superficially as an opportunity for students to take a break and visit a foreign country. As a result, study abroad enrolment has been decreasing in Japan, with more of a focus being placed on short-term programmes, rather than long-term programmes. In line with governmental reforms, more focus should be given to meaningful outcomes which will aid in the development of global human resources as desired by governmental policy and industry leaders.

2.1.5 Concluding Remarks

This section has painted a picture of Japanese government, society and higher education as being in a state of transition. Driven by demographic changes due to the declining birth rate, all areas of society are looking to internationalisation as a way to overcome the challenges that lie ahead. Governmental policy and the new third wave of Japanese higher education are attempting to address these concerns, though tensions exist between the old and the new. For Japanese universities, there is a need for more focus on the quality of education provided, including a focus on outcomes-based education and assessment, including study abroad, where students can gain the skills which will be needed in a more internationalised society.

For academics looking at Japanese higher education, this situation provides many opportunities for research. Not only is there a gap in qualitative research for Japanese higher education in general, but there is a lack in research on the impact and implementation of governmental policy for the internationalisation of Japanese higher education. In addition to this, research on outcomes-based assessment can help university policymakers and educators

to design programmes which are better suited for the third-wave of Japanese higher education and the implementation of new governmental policies.

The next section of this literature review will look at current research on study abroad programmes. It will focus on the outcomes of study abroad programmes and examples of good practice in delivering programmes to maximise outcomes for participants.

2.2 Study Abroad

Calls for research into study abroad can be found in publications going back to 1995 (Whalen, 1995), with a list of under-researched areas being developed since the turn of the millennium (Ogden, 2015; Szekely & Klahr, 2009; The Forum on Education Abroad, 2015). Among the items identified for further research are, the outcomes achieved by study abroad participants, participant expectations of these outcomes, and how study abroad administrators can maximise the outcomes and manage participant expectations of study abroad programmes. The following sections will discuss recent research into each of these three areas.

2.2.1 Outcomes of Participation in Study Abroad

This section on outcomes will begin with a discussion on potential outcomes of participation in study abroad programmes before turning to factors influencing these outcomes and will then end with a discussion on alternative developmental paths not covered in the main discussion.

A core outcome in relation to study abroad research is that of intercultural competence (Watson & Wolfel, 2015), though it has been noted that many other terms have also been employed to discuss similar concepts (Jackson, 2018). Similarly, there are various definitions and models of intercultural competence which although they contain some similar

elements, the way in which different elements are emphasised differentiate them. Commonly referenced models include Byram's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence, Fantini's Intercultural Competencies Dimensions, The Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, The Intercultural Development Continuum, and Deardorff's Process Model of Intercultural Competence Development (Deardorff, 2009; Jackson, 2018).

These models have come under criticism for being too rigid in their concept of the boundaries of culture, for viewing cultures as much more homogenous than they are, and for being too scientific in the logical steps needed for an individual to reflect and grow from intercultural encounters. However, it has also been noted that even with these criticisms in mind, some teachers and researchers can find them useful to guide practice. An example of this is that international educators in higher education often refer to Deardorff's (2006, 2009, 2015) process model of intercultural competence when assessing outcomes of international education (Jackson, 2018). With this in mind, this chapter will also use Deardorff's model to frame the discussion of intercultural competence in study abroad.

Deardorff (2006, pp. 247–248) defines intercultural competencies as "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes". In Deardorff's process model of intercultural development (2006, 2009, 2015), the individual elements of knowledge, skills and attitude from this definition form the entry point to the process. These elements then lead firstly into internal outcomes, which are a shift in the individual's frame of reference. Through experience with intercultural interactions, these internal outcomes lead into external outcomes, which includes as effective communication and behaviour in an intercultural situation. This model can be seen below.

Figure 2 – Process Model of Intercultural Competence

Individual

Attitudes:
Respect (valuing other cultures); Openness (withholding judgment); Curiosity & discovery (tolerating ambiguity)

Knowledge & Comprehension:
Cultural self-awareness, deep cultural knowledge, sociolinguistic awareness
Skills: To listen, observe & evaluate; To analyze, interpret & relate

Process Orientation

External Outcome:
Effective and appropriate communication & behavior in an intercultural situation

Internal Outcome:
Informed frame of reference shift (adaptability, flexibility, ethrnorelative view, empathy)

Interaction

(Deardorff, 2006, 2009, 2015)

Research into study abroad outcomes has identified potential positive effects on the elements of attitudes, knowledge and comprehension, and skills, which are key for both the internal and external outcomes in Deardorff's (2006, 2009, 2015) process model of intercultural competence development. The first element in the model is *attitudes*, which contains the attitudes of respect, openness, curiosity and discovery as the key features of this element. Development in these attitudes are referenced in research finding study abroad participants returning from study abroad with broadened horizons, greater intercultural curiosity, open-mindedness, awareness, empathy, and a more flexible attitude to life (Allen et al., 2019; Benthuysen, 2012; Lindsey Parsons, 2010; Walsh & Walsh, 2018).

The second area on Deardorff's (2006, 2009, 2015) process model covers both knowledge and comprehension, and skills. Knowledge and comprehension is comprised of cultural self-awareness, deep cultural knowledge, and sociolinguistic awareness.

Deep cultural knowledge refers to knowledge of the foreign culture beyond that of surface culture such as food and greetings, and into the social, historical and political context of the culture (Deardorff, 2006). In the areas of cultural self-awareness and deep cultural knowledge, participants have reported a greater knowledge of the host country and a greater cultural self-awareness (Benthuysen, 2012; Lindsey Parsons, 2010), as well as a greater understanding of cultural differences, including some elements of deep culture (Allen et al., 2019; Shiri, 2015a; Walsh & Walsh, 2018).

Sociolinguistics is the study of the interplay between language use and the social context in which it is used (Edwards, 2013). In the case of study abroad outcomes, some growth in sociolinguistic awareness has been identified, such as the development of both receptive and expressive abilities with regards to identity and intentions (Lasan & Rehner, 2018), and development of sociopragmatic awareness (Magliacane & Howard, 2019; Shiri, 2015b).

Finally, Deardorff's model (2006, 2009, 2015) also covers the skills needed for development in intercultural competency. Generally speaking, they are the skills required to reflect on and learn from intercultural encounters. These skills cover the need to first listen, observe and evaluate the encounter. Followed by the skills of analysis and interpretation to make sense of the encounter, and finally the ability to relate the results of this reflective process.

In addition to outcomes related to intercultural competence development, there have also been outcomes identified in terms of career development and academic outcomes.

Career development includes outcomes such as the study abroad experience shaping participants' career goals, helping participants gain a position in a relevant field, and as a result gaining higher levels of job satisfaction (Allen et al., 2019; Jiang & Kim, 2019; Wolniak & Engberg, 2019). However, it has also been shown that it has little effect on career earnings and employment possibilities in the host culture (Allen et al., 2019; Jiang & Kim, 2019; Wolniak & Engberg, 2019). In terms of academic outcomes, research has suggested that a study abroad period can have an impact on certain aspects of second-language skills (Benthuysen, 2012; Lindsey Parsons, 2010), and gains in knowledge for other academic subjects, such as design.

Up to this point, the discussion on potential outcomes of participation in a study abroad programme has identified outcomes which could be seen as desirable or positive in nature. However, the literature also points to alternative developmental pathways, resulting in less pronounced, less desirable, or even negative outcomes. This is important to note, since this research highlights the fact that outcomes from participation in a study abroad programme are not guaranteed through participation alone and that the outcomes are not always as desired by either the participant or other stakeholders in the study abroad programme.

From the perspective of intercultural competence development, rather than participants developing the knowledge and skills of openness, respect, a perspective of ethnorelativism, and a deep knowledge of culture (Deardorff, 2006, 2009, 2015), some research has found participants returning from their study abroad with negative impressions of the host culture, reinforced stereotypes, and less openness or flexibility to the unknown (Ellwood, 2011; Tanabe & Kiad, 2019; Twombly, 1995). The same can be said for the development of sociolinguistic development, which is not always guaranteed as sustained

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growth is dependent upon the participant having enough second language ability during the programme (Lasan & Rehner, 2018), and any development addressed and built upon on the participants' return to their home culture to ensure gains are not lost (Larsen & Howell, 2018).

Furthermore, as highlighted in Deardorff's (2006, 2009, 2015) process model of intercultural competency development, attitudes of respect, openness, curiosity and discovery are important factors to consider in terms of achieving any outcomes. This is due to the fact that through these attitudes, participants can open themselves up to opportunities for social interaction, which is considered key for development of many of the outcomes mentioned above (Ellwood, 2011; Tanabe & Kiad, 2019; Watson & Wolfel, 2015). For example, a participant who locks themselves away in a dorm room without engaging in social interaction is more likely to return home with a negative view of the host culture, whilst having even a single acquaintance from the host culture can have a profound impact on the participant's view of the host culture (Twombly, 1995; Whalen, 1996).

Alongside the attitudes held by the participant, it is also important for a study abroad programme to contain elements that encourage, support and train students in critically reflecting on their experiences (Jackson, 2018). This is particularly important from the perspective of intercultural competencies, since critical reflection can promote better understanding of cultural similarities and differences and can foster intercultural communication skills (Wilkinson, 2014). Furthermore, critical reflection is also a key component in the transformation of perspectives and frames of reference (Moak, 2020), another component of Deardorff's model (2006, 2009, 2015).

Finally, another important consideration is the willingness of others to engage in any social interaction with the study abroad participant. For example, the benefits that can be gained from a homestay experience can rely on the willingness of the homestay family to

engage with the study abroad participant. Homestay experiences can be rich experiences to learn both language and deep culture if the homestay family spends time interacting with the homestay student, though these experiences can be lacking if the homestay family is not (Jackson, 2018; Kinginger, 2015).

This section has highlighted many of the potential outcomes that can be gained through participation in a study abroad programme. However, these outcomes are not guaranteed only through immersion in a foreign culture, and the degree to which the outcomes are gained can vary due to a variety of external factors. The next section will now turn to the participant perspective on study abroad outcomes and discuss the types of outcomes desired by participants in study abroad programmes.

2.2.2 Participant Expectations of Outcomes from the Study Abroad Experience

The literature reviewed for this section is based on research from a variety of programme types, locations, and participant nationalities. However, in terms of participant expectations there is little variance in terms of what has been found. They can broadly be grouped into four areas; employment, academic, cultural, and personal transformation.

Expectations for employment outcomes are based upon employment opportunities after graduation (Bikos, Manning, & Frieders, 2019; Nghia, 2019; Salyers et al., 2015; Walsh & Walsh, 2018). For some participants, this includes networking in the host culture with the aim of living and working there after graduation. It also covers areas such as increasing employability in the participant's own country due to the international skills and experience gained from living in a foreign country (Zhai, Gao, & Wang, 2019).

Expectations for academic outcomes are those based around the subject area the participants major in, and outcomes associated with knowledge related to that field (Nilsson & Ripmesster, 2016; Walsh & Walsh, 2018; Zhai et al., 2019). Some examples from the

literature include foreign language majors hoping to improve their second language skills (Badstübner & Ecke, 2009; Liu, 2013; Salyers et al., 2015) or design majors hoping to learn more about the history of design in the host culture (Larsen & Howell, 2018). These are most commonly associated with the academic content of the programme, since participants tend to use their major as a consideration when selecting a study abroad programme to participate in.

Expectations for cultural outcomes are related to interaction with the host culture of the study abroad programme (Liu, 2013; Walsh & Walsh, 2018). These types of outcomes focus on things such as learning more about the host culture and broadening horizons (Bikos et al., 2019; Lewis, 2016; Nilsson & Ripmesster, 2016). It also contains a social aspect, like making friends with people from the host culture (Nghia, 2019) and being able to socialise in ways that perhaps the participant is unable to do in their own culture (Badstübner & Ecke, 2009; Lewis, 2016).

An observation to make on these desired outcomes is how they compare to the items in Deardorff's (2006, 2009, 2015) process model of intercultural competency development, which highlights the need for the exploration of deep culture, not surface culture such as food and greetings. In some cases (Bikos et al., 2019), it is unclear what depth of knowledge participants are seeking, since it only reports 'cultural knowledge'. However, some research is much more specific and references aspects of deep culture such as an interest in politics and cross-cultural topics (Lewis, 2016), indicating that in some cases, students are motivated to learn about the host culture in a manner conducive to intercultural competency development.

The final group of expectations for outcomes are those based on personal transformation (Bikos et al., 2019; Liu, 2013; Walsh & Walsh, 2018). These are personal

changes and are not well defined prior to departure, but participants generally expect a profound impact on themselves and the way they view the world (Salyers et al., 2015). Some more well-defined aspects include a growth in confidence or a deeper understanding of themselves.

Of the four groups of expectations outlined above, some research has tried to identify which are more popular among study abroad students. Though they are the least well-defined, research has indicated that cultural outcomes and personal transformation are more desired, while academic and employment outcomes, though sometimes considered, do not rate as popular in most cases (Badstübner & Ecke, 2009; Lewis, 2016; Walsh & Walsh, 2018).

Research conducted on the advertisement of study abroad programmes gives us some indication as to why this may be. The research looked at images in study abroad programmes and identified three types of image and the possible meaning behind them. The first was *jumping*, showing study abroad as a fun, social adventure. The second group was *horizon gazing*, which shows study abroad as being a time for contemplation, growth, and transformation. Finally, there is the group labelled as *arms wide*, indicating achievement, victory, and transcendence. In essence, promoting study abroad not only as an opportunity for academic and employment growth, but personal transformation too (Miller-Idriss, Friedman, & Auerbach, 2019).

Referring back to the two most common expected outcomes, an overlap between the images in advertisement and the expected outcomes can be seen. Images displaying *jumping* relate to social outcomes, having fun, going on an adventure and meeting new people. Images showing *horizon gazing* and *arms wide* are related to outcomes for personal transformation, achievement, and transcendence. Though research has not proven the causes behind this

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overlap, it is likely to be a case of advertising both reflecting and shaping the expectations of study abroad participants (Glass, 2019; Miller-Idriss et al., 2019).

Due to there being some overlap between participant expectations and media advertising, there are some dangers that present themselves. Participants sometimes begin the study abroad programme with unrealistic expectations (Jackson, 2008), something which may result in participants feeling their expectations have been unfulfilled upon completion of the programme (Salyers et al., 2015), therefore more realistic and well defined goals may have a stronger impact on outcomes (Larsen & Howell, 2018). This has resulted in some calls for professors and study abroad coordinators to not only ensure the outcomes of participation in study abroad programmes are clearly expressed to potential participants (Sutton, 2019), but also that these expectations are managed in order to make them more realistic (Jackson, 2008).

The impact of unfulfilled expectations on participants of study abroad programme has not been well researched, leading to calls for more research (Nilsson & Ripmesster, 2016). More generally speaking, there has also been calls for investigations into not only unfulfilled expectations, but the interplay between expectations, experiences, and outcomes (Salyers et al., 2015). The third and final section of this review of study abroad research will turn to how institutions can manage the study abroad experience to maximise these outcomes and manage student expectations.

2.2.3 Managing Expectations and Maximising Experience for Participants in Study Abroad Programmes

Literature on study abroad management highlights the importance of a well-structured support programme at all stages of the study abroad experience, with pre-departure training, ongoing support during the programme, and a post-study abroad

programme for critical reflection (Khanal & Gaulee, 2019). This section of the literature review will look at each stage of the programme in turn, beginning with the pre-study abroad training programme.

Pre-study abroad training programmes have been described as "woefully inadequate" (Jackson, 2008, p. 222) in preparing participants for the experience. The focus currently tends to only be on logistical matters such as visa applications, buying travel tickets, and completing paperwork. It has been suggested that much more is needed in the pre-departure stages, with a programme ideally beginning around 12-18 months prior to departure (Salyers et al., 2015) and focussing on more than just logistical matters.

Section 2.2.2 outlined the most common expectations with regards to outcomes by students, and described how some participants may have unrealistic goals. However, some researchers consider it critical in the pre-departure preparation to have participants reflect upon their goals to make sure they are grounded, realistic, and broken down by the topics outlined in section 2.2.2 in order to foster achievement (Jackson, 2008; Salyers et al., 2015). This is important because clear goals allow participants to take concrete steps towards their achievement during the programme, while those with less well-defined goals have nothing to work towards (Larsen & Howell, 2018).

In addition to goals, it is also recommended in the literature that steps are taken in the preparation programme to help students plan how they will work towards them. This is particularly true with regards to skills needed to socialise with members of the host culture, something which is considered integral for social outcomes and personal transformation outcomes (Badstübner & Ecke, 2009). This means not only equipping students with foreign language and sociolinguistic skills (Deardorff, 2006, 2009, 2015; Jackson, 2008), but also social and cross-cultural skills and knowledge to help them integrate into the host culture outside

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the classroom (Kato & Reeder, 2015). Finally, it is also important for the pre-departure programme to focus on alleviating some anxieties which may impede on the social aspects of study, such as fears of discrimination and the unknown (Sutton, 2019).

In order to help combat unrealistic expectations it is also important to ensure the content of the programme is clearly articulated to participants, and that they are able to have a clear picture of what the experience will be before they leave. An example would be a group of Japanese students taking an English language programme, but leaving with the expectation that their classroom will be full of native speakers to practice with (Kato & Reeder, 2015). This is, of course, unrealistic since native English speakers do not need to take an English language class. Another example is a group of students studying for five weeks in Britain, with the expectation of acquiring a full British accent, something which is unachievable in such a small period of time (Badstübner & Ecke, 2009).

A further recommendation for pre-departure programmes is related to personal transformation. Considering this is one of the main images sold to students in study abroad advertising (Miller-Idriss et al., 2019), and is one of the more common expected outcomes, special attention needs to be given to helping participants be aware of how transformation can be achieved. As described above, research is revealing that the social aspect of the study abroad programme plays an important part in participant transformation. It has found that just being exposed to a foreign culture does not result in transformation (Pellegrino, 1998) and neither do gains in linguistic and cultural knowledge (Tanabe & Kiad, 2019), it is *interaction* with the host culture that is key (Badstübner & Ecke, 2009; Ellwood, 2011). Therefore, as mentioned above, participants need to be exposed to the importance of social interaction in their own transformation and how or where to find these moments of social interaction (Jackson, 2008; Kato & Reeder, 2015).

During the programme, recommendations include provisions for structured interaction with the host culture (Jackson, 2008). This could be through field trips, guest lectures and event days. Special care must be taken to help participants meet their first acquaintance in the host culture, since this is often the gateway for further social interaction and the building of a network of friends and acquaintances. A further recommendation from the literature is to have a club where students from the home institution and the study abroad students can have an opportunity to meet and take part in organised activities to promote social interaction (Fayzullina, 2019).

These social interactions alone, however, are not enough to prompt learning, especially from the perspective of intercultural competence development and personal transformation. The research on study abroad has shown that guided critical reflection is an important component of learning from these interactions and can take many forms. Examples of critical reflection from the literature include participant diaries using prompts to guide the reflection, support from a personal tutor, group discussions, and summary reflection papers. Through these reflective efforts, many of the outcomes outlined in section 2.2.1 have been identified, such as changes in perspectives and growth in intercultural competencies (Elverson & Klawiter, 2019; Moak, 2020; Roberts, Raulerson, Telg, Harder, & Stedman, 2019).

Post-programme, as described above, the literature recommends that a programme promoting further reflection should be held. Research has suggested that for gains made during the study abroad programme, they quickly fade if not immediately used and built upon (Ackers, Ackers-Johnson, Ahmed, & Tate, 2019). In addition, participants often feel a period of reverse-culture shock upon returning to their home country, which can be exacerbated by personal transformations. The person who left the home country is not necessarily the person

who comes back, and a period of reflection helping them to make sense of their experience is needed in the post-study abroad programme (Jackson, 2008; Moak, 2020).

2.2.4 Concluding Remarks

This section has highlighted some of the themes in study abroad research; potential outcomes as a result of participation in a study abroad programme, participant expectations on outcomes, and approaches to maximising these outcomes. Though there has been some effort to research these areas independently, more research is needed, especially with regards to how these three different areas influence each other.

This kind of research could be particularly beneficial to my own context working in a higher education institution in Japan. As described in section 2.1, study abroad is a big part of governmental initiatives and policies related to internationalisation in Japan. In addition, the so-called third-wave of Japanese higher education is bringing a new focus on outcomes of higher education, with the aim of equipping graduates with the skills they need to enter a globalised job market. A piece of research focussing on study abroad could contribute not only to the literature in the area of study abroad, but also to the area of Japanese higher education.

Throughout this section of the literature review, the word 'transformative' has been frequently used to describe the impact of study abroad programmes. This is reflective of the literature on study abroad which explicitly uses this phrase repeatedly when describing outcomes of participation in a study abroad programme or the marketing materials used to recruit participants for a programme.

With regards to a theoretical framework to use when investigating outcomes of participation in study abroad, the use of the word 'transformation' points the researcher towards a very specific theory known as Transformative Learning Theory, created by Jack

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Mezirow (Mezirow, 2000; Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). Transformative Learning Theory is a framework designed to describe how one's perspective or identity can be transformed through experience. The next section of this literature review will discuss Transformative Learning Theory and its suitability as a theoretical framework for research into outcomes on study abroad programmes.

2.3 Transformative Learning

The theoretical framework chosen for this piece of research is the theory of transformative learning. This section of the literature review will present a critical review of literature on Transformative Learning Theory and present an argument for why it may be useful in helping to understand the link between experiences on study abroad programmes and the outcomes gained by participants.

2.3.1 Overview of Transformative Learning

Transformative Learning Theory is a theory of adult education first proposed by Jack Mezirow in the 1970s (Mezirow, 2000; Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). It looks beyond traditional forms of knowledge acquisition and aims to show how adult learners consciously make meaning based on experience, reflection and open dialogue with others (Kiely, 2004; Seel, 2012). Since it was first proposed, the theory has largely remained unchanged and it has become a central theory in the field of adult education today (Howie & Bagnall, 2013).

Transformative Learning Theory is based around a model which describes the process through which adult learners go, resulting in a transformed perspective. It begins with a challenge to one's existing assumptions, knowledge or frame of reference, known as a disorienting dilemma, and if the process is followed through to the end, results in a transformation of said perspective. The model consists of the following ten steps:

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1. A disorienting dilemma
2. Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt or shame
3. A critical assessment of assumptions
4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
6. Planning a new course of action
7. Acquiring of new knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
8. Provisional trying of new roles
9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective

(Mezirow, 2000, p. 22)

The types of transformation as outcomes of this model are varied. Generally speaking they can be epochal, fast large-scale transformation, or smaller, incremental transformations that take place over a longer period of time (Howie & Bagnall, 2013). Specific domains have been identified for transformation and can be characterised in different ways. Saxena (2019) talks about *ways of knowing* and describes instrumental transformation, *knowing that*, communicative transformation, *knowing how*, and emancipatory transformation. Alternatively, Seel (2012) talks about psychological, convictional, and behavioural transformation. Psychological transformation refers to transformation in the understanding of oneself, convictional transformation refers to a revision of belief systems, and behavioural transformation refers to a change in lifestyle. A final way of describing transformation is found in Sterling (2014) who describes potential transformations as either elaborating existing frames of reference, learning new frames of reference, transforming points of view, or transforming habits.

Though there are many ways to express the type of potential transformations as a result of Transformative Learning Theory, ultimately there is little difference in the actual *meaning*. These definitions describe transformations in *perspective* and understanding. Understanding of ourselves, our beliefs and habits, and our understanding of the world

around us and how it works. In order to achieve these transformations, there are some key concepts central to the Transformative Learning Theory; disorienting dilemmas, critical reflection, and critical dialogue.

Disorienting dilemmas are important because they begin the entire process of transformation. Though an exact definition of a disorienting dilemma is yet to be formed (Howie & Bagnall, 2013), there is some agreement in what it may look like. It has been described as a crisis point in one's experience either personally or socially, with feelings of stress or pain which make you question certain assumptions and beliefs that contributed towards said crisis (Cagney, 2014; Mezirow, 2000; Taylor, 2008).

Disorienting dilemmas come in many forms, but they all share one key component in the emotional stress felt by the person experiencing the disorienting dilemma. This then sets the ground for the transformative learning process to begin (Cagney, 2014; Mezirow, 2000; Taylor, 2008). Examples from the literature include a personal crisis such as the death of a loved one, or from a moment of life change such as moving into a university halls of residence (Deveci, 2014). Some researchers have also argued for the existence of large-scale, collective disorienting dilemmas, such as the attacks on the World Trade Centre in 2001, from which a system-wide transformative learning process began (Hunter, 2012). In intercultural situations, such as study abroad programmes, a disorienting dilemma can be based on the senses, such as strange sights, smells, sounds and food, or can be based on experiences which challenge an individual's idea of what is 'normal', according to their own cultural background (Birkeland & Ødemotland, 2018).

These disorienting dilemmas create an environment in which an individual confronts a core assumption they hold about themselves or the world around them, known within transformative learning as a *frame of reference* (Mezirow, 2000; Mezirow & Taylor, 2009).

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Frames of reference are defined as "..structures of assumptions and expectations that frame an individual's tacit points of view and influence their thinking, beliefs, and actions" (Taylor, 2008, p. 5). It is these frames of reference which, assuming the transformative learning process is successful, are transformed at the end of the ten steps.

In the case of the examples of disorienting dilemmas presented above, the death of a loved one may cause an individual to confront their frame of reference regarding their own mortality or their relationship with the loved one. In the case of intercultural contexts, frames of reference regarding one's own culture, or preconceived ideas of the host culture may be confronted.

Once a belief or assumption is bought into question, a period of reflection begins. This can happen both internally and externally though critical dialogue with another person (Howie & Bagnall, 2013; Mezirow, 2000; Mezirow & Taylor, 2009; Seel, 2012). This period consists of finding alternative perspectives or identities and testing them out, either accepting them or rejecting them based upon further reflection. Once new perspectives have been found and accepted, the original perspective has been transformed.

At this point, it should be noted that the description given above, and the model created by Mezirow gives the impression that transformation is a linear process. However, this is not necessarily the case. Even Mezirow himself has noted that the process can become disjointed, may not necessarily include all of the stages in the model, and different stages may take differing lengths of time (Mezirow, 2000). Of course, it is also entirely possible that the process may end up being abandoned and my not result in any transformation at all.

2.3.2 Criticisms of Transformative Learning Theory

Though Transformative Learning Theory remains very popular among adult education researchers today, it has come under some criticism from some researchers in the field, and

questions remain unanswered about certain aspects of the theory. Writing in the very early days of the development of Transformative Learning Theory, Collard and Law (1989) lament that the main ideas of Transformative Learning Theory have not been held up to critique by practitioners in the field and claiming that "At best, [Mezirow] presents mere fragments of a theory…" (p.105).

Over 20 years later, in a series of articles, Newman (2012a, 2012b, 2014) added to these criticisms, criticising the vagueness and amount of terminology in Transformative Learning Theory, the way in which its overuse has caused it to lose meaning and be too general, and the fact that the success of transformative learning can only be verified by the participants' subjective assessment. He also raised the question over whether Transformative Learning Theory is a "plaything of the mind" (2012a, p. 40) which is only useful to explain education phenomena *after* the event, rather than a theory of learning which can be applied to educational practice.

Howie and Bagnall (2013) repeat these claims, adding that practitioners of Transformative Learning Theory have been "tardy" (p.18) in their response to criticisms. They then go on to describe in detail a number of the unanswered criticisms laid out across the literature, including criticisms such as the vagueness of key terms within the theory, a lack of critique of Transformative Learning Theory by its own proponents, and the lack of theoretical boundaries meaning Transformative Learning Theory can absorb other theories within it. They concluded by building on Newman's consideration of transformative learning as a "plaything of the mind", claiming that Transformative Learning Theory should be considered as a *conceptual metaphor,* rather than a theory.

Originally proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980a, 1980b), *conceptual metaphors* can be defined as the way in which we use a concept of one thing to

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guide both our language use, our beliefs, and our actions in another area. An example provided by Lakoff and Johnson would be the conceptual metaphor of ARGUMENT IS WAR. In language use, we use the language of war to describe an argument; to win/lose an argument, to shoot down an opposing argument and to have a strategy in an argument are just a few examples. However, they also guide our actions and beliefs in the sense that though our metaphorical concept of ARGUMENT IS WAR, our expectations of how an argument is structured, and how we act during the course of an argument are set through our understanding of war.

From this perspective, Howie and Bagnall's (2013) suggestion of transformative learning as a conceptual metaphor means that we use the *language* of transformative learning to *describe* and *explain* the learning process through the conceptual metaphor of LEARNING IS TRANSFORMATION. They also identify that the benefit of this approach would free transformative learning from the criticisms outlined above, since a *conceptual metaphor* requires none of these things. It would also allow the metaphor to be adjusted and interpreted across a wide range of contexts to provide a fruitful way of describing learning as a transformative experience.

Though there are some benefits (Howie & Bagnall, 2013) towards applying transformative learning as a conceptual metaphor, some consideration needs to be given towards exactly *how* it could be conceptualised. This especially important, since this decision will have a large impact on the language used in the application of the conceptual metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980a, 1980b).

The discussion above offered two ways of conceptualising Transformative Learning Theory, firstly as a ten-step model in which adult learners go through, resulting in a transformed perspective (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22). The second way of conceiving is to look at

the three key components of transformative learning, disorienting dilemmas, critical reflection, and critical dialogue, all of which were defined above (Mezirow, 2000; Mezirow & Taylor, 2009).

Applying the ten-step model as a *conceptual metaphor* may prove to be rather unwieldy in terms of language use (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980a, 1980b), and is further complicated by the fact that it is not a linear process. Different stages may take differing lengths of time, it can become fragmented and disjointed, steps may be skipped, and there is potential for the ten-step model to be aborted and remain incomplete (Mezirow, 2000).

Considering the fact that the aim in applying transformative learning as a *conceptual metaphor* is to aid in a fruitful explanation of the learning experience question (Howie & Bagnall, 2013; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980b, 1980a; Newman, 2012a), this conceptualisation would seem too unwieldy due to the large number of stages, and the fact that the process is not very linear. Therefore, in a situation where a researcher chose to apply transformative learning as a conceptual metaphor, it would seem advisable to apply the three core components, since they offer a more refined selection of language to use, and they are central to the idea of transformative learning.

Though this approach seems to have its merits, proponents of Transformative Learning Theory tend to still view it as a *theory,* albeit a theory in progress, awaiting more work to produce a final definition, rather than approach it as a conceptual metaphor (Mezirow, 2000; Taylor & Cranton, 2013). They also consider the flexibility within the theory as a benefit, due to the fact that the flexibility allows for multiple interpretations, across a wide variety of fields (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009) and from a wide variety of perspectives and approaches (Savicki & Brewer, 2015; Taylor, 2008).

That said, there has been some recognition of the need for more work on the *theory* of Transformative Learning Theory from the practitioners themselves, with Taylor and Cranton (2013) writing an article addressing the common criticisms. Within the article, they do admit to, and criticise the lack of development on the content of the theory, and suggest a series of gaps in the research which need to be addressed, along with relevant questions that need to be answered. These include questions regarding the *theory* of Transformative Learning Theory, for example, "Can positivistic paradigms provide us with another perspective (on Transformative Learning)?" (p.43).

In addition, they also identify further important questions to answer in order to aid in the development of Transformative Learning Theory (Taylor & Cranton, 2013, p. 43). Of interest are items such as bridging the gap between experience and outcome; "How does experience unfold in the context of transformative learning?" and "Why do some people revise their perspectives and others not? Is it a characteristic of the person? A characteristic of the event? Or where the person is in his or her life?". Another area of interest is related to best practice and asks "how can we foster new experiences that have the potential to lead to transformative learning?".

To this extent, Transformative Learning Theory offers a suitable theoretical framework to research into study abroad programmes. Not only is it based on *experience*, but there is some overlap between the gaps in the literature in both the area of study abroad and Transformative Learning Theory in which both areas of research may be able to inform each other. As described in section 2.2, more research is needed on the interplay between expectations, experience and outcomes, as well as research into how these outcomes can be maximised. A similar question is being asked of Transformative Learning Theory to bridge the gap between experience and outcomes, and how to produce effective environments for

transformative learning to occur. Finally, questions are being asked into whether or not Transformative Learning Theory should actually be considered a *theory* or a *conceptual metaphor*.

2.3.3 Transformative Learning in Study Abroad Research

Now that Transformative Learning Theory has been identified as a good candidate for the theoretical framework of this doctoral thesis, attention will turn to existing research on study abroad which uses Transformative Learning Theory as a core component of the theoretical framework.

Transformative Learning Theory offers a way for researchers to investigate the interplay between expectations (pre-existing frames of reference), experiences (a disorienting dilemma, reflection, and critical dialogue), and outcomes (transformation), something which is considered to be a gap in the research of study abroad (Salyers et al., 2015). As has already been described in section 2.2, the literature on study abroad research is fairly fragmented, focussing on expectations, experience and outcomes independently, rather than as connected in the sense of transformative learning. To this extent, existing literature is sparse, though some researchers have used Transformative Learning Theory to investigate study abroad, which will be presented below.

Generally speaking, research has pointed towards the existence of transformative learning on study abroad programmes (Glass, 2019; Kiely, 2004; Mitchell & Paras, 2018; Strange & Gibson, 2017; Tovar & Misischia, 2018). Though their results pointed towards the same conclusions, their methods, focus, and theoretical framework differed in each study. Quantitative data using questionnaires, qualitative data from written reflections and journals, mixed-methods, phenomenology, and practitioner reflection were all accounted for in this research. This exploratory interview study aims to further contribute to this body of work.

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In terms of focus, both Strange and Gibson (2017) and Glass (n.d.) commented on the impact of the length of the programme on participant transformation. While Glass questions whether short-term programmes can really promote transformative learning, Strange and Gibson found data that suggests any programme over the length of 18 days has potential for a transformative effect on participants, though they also admitted that due to the size of the study, more research needs to look into the impact of programme length on transformative learning.

Strange and Gibson (2017) also found that certain programme features appeared to be an important factor in promoting transformative learning, coming to the conclusion that experiential learning is an important component for transformative learning, as are the formation of social connections. It should be noted here that the importance of experiential learning and social connections is not only limited to Transformative Learning Theory but is also cited as an important aspect for the development of the outcomes discussed in chapter 2.2.1 (Ellwood, 2011; Tanabe & Kiad, 2019; Watson & Wolfel, 2015).

Mitchell and Paras (2018) added that programme content is also key for transformation by finding evidence highlighting the importance of reflection in the transformative learning process. In addition, they also looked specifically at the development of intercultural skills, finding evidence that cognitive dissonance felt by participants when experiencing the new culture acted as the disorienting dilemma, the first stage of transformation. Though this was linked to the development of intercultural skills, there was no reference to other types of transformation. Once again, it is important to note that the inclusion of reflection is not only important from the perspective of Transformative Learning, but also to the development of intercultural competencies (Deardorff, 2006, 2009, 2015). Furthermore, if the reflective component is missing from the programme, then participants

may find it difficult to articulate or demonstrate any transformation they claim to have gone through.

Finally, alongside the identification of intercultural skills as a result of transformative learning (Mitchell & Paras, 2018), other researchers have found additional outcomes of transformation. These include a transformed perspective on career goals in forensic students after taking part in a study abroad programme (Tovar & Misischia, 2018), and an attempt to map specific domains of transformation by Kiely (2004). The domains found by Kiely are political, moral, intellectual, cultural, personal, and spiritual.

This discussion on Transformative Learning has presented some research which suggests that the length of the programme, the amount of social interaction, and the inclusion of reflection in the programme content has an impact upon participant transformation. However, the claim made by Strange and Gibson (2017) on the length of the study abroad programme should be bought into question. Provided the programme contains enough opportunity for experiential learning and critical reflection, then a programme as short as ten weeks can have potential for transformation (Moak, 2020).

Overall, though sparse, the research combining the area of study abroad research with Transformative Learning Theory has found some evidence that participants are indeed transformed on study abroad programmes given specific conditions including the length and content of the study abroad programme. It has also gone some way towards providing an overview of exactly *what* transformations occur, although in all areas more research needs to be done to better understand these insights.

2.4 Chapter Conclusion

The preceding literature review has looked at three key areas of literature related to the exploratory interview study presented in this doctoral thesis. Firstly, it described the context of the exploratory interview study, the internationalisation of Japanese higher education, where there is an increasing focus on outcomes-based education, and a series of governmental policies aimed at encouraging more domestic students to enrol in study abroad programmes. Similarly, in the area of study abroad research, though some research has been done on specific outcomes, the area is so new as to require further research, especially with regards to the interplay between expectations, experiences, and outcomes.

Transformative Learning Theory has been identified as a suitable theoretical framework for research in this area. Since study abroad is often sold as a transformative experience, it is something that both students and higher education institutions expect, though little research has been done into how this transformation occurs. Though other theoretical frameworks may also be appropriate, Transformative Learning Theory may help to bridge the gap between expectations, experience, and outcomes of participation in a study abroad programme, something needed in the area of study abroad research. Any insights gained from this exploratory interview study could then be used to advise Japanese universities, and beyond, in how they can manage their study abroad programmes to maximise the outcomes for students who participate.

In order to do address the areas identified for research in the literature review, I devised the following research questions:

RQ1. How far do students view the study abroad programme as an opportunity for personal growth and change before departure?

RQ2. After the programme, how do students perceive their actual growth and change?

RQ3. How can a Japanese institution manage student expectations and maximise student experiences on study abroad programmes?

RQ1 and RQ2 address whether or not personal growth and change is something that participants consider before they depart on a programme, and whether or not growth and change *actually* happens, regardless of participant intentions prior to departure. This aims to bridge the gap between expectations and outcomes of participation in a study abroad programme. It also aims to identify any transformations that may occur through the programme.

Finally, RQ3 aims to turn any insights gained through RQ1 and RQ2 into practical advice on maximising outcomes participants of study abroad programmes that are run in higher education institutions.

3.0 Methodology

This chapter will discuss the methodological approaches taken to approach the research questions identified at the end of the previous chapter. The following discussion is a top-down account of the different factors which influenced my research design, beginning with ontology and epistemology, its influence on the design of the research questions, and the methods chosen to address these questions. This will be followed by information on the data collection for this exploratory interview study and a description of the participants in this study. Finally, there will be a discussion of ethical concerns relevant to this exploratory interview study.

3.1 Philosophical Standpoint: Ontology and Epistemology

Ontology and epistemology are philosophical standpoints which describe a researcher's worldview that guides their research design and methodological choices (H. Burgess, Sieminski, & Arthur, 2006; Creswell, 2014). This section will initially define both ontology and epistemology, as well as providing a brief overview of the main perspectives on these issues. It will then go into detail on my own ontological and epistemological standpoint, and the sources of influence that guided me to this standpoint. Finally, it will end with a description of how my ontological and epistemological perspective guided my choice in research questions.

Ontology deals with questions related to the nature of reality, addressing whether reality is objective and separate from human cognition, or whether reality is a product of human cognition, and therefore a subjective experience. Epistemology, on the other hand, deals with sources of knowledge, whether knowledge presents an accurate representation of reality and whether, or how, we can really know anything. Similar to the questions on reality

presented in ontology, epistemology questions whether knowledge is hard and capable of being transmitted in tangible form, or whether it is soft, subjective, and personal in nature (H. Burgess et al., 2006; Jackson, 2018).

Both ontology and epistemology are traditionally split into two broad perspectives, positivism and interpretivism/constructivism. Some researchers consider the terms interpretivism and constructivism to be interchangeable (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2013; Vanson, 2014), so for ease, the term constructivism will be used from this point on.

Positivism proposes that reality is observable and *separate from the individual*. Therefore, knowledge exists, and is waiting for the researchers to find it. As a result, the focus of positivistic research tends to be about identifying patterns and causal effects between phenomena with an aim of the results having predictability and reproducibility (Cohen et al., 2013; Jackson, 2018; Scotland, 2012; Vanson, 2014).

Constructivism, however, proposes that reality is contextually bound and is *created by the participants within any given context they share*. Therefore, knowledge must be uncovered through the investigation and interpretation of individual perspectives. As a result, the focus of constructivist research is to describe how individuals make sense of the world and their experiences in different contexts, the meaning they derive from this, and the way in which this contributes to their own development (Cohen et al., 2013; Creswell, 2014; Jackson, 2018; Scotland, 2012; Vanson, 2014).

A researcher's stance on ontological and epistemological questions is of great importance with regards to research design. The philosophical positioning of the researcher ultimately represents their personal worldview and beliefs, therefore influencing their beliefs on the nature of *research* and what it can achieve (H. Burgess et al., 2006). As a result, it then guides the research design process, the way in which conclusions are formed during the

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research, and finally the way in which it is communicated (Jackson, 2018). A researcher's

standpoint on these issues can be influenced by a variety of factors, including "discipline

orientations, students' advisors/mentors orientations, and past research experiences"

(Creswell, 2014, p. 6). As a result, attention will now turn to identifying my own standpoint

on ontology and epistemology, as well as identifying sources of influence on this standpoint.

My personal standpoint on the issue of ontology and epistemology has been greatly

influenced by my academic and professional career within the field of teaching English to

speakers of other languages (hereby, TESOL). A look at the history of research in TESOL

methodology shows a shift from approaches from a positivistic position to approaches more

influenced from a constructivist position in recent times. For many decades, researchers were

searching for the one teaching methodology which would work for all classrooms in all

contexts, but to no avail. Eventually, methodologists gave up on this search and took a more

constructivist position to methodology, known as *principled eclecticism*; the principle that no

two classroom contexts are alike, and the teacher should select the right methodological tools

according to their unique teaching context (Gabrielatos, 2002).

In alignment with this change in perspective on methodology, TESOL research has also

become more positioned within constructivism. This is displayed in the growing focus on

action research methodology within TESOL, one which can be positioned within

constructivism as it allows for the appreciation of the diversity of teaching contexts (Brooke,

2013). This was reflected in the research training I received during my MA, which was

primarily focussed on action research.

This background has resulted in my own ontological and epistemological beliefs to be

rooted in constructivism, which had a strong influence on my choice of research questions for

this thesis. When writing the research questions, I knew that they needed to reflect my

constructivist perspective. In other words, I had to ensure that the questions were not worded in a way that signalled an intent to search for a single, objective reality as would be done in positivist research. Instead, I had to ensure that they were written in a way that allowed for multiple realities, based upon individual perspectives.

Initially, during the process of designing the research questions, I was not entirely successful in ensuring my constructivist perspective was included. Early drafts of my research questions were written in a way that attempted to identify causal links between study abroad programmes and outcomes for participants, something more common in the positivist perspective (Jackson, 2018). However, as I became more aware of my own philosophical standpoint on ontology and epistemology, the focus and wording of my research questions fell more in line with my constructivist standpoint.

To better reflect my constructivist perspective, I began to change the focus and the wording of the questions to allow room for individual perspectives. Since constructivism holds that reality is individually constructed in a given context, it can therefore only be understood through interpretation of participants' individual perspectives and I knew this had to be central in the questions I designed (Cohen et al., 2013). Therefore, RQ1 and RQ2, are specifically worded to focus on participant *perspectives* on their personal growth and change, with the final wording being:

RQ1. How far do students view the study abroad programme as an opportunity for personal growth and change before departure?

RQ2. After the programme, how do students perceive their actual growth and change?

RQ3 is also reflective of my constructivist beliefs. In this question, it is important to note that the aim is to give practical recommendations for how experiences can be *maximised*:

RQ3. How can a Japanese institution manage student expectations and maximise student experiences on study abroad programmes?

From a constructivist point of view, the way this question is written is in recognition of the perspective that reality and knowledge is a subjective experience and created by the individual. In this sense, the research question is not aiming to prescribe specific experiences or outcomes for participants. Instead, it is aiming to provide institutions with the tools to create fertile grounds for individual experiences on the study abroad programmes.

In conclusion, this section has situated my own ontological and epistemological beliefs within the field of constructivism. Based on my own personal educational and professional experiences, I hold the perspective that there is not an objective reality awaiting identification. Rather, there are multiple realities, socially constructed by individuals and the way to understand them is through an investigation of individual perspectives. The aim is not to prove causal effects, but rather to identify developmental paths and gain an understanding of the experiences of the individuals. With this in mind, the research questions have been designed to complement my constructivist standpoint.

3.2 Research Design

As is common with the development of a research project, the ontological and epistemological standpoint of the researcher does not only influence the design of the research questions, but also the methodological tools which are used (Vanson, 2014). The

following sections will outline how my own ontological and epistemological beliefs, amongst other factors, have influenced these research design choices.

3.2.1 Qualitative Data

As noted above, the ontological and epistemological stance in which this exploratory interview study sits has an influence on the type of data which will be required to answer the research question. Constructivism holds that reality is subjective in nature and differs from person to person (Scotland, 2012). In order to go beyond the observable world and into the internal, subjective reality of the participants, qualitative data is often chosen by constructivist researchers (Cohen et al., 2013; Cousin, 2009). Considering my own constructivist position, the focus on participant *perspectives*, and common traditions in constructivist research, I felt that qualitative data would be the best approach for the research questions I had designed for this project.

Qualitative data can take many forms; photographs and drawings, field notes, indirect observation, stories and narratives, interviews, focus groups, documents and texts, artefacts and more (Cousin, 2009; Stake, 2014). For most qualitative research, researchers often choose to use either focus groups or interview data, since these can be used to focus on things which we cannot directly observe such as feelings and emotions, or to discuss past events which cannot be created in the present (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Since I knew that my research participants would likely be participating on study abroad programmes with lengths varying from one month up to a year and would be located in various countries around the world, setting up a system of direct observation would not have been a practical option for data collection. In addition, the research questions call for an investigation into the internal world of the participants' *perspectives*, which would be very

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difficult to gather through direct observation. As a result, I narrowed down my options to either participant diaries, focus group or interview data for this exploratory interview study.

The first consideration was to use participant diaries as the main data source. Dairies appeared to be a good choice because they would satisfy the requirement of gaining participant perspectives as described above. In addition, they would provide a thick description and a snapshot of what is happening *during* the study abroad programme (Hyers, 2018). However, diary studies require the participants to keep the diary updated and if they do not, the data set could be incomplete (Creswell, 2014). Since the participants would be spread across a large geographical area, it would be difficult for me to ensure all participant diaries were being completed, and an incomplete data set would not be desirable for the purposes of a doctoral thesis, so the decision was made not to use participant diaries as part of the data.

A second consideration for the data was to conduct a series of focus groups. Focus groups are seen as valuable by qualitative researchers because of the dialogic and interactive nature of the interaction, which can produce more enriched data (Cousin, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). With regards to the research questions for this thesis, the dialogic nature of the focus group, and the co-construction of knowledge amongst the group participants could provide interesting insights into their perspectives on transformation before and after the programme (RQ1 and RQ2).

However, certain aspects of Japanese culture might have a negative impact upon the data gathered within a focus group. Within Japanese culture is an "..ideology which discourages transparent and forthright interactions between individuals" (Y. Sugimoto, 2014, p. 32). In addition, Japanese culture is a conformist society (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010), meaning group harmony is more important than the expression

of individual opinion. Therefore, it was decided that focus groups may not be the best approach to data collection for this exploratory study.

A final option for the data in this exploratory interview study would be the collection of data through individual interviews with the participants. Interviews have been identified as one of the most common types of data source in qualitative research (Savicki & Brewer, 2015), especially for situations where on-site observations may be too cost-prohibitive or not possible for other reasons (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). They have also been described as useful for getting information on people's beliefs and perspectives (Roulston & Choi, 2018), as well as how an individual views their situation and experiences (Morris, 2015).

With regards to this exploratory interview study, interview data would be very helpful towards answering the research questions outlined in section 3.1, since they call for an investigation into participants' perspectives on both what outcomes they expect to receive from participation in a study abroad programme (RQ1), but also their perspectives on what outcomes they have received after the programme ends (RQ2). In addition, as discussed earlier in this section, since the participants would be studying abroad in a diverse set of locations, on-site observations would be cost prohibitive, and so interviews offer a suitable alternative.

Additionally, the discussion on focus groups raised concerns with regards to the way in which certain aspects of Japanese culture may limit the quality of data retrieved from a focus group. However, these limitations are far more minimised in an interview setting. Research from the field of second language acquisition has found that learners of a second language (L2) also develop an L2 identity which incorporates aspects of the L2 culture (Bahous, Bacha, & Nabhani, 2011). In the case of Japanese university students, it has been noted that when they speak in English one-on-one with foreign professors they are often far

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more impolite (by Japanese standards), informal, and forego many Japanese cultural conventions (McVeigh, 2002). In other words, they have adopted a new L2 identity which in one-to-one communication with foreign professors does not include adherence to the strict Japanese social codes which may be a problem in a focus group with other Japanese students.

As a result, the more intimate one-to-one nature of an interview, would provide opportunity for participants to express thoughts and experiences which they may not be as comfortable expressing in front of a Japanese peer, in Japanese language. Furthermore, I know from personal experience that students in my university are often more willing to share personal stories and problems in L2 with a foreign professor than they are in Japanese, with members of their own peer group. This does bring up certain ethical issues, especially with regards to the power distance between myself and the participants, though this will be discussed in section 3.6. Therefore, it was felt that one-to-one interviews held in English provided a better opportunity for a richer set of data, even with the ethical implications of perceived power due to my role within the institution.

3.2.2 Interviews

In order to collect data on participant perspectives, two semi-structured interviews were held with participants. One before and one after their study abroad programme. As detailed above, the decision to use interview data was based around factors including the type of data needed to answer the questions, and a consideration of Japanese culture. Once this was decided, the next consideration was what language to hold the interviews in, how many interviews to hold, and how the interviews should be structured.

What language to hold the interviews in was an important consideration to make. Since all of the participants were coming from within my institution, they would all have the same native language, Japanese. Holding the interviews in Japanese would offer many

benefits, including a potentially thicker description of their experiences, since the participants would be expressing themselves in their native tongue. However, my own ability in Japanese is not of a sufficient level to either conduct the interview, or interpret the narratives given by the participants. Therefore, in order to hold the interview in the participants' native language, I would have needed to find an additional researcher to conduct the interviews and help from translators to transcribe and translate the interview content.

In order to be allowed on a study abroad programme at my institution, students must have a certain level of foreign language ability (Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, n.d.-d). In the case of English-language programmes, it is measured at a minimum of 500 on the TOEFL scale, which is equivalent to around B2 or B1 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (EIKEN, n.d.). Descriptions of the spoken ability of B1 and B2 level English speakers can be found below.

Figure 3 – CEFR Spoken English Descriptors

	Spoken Interaction	Spoken Production
CEFR B2	I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interest. I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
CEFR B1	I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).	I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes and ambitions. I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.

(Council of Europe, n.d.)

Considering the research questions, it was felt that participants with a CEFR level of B1 or B2 prior to departure, in accordance with university guidelines (Nagoya University of

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Foreign Studies, n.d.-d), would be able to answer the interview questions (Appendix) sufficiently. Indicative descriptors include "I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar or pertinent to everyday life" and "I can take an active part in discussion…accounting for and sustaining my views" (Council of Europe, n.d.). Therefore, the decision was made not to hold the interviews in the participants' native language and rely on the use of a translator, since their English ability would be of a high enough level to answer the interview questions (Appendix) in English.

With regards to how many interviews to be held, the research questions called for a minimum of two with each participant; one before the participant leaves for their study abroad programme (RQ1) and one upon their return to Japan (RQ2). An additional consideration was whether to have one interview mid-way through the programme. However, it was felt that not only could this be intrusive upon the experience of the participants, but it would also be difficult to manage due to the differing locations, time zones, and the length of programmes.

When reviewing the options for the structure of the interviews, three traditional types of interview presented themselves; structured interview, semi-structured interview, and unstructured interview. The structured interview has been likened to the equivalent of an oral survey (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and was quickly dismissed as an option, since the type of data required is in narrative form, of the participants desires (RQ1) and experiences.

Both semi-structured and unstructured interviews offer a chance for the participants and interviewer to move beyond a pre-set series of questions, with the unstructured interview being the most open of the two. Unstructured interviews are described as exploratory, contain no pre-determined set of questions, and often used by expert researchers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). However, there is some disagreement with the exact

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definition due to the fact that in reality, expert researchers will always have some form of structure in mind before the interview begins (Cousin, 2009).

Since the participants were speaking in a second language, and I could not be considered an expert, it was decided to use semi-structured interviews. This would allow me to write a set of questions which could be used as needed to provide some structure to the participants who would be speaking in a second language, and give the flexibility for the interview to "ramble" (Walliman, 2011, p. 99) around a chosen topic, using some loosely pre-defined questions and topics (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Savicki & Brewer, 2015).

Following the idea of semi-structured interviews involving loosely pre-defined questions and topics (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Savicki & Brewer, 2015), I divided the interview into sections. Each section covered a theme related to one of the research questions, and contained some suggested questions, follow-up questions, and re-worded questions in the event my participants needed me to word the questions in more simple English.

3.2.3 Exploratory Research

A final consideration in the research design was in the framing of this study as an exploratory study. Exploratory research can be characterised as an initial examination of the research area, which is conducted in order to uncover a better understanding of the problem being faced or to understand the current situation. The results of the exploratory study can then be used to inform future research projects (Clow & James, 2014). With specific regards to educational research, exploratory research aims to investigate the meaning people give to their actions in particular situations, and the issues which concern them (Check & Schutt, 2017).

Furthermore, Stebbins (2011) discusses the idea of concatenation, which views exploratory research not as a single study on its own, forging new ground. It could be that,

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but it might also be part of a larger process, further along the research process, where the study can re-examine groups or processes previously covered by other exploratory research. In this case, the aim is to contribute to a larger body of research from which other researchers can draw upon for their own research into connected groups.

With regards to the exploratory interview study presented in this thesis, exploratory research seemed the correct approach from two perspectives. First of all, from the perspective of my institution, there has been very little research conducted either into the participants of the study abroad programmes, nor the actions the institution takes in preparing the study abroad participants prior to departure, or the support the participants receive upon their return. To that extent, there was no information available to inform the research questions outlined in section 3.1. Therefore, this study would need to be exploratory in order to gain an understanding of the current situation at my institution (Check & Schutt, 2017; Clow & James, 2014). This exploratory interview study can then be built upon in both follow-up research activities conducted within the institution, but also in practice as the research can be used to inform the preparation programme and any post-study support available to the students.

With regards to the wider body of literature in the area of study abroad, this exploratory study can contribute a small set of data on Japanese university students, which other researchers can use to inform their own studies into study abroad research. As a result, the choice to conduct this research as an exploratory study would allow me to contribute to both research and practice within my own institution, and to the wider body of literature on study abroad.

3.3 Research Participants

In total there were 16 participants for the first round of interviews, 15 of which returned for the second round of interviews once they had finished their study abroad programme. The one participant who dropped out did so for unknown reasons, and never responded to my request for a follow-up interview. The decision was made to keep this participant's first interview in the data set, since it could contribute to RQ1, which considers participants' perceptions on personal growth and change prior to departure on the study abroad programme.

Participants were selected using convenience sampling and came from many departments across my university, with the exception of my own department due to a consideration of ethical issues. Finally, all participants were Japanese students either in their second or third year of university, with the majority of participants being female students.

3.3.1 Participant Selection

For participant selection, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) identify two broad areas of sampling methodology; *probability* and *nonprobability* sampling. According to Merriam and Tisdell, probability sampling is used predominantly in quantitative research since results gained can be generalised, while nonprobability sampling tends to be used in qualitative research and can be used to answer questions based on what is occurring, finding implications of what is occurring, and relationships between occurrences. Daniel (2012) concurs with this opinion, recommending nonprobability sampling for homogenous populations, exploratory research, qualitative research projects, and a lack of a need to make statistical inferences from the data.

With regards to my exploratory interview study, the decision was made to use nonprobability sampling methods, since as described in section 3.1.4, this exploratory

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interview study is qualitative in nature and is not aiming for statistical generalisation. I also knew that the population would be fairly homogenous since I would be using students from my own institution, so they would be university-age Japanese university students.

Within nonprobability sampling, there are four approaches commonly taken; purposive sampling, availability sampling, respondent-assisted sampling, and quota sampling (Daniel, 2012). In addition to this, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest that usually qualitative researchers use a two-tier sampling approach. The first tier being purposive sampling, identifying a specific group that fits with the focus of the research from which to sample (Daniel, 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The second tier is then used to select the final participants and can take any of the four sampling methods mentioned above.

Following the two-tier sampling model (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), I chose my first tier to be purposeful sampling, since I knew which group I would like to target; students in my university who were studying abroad from August 2017. The next decision to be made was for the second tier in the model and focussed on the ethical consideration of power distance.

Japanese culture is known as being strictly hierarchical in nature, and deference to a senior person considered a personal virtue (Y. Sugimoto, 2014; The Hofestede Centre, n.d.). In the university setting this means deference to the teacher's will and not asking questions (McVeigh, 2002). For this reason, I felt that direct recruitment by approaching individual students may result in them feeling compelled to participate due to my position of power as a member of staff in my institution. Similarly, I knew that if I asked any of my colleagues or someone in a senior position to aid in recruitment, it might also result in participants feeling compelled to participate. Therefore, I wanted to find a way in which students were free to volunteer to participate in the exploratory interview study.

For this reason, quota sampling was rejected as an option since it has a strict focus on controlling the number of participants. I was concerned that if I didn't have enough participants, I may have had to approach individual students and request their participation, which is common in quota sampling (Daniel, 2012). Therefore, I felt that availability sampling would offer the best chance of minimising my concerns of students feeling compelled to participate.

Availability sampling allows the researcher to select participants who *volunteer* to take part in a study, rather than being directly recruited by the researcher. This is particularly true of convenience sampling, a form of availability sampling, which selects participants based upon convenience for the researcher and the participant. However, it has been criticised for potentially creating information-poor data due to the fact that the researcher is choosing participants based only on convenience and access, and cannot guarantee that the people chosen for participation are the same as those who are not (Creswell, 2014; Daniel, 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

I felt that with my two-tier design, the benefits of using convenience sampling outweighed the concerns expressed above. The use of purposive sampling in the first tier of the model would allow me to target a specific, homogenous group in which any volunteers would satisfy the requirements for my exploratory interview study. In other words, my exploratory interview study required participants studying abroad on a range of programmes and my target group was all students participating on study abroad programmes from August 2017. The convenience sampling in the second tier would ask for volunteers from that group to participate without me having to ask individuals face-to-face and risk selecting participants who felt compelled to participate due to the power distance between us.

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In addition to the two-tier model of data sampling, I also used respondent-assisted sampling, though this was unplanned. Respondent-assisted sampling, or snowball sampling (Daniel, 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) exploits participants' social networks and uses the participants in the study to help recruit further participants. During the first round of data collection, two of the participants commented after the interview that they had found it useful and asked if they could tell their friends to contact me to participate. I accepted this offer and gained a few more participants as a result.

The next decision to be made was with regards to how many participants I hoped to gain for the exploratory interview study. The key factors in this decision were that this exploratory interview study is qualitative in nature, the data set was interview-based, and I planned to use thematic analysis on the data set. Baker et al. (2012) recommend a group size of 12-20 for interview-driven research. Daniel (2012) adds that for purposive-driven samples of largely homogenous groups, a smaller sample size is recommended, but notes that in qualitative research it is difficult to target a specific number of participants. Therefore, for this exploratory interview study, I set a broad target of 12-20, since it agreed with advice from Baker and Edwards, but was wide enough to not be restrictive, since it would be difficult to target a specific number due to my sampling method.

The final consideration to make was criteria for rejection of participants. Since I was targeting a very specific population which fit the criteria of my research, I did not have many criteria for rejection. In line with my concerns over the power distance discussed above, the criteria for rejection would be if the participant came from one of my own classes or if they were a member of my department.

3.3.2 Participant Recruitment

After choosing the two-tier sampling method, I could begin the recruitment phase. The phase consisted of two parts, a letter inviting participants to take part in my exploratory interview study and a small presentation I gave at an orientation session given to students who were studying abroad from August 2017. Both of these options were chosen due to the fact that the head of the international office also shared my concerns about not compelling the students to participate.

On the recommendation of the head of the international office, I drafted a letter in both English and Japanese to the students inviting them to participate. The letter was written in English by myself and translated by two bilingual office assistants from my department. They both translated the letter independently and then compared and combined their translations into one final document.

The head of the international office also invited me to give a small, 4-minute presentation at a meeting on the 22nd June 2017. Attending this meeting were all of the students studying abroad from August 2017, my target population. All attendees were given copies of my invitation letter and my presentation gave a brief overview of what I am investigating and the fact that participation would entail two interviews. Finally, I placed a sign-up sheet at the back of the room for potential participants to register their interest. In order to avoid pressuring students to sign up, I left the room once my presentation was complete, and the sign-up sheet was returned to me later by office assistants from the international office.

Once the sign-up sheet was returned to me, I had 15 students registering interest to participate. I then emailed all the participants to begin setting up interview times. 14 of the participants on the sign-up sheet responded and attended interviews. As described above,

once the interview began, some of the participants told their friends about the interviews, which helped me to recruit two more, bringing the total to 16 participants for the first round of interviews.

3.3.3 Participant Demographics

All participants were recruited from departments across my institution and were Japanese nationals. The table on the next page provides demographic details on each participant. This will be followed by supporting graphs and discussion on specific demographic data.

Figure 4 – Participant Demographics by Participant

Code	Destination	Length of Stay	Department	Accommodation	Programme Type	Age at Departure	Gender
S01	Australia	Four Months	Japanese	Homestay	Language Course	20	Female
S02	Ireland	Five Months	World Liberal Arts	Homestay	Language Course	21	Female
S03	Ireland	Nine Months	English and Contemporary Society	Dormitory	Academic Course	19	Female
S04	United Kingdom	Nine Months	Department of English Language Teaching	Dormitory	Academic Course	19	Female
S05	United Kingdom	Eight Months	Not given	Dormitory	Language Course	Not given	Female
S06	Australia	Eight Months	English and Contemporary Society	Split homestay and share house	Mix - Language and Academic	19	Female
S07	North America	Nine Months	British and American Studies	Split dormitory share house	Language Course	20	Male
S08	Australia	Seven Months	British and American Studies	Homestay	Language Course	20	Male
S09	North America	Ten Months	British and American Studies	Split homestay and employee dormitory	Mix - Language, academic and Internship	21	Female
S10	Canada	Eight Months	World Liberal Arts	Homestay	Language Course	20	Female
S11	Australia	Eight Months	British and American Studies	Split homestay and share house	Language Course	20	Female
S12	North America	Ten Months	British and American Studies	Split homestay, Employee dormitory and student dormitory	Mix - Language, academic and Internship	19	Female
S13	North America	Four Months	English and Contemporary Society	Dormitory	Language Course	21	Female
S14	North America	Ten Months	English and Contemporary Society	Dormitory	Academic Course	19	Male
S15	United Kingdom	Three Months	Global Business	Homestay	Academic Course	21	Female
S16	North America	Nine Months	World Liberal Arts	Dormitory	Academic Course	20	Female

The participants by gender and age are representative of my university as a whole, and of the 2017 study abroad cohort. Though data is not publicly available, in my estimate the student body in my institution is around 90% female. It is also common in my institution for students to study abroad in their second or third year, when they are around 19 or 20 years old. This is due to the fact that our university offers very competitive scholarships, which require a high GPA and a high English language score (Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, n.d.-a), so many students spend their first year of studies working towards those benchmarks. As for the final year, students in Japan must go through the job-hunting process, something which they must complete on time or be held in lower regard by potential employers (McVeigh, 2002; Y. Sugimoto, 2014). Therefore, most students aim to complete their study abroad programme before they enter their fourth year of study.

As for the breakdown by department, the participant sample is also representative of the 2017 study abroad cohort. The top three departments who sent students abroad in 2017 were British and American Studies, accounting for 32% of the 2017 cohort, World Liberal Arts, accounting for 15% of the 2017 cohort, and English and Contemporary Society, accounting for 14% of the 2017 cohort (Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, 2018). Therefore, it is no surprise that these same departments provided the majority of my research participants.

3.4 Data Collection

The first round of interviews was held between July and August 2017, depending on each participant's availability and departure date. The interviews were held on campus in my office, though participants were offered an opportunity to change the venue if they wished. As described in section 3.1.5, the interviews were semi-structured in nature and loosely followed the prepared questions. Each interview was around 60 minutes in length.

For the second interview, which was held upon the participants' return to Japan, special consideration had to be given to the timing of the interview and whether it should be done immediately after they return or after a certain period of time. I decided that since the research questions specify the study abroad programme as the focus of the exploratory interview study, it would be better to interview participants as soon as they return from the programme, rather than after a period of time. If I were to leave some time for participants to begin reintegrating back into Japanese society, then I felt any observations I might make in the data might be corrupted by the reintegration process.

The second round of interviews were held in the same way as the first, in my office at a time convenient to the participant, loosely following the questions I prepared for a semi-structured interview. During the interviews, I noticed a few participants commenting that they had so many experiences to share that it was difficult for them to choose which to discuss. Therefore, I decided to offer the opportunity for participants to return at a later date if anything occurred to them after the interview was over. Two participants took advantage of this and contacted me to return for a second interview.

In total, by the end of the data collection phase I had around 12 hours and 3 minutes of interview data with 16 participants for the first round of interviews and 17 hours 30 minutes with 15 participants for the second round of interviews. The discrepancy between the total number hours is accounted for by some participants returning for a follow-up to the second interview to share more information with me, and for the fact that the participants all had a lot more information to share once they had returned from their study abroad programmes, so some of the second-round interviews ran for longer than the pre-departure interviews.

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3.5 Data Analysis

The final choice in the research design was how to analyse the interview transcripts. Several options presented themselves, including content analysis, narrative analysis, grounded theory, and thematic analysis. I ultimately decided to use thematic analysis as my analysis method due to the fact that it is one of the more flexible options, not bound to a specific epistemological stance and offers the researcher the ability to find emergent themes across a large set of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

In order to discuss why other options for analysis were rejected, I will return to the research questions. RQ1 and RQ2 call for an investigation into both desired and perceived outcomes of the study abroad programme. Considering this, content analysis was rejected as it is a method which focuses on the prevalence of specific themes and minimising themes which do not occur very often (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As some critics of content analysis have pointed out (Marks & Yardley, 2004), there is potential for a lot of meaning in a single story, and I wanted the flexibility to be able to pay attention to single stories presented in the data. Therefore, I felt the content analysis was undesirable in terms of the research questions.

Similarly, I rejected narrative analysis by referring to the research questions. Narrative analysis is an analysis method that focuses on stories; how people relate their stories through the use of narrative functions such as plot and characters, the language used to tell the story, and the way in which it is told (Ignatow & Mihalcea, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The research questions posed in this exploratory interview study do not call for an analysis of *how* the study abroad experience is related, but *what* is related, especially RQ1 and RQ2 which look at what students perceive, rather than how they are relating their perceptions. As a result, narrative analysis too, was rejected.

Grounded theory was the final analysis method I rejected for two reasons, firstly because grounded theory aims to build an overall theory of the phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). However, the EdD programme, and by extension RQ3, calls for practical outcomes of my exploratory interview study, not working theories. Therefore, I rejected grounded theory as an option for data analysis.

As a result of this decision making process, thematic analysis was deemed the most appropriate due to the research questions, and the flexibility of it as a method of analysis (Marks & Yardley, 2004; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It allowed me to be able to pay attention to individual stories, rather than only the more prevalent themes (Marks & Yardley, 2004), allowed me to focus on the *content* of what was said, rather than *how* it was related (Ignatow & Mihalcea, 2017), and allowed me to focus on practical implications, rather than building a theory of the phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

3.6 Development of Themes

This section addressed how the data analysis for this exploratory interview study was conducted, and how I arrived at the themes presented in chapter 4. It will begin by providing an outline of the thematic analysis approach to data analysis and will then be followed by an account of how I implemented the process in order to come to the themes presented in chapter 4.

3.6.1 Conducting Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis has been described as "…not a single method, but a broad approach which encompasses many different styles" (King & Brooks, 2019, p. 219) and aims to uncover common themes across a data set. Furthermore, according to King et al. one of the more widely referenced approaches to thematic analysis is the one proposed by Braun and Clarke

(2006), which outlines six steps for thematic analysis; becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. It was this approach which I took to analysing the data in this exploratory interview study. What follows is a brief outline of the six steps and the recommendations from the literature about how to conduct each step.

The first step of familiarising yourself with the data is the "bedrock" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp. 87–88) of the thematic analysis process, allowing the researcher to get a thorough understanding of the data and informing the early stages of the analysis (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). In the case of this exploratory interview study, the familiarisation process happened naturally, since I was both the interviewer in the data collection period, and the transcriber of said interview data. This process required me to pay close attention to the data in both the interviews and transcriptions and afforded me the chance to engage with it repeatedly before I began stage two.

The second step is that of generating codes within the data. Codes are defined as the smallest, individual units of data that can vary in size, but contain potentially interesting or important thoughts or ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Braun and Clarke also point out that at this stage, the researcher should aim to generate as many codes as possible, since at this stage it is not known if something may prove be useful later. They also point out that during this stage it is also important to keep note of any individual pieces of data that might stand out as deviating from any emerging themes or codes. Finally, it is also important to note that coding is a recursive process, so as new codes are generated in this stage, it is important to return to previously coded sections to include the new codes.

The third, fourth and fifth stages of Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis all deal with identifying, reviewing, and defining the themes found within the data.

At this point, the researcher aims to combine the codes created in set two into larger, broader themes which represent meaningful aspects of the data set (Scharp & Sanders, 2019). Once the initial list of candidate themes are identified (stage 3), they are then reviewed at the level of the coded extracts and at the level of the broader theme to ensure the meaning is consistent (stage 4). Finally, they are then defined and named (stage 5) in a succinct way covering the scope and content of the theme. They are then ready for the 6th and final stage in which the themes are published in a report (Braun & Clarke, 2006; King & Brooks, 2019).

3.6.2 An Account of the Thematic Analysis Conducted for this Exploratory Interview Study

The thematic analysis for this exploratory interview study followed the Braun and Clarke model outlined in section 3.6.1 (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; King & Brooks, 2019; Scharp & Sanders, 2019). As described above, stage one consisted of familiarising myself with the data, which came naturally as I collected the data in the interviews, and then through the transcription process. The interviews were transcribed at the end of each round of data collection, with the first round of interviews being transcribed in August and September 2017 and the second round of interviews being transcribed between August and October 2018.

Due to the fact I was handling two different data sets collected a year apart, the remaining stages of Braun and Clarke's (2006) model were initially handled at different times for each data set. Stage two covers the generation of initial codes for the data. For the pre-departure interviews, this began at the end of September 2017, and for the post study abroad interviews, it began in November 2018.

When starting coding of the pre-departure interviews, I had no predetermined codes, and followed Braun and Clarke's advice to code for as much as I could. The initial set of codes not only covered specific things the participants were discussing, such as "friends" or

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"workload", but I also coded for the tone in which participants were discussing these things, namely "positive", "negative", and "neutral". This decision was made not only due to Braun and Clarke's (2006) recommendation on coding as much as possible, but because I also thought this might prove useful later once I started analysing any themes that emerged from the data.

For the second set of data, I began the coding process with the codes I had already generated from the first set of data. In addition, a series of new codes were generated during this process as a result of the slightly different focus of the interviews, speaking about the participants actual experiences on the study abroad programme. At this point, due to the recursive nature of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; King & Brooks, 2019), I went back over the data for the pre-departure interviews to ensure that the new codes could be applied where appropriate. By the time the generation of codes had been completed, I had around 120 individual codes which I could use for the third step of Braun and Clarke's (2006) model.

The third stage of Braun and Clarke's (2006) model consists of searching for themes by reviewing and combining the codes and any additional data extracts found during stage two. The search for themes began in December 2017, whereby I began combining codes together into broader categories. This included combining codes such as "TOEIC-TOEFL Score", "Listening Ability", "Communicative Ability" and others into the category of "English Language". In December 2018, after finishing the coding stage for the second data set, I was able to further combine the codes into larger groups and go through the complete data set once more to ensure the data was fully coded.

At this point, I was able to begin identifying candidate themes from the data and found a large number of categories which stood out in the data. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) advice, I knew that at this stage nothing should be discarded, since they need to be

checked, refined, and potentially combined in stage four. Categories which stood out to me were ones that were referenced a high number of times, or ones which were not particularly highly referenced, but stood out due to some interesting content or were conspicuous because of their absence in the coding for the pre-departure interviews.

Examples of categories which were very highly referenced include those related to the content of the study abroad programme, such as "English Ability" or "Subject Knowledge". In addition, categories related to life outside classes, such as "Making Friends" stood out for the amount of references within the data. Categories which stood out for being less widely referenced, but contained some interesting information included the category of "Mass Media" and "Social Media". Finally, an example of a category which stood out for being absent in the coding would be "Self-Awareness" which was referenced heavily in the post study abroad interview data, but entirely absent in the pre-departure interviews.

As I began to finalise the list of categories which stood out in the data through Spring 2019, I moved into the fourth stage of Braun and Clarke's (2006) model, which involved reviewing the categories identified in the third stage. At this stage, I began to combine some of the categories which I had identified in the previous stage into broader themes, while raising some single categories into full themes. This stage also involves two levels of reviewing, firstly within the coded extracts to ensure that they are all relevant to the theme, and also a final read through the whole data set to ensure that the themes accurately represent the whole data set, and to ensure that there haven't been any missed extracts that need coding within the data.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006) the aim when deciding themes is to ensure that the data within the theme is coherent and matches the theme, while at the same time each theme is distinct from each other with no overlap. To that extent, when finalising themes

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from the categories, I paid particular attention to ensuring that each theme was distinct, and used this as a guide for which categories to combine. The final list contained seven distinct themes, some of which were formed by combining some categories together. These themes are presented in the table below. It can be seen in the table the both theme two and theme five contain no categories, this is because they were raised from being an individual category themselves into a full theme, and there were no other categories whose content aligned with them, meaning there was nothing to combine.

Figure 5 – Final List of Themes and Categories

Theme One *Curriculum-Related Outcomes*	Theme Two *Breaking Stereotypes*	Theme Three *Having a Good Time*
• Work experience • Employment • English language and subject knowledge • Learning foreign culture		• Sightseeing • Making friends
Theme Four *Maturation*	Theme Five *Growth in Understanding of Japanese Culture*	Theme Six *Sources of Influence on Pre-Departure Expectations*
• Confidence • Independence • Self-Awareness		• Family • Pre-Departure Training Programme • Social Media • Mass Media
	Theme Seven *Pre-Departure Training Programme*	
	• Paperwork • Personal safety • Opportunity to discuss goals • Researching host country and institution	

Once the themes had been finalised, I once again checked through the main data set to ensure that the themes were representative of the data as a whole, and also to ensure that

no opportunities for these themes to be coded into the data had been missed. This process

ended around the beginning of summer 2019, and I was then able to move on to the final two

stages of Braun and Clarke's (2006) model, which involves defining and naming themes, and

reporting the data and is covered in chapter 4 of this thesis.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

When designing this exploratory interview study, there were many ethical

considerations I faced stemming from general research ethics, the nature of myself as an

insider in the institution I sampled my participants from, and the nature of qualitative inquiry

and thematic analysis. These included considerations of informed consent, insider research,

researcher biases, and data storage and handling.

3.7.1 Informed Consent and The Right to Privacy

One of the cornerstones of modern ethical thinking is that of respecting the individual

rights and dignity of the participant (Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, 2015),

alternatively described as autonomy and non-maleficence (Robson, Cook, Hunt, Alred, &

Robson, 2000). In other words, the researcher must ensure their research does no harm to

their participants and that the participant is fully informed of what participation entails, the

rights of the participant, and how their data will be handled before they make a decision to

participate (Cohen et al., 2013).

In order to ensure all participants were fully informed of the exploratory interview

study I created a participant information sheet which outlined what participation entails, the

rights of the participant, how their data will be handled, and the contact details of both myself

and the University of Liverpool research participant advocate. This document was written in

simple English, but I also secured a Japanese translation to ensure the risk of any

misunderstandings was minimised. The translation was provided by a student in the graduate school for translation, then double-checked by office assistants in my department.

In the same manner I also produced a bilingual informed consent form, which participants were required to sign in order to confirm their willingness to participate in the study. All of these documents were emailed in PDF form to the participants as soon as they expressed interest in participating in the exploratory interview study, in order for them to ask any questions for clarification before the interview day. On the day, they were given paper copies of both documents signed and dated by me first, then the participant.

In order to protect anonymity, in all documents I only referred to participants by a random letter designation. I also ensured that in all records and later in this thesis I did not share any information which may identify the student, for example the specific university they attended. Rather, I referred only to the country they visited, which I felt was general enough to avoid the participants being identified, due to the large number of institutions we have partnerships with (Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, n.d.-c).

3.7.2 Insider Research and Perceived Position of Power

The next set of ethical concerns come from the fact that I conducted the exploratory interview study inside my own institution, otherwise known as insider research. Common issues stemming from insider research are those involved in the dual roles played by the researcher (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014; Holian & Coghlan, 2013), and how it would impact on the research and the interactions had with participants, particularly since in most cases the researcher holds some position of power over the participants (Brooks, te Riele, & Maguire, 2014; Noffke & Somekh, 2009).

Issues stemming from the perceived position of power include ensuring that participants have volunteered rather than joining through coercion or for a perceived reward,

ensuring that participants are free to say what they *actually* think and not what they think the researcher wants to hear, ensuring that the research does not interfere with the researcher's primary role, and ensuring that participants are protected within the organisation (Brooks et al., 2014; Burns, 2010; Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; Noffke & Somekh, 2009; N.-J. Smith, 2009).

In addition to my dual role as an insider researcher, there is another duality I feel is important to identify before addressing insider research ethical issues; my role as a foreign lecturer. Though I am an insider with my institution as a lecturer, I am also perceived as an outsider as a result of being non-Japanese (Houghton & Rivers, 2013), and these two positions have different impacts upon the issues related to insider research.

My role as a lecturer in my institution had a big impact upon the ethics of ensuring participants were free to volunteer and not coerced or volunteering in order for a reward, such as better grades or easier treatment in class (Holian & Coghlan, 2013). As described in section 3.2.1 and 3.2.2, I held this issue in mind when deciding upon sampling and recruitment methods for this exploratory interview study. I felt that in order to ensure participants would be volunteering and not coerced, I designed a process where potential participants would have to come to me and express interest in participating, rather than me approaching them.

In addition to this, I also ensured that I did not use any participants from my own classes or department to ensure that the participants would not be under the impression that participating would result in a classroom-based reward such as receiving preferential treatment or being given higher grades. This also helped me to ensure that my exploratory interview study did not interfere with my primary role as a lecturer in my institution, since I would have no interaction with these participants in my day-to-day work.

Another issue stemming from insider research and my position of power impacts upon the quality of data, and is often described as ensuring that the participants are saying what

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they *really* think, and not what they think the researcher wants to hear, or what they think might be the socially desirable response (Alvesson, 2014; Burns, 2010; Rosenblatt, 2011; van de Mortel, 2008). My position as a non-Japanese offers a different perspective to this issue. Since I am not bound by the strict cultural rules governing social interaction in Japanese culture (Y. Sugimoto, 2014), I know from personal experience that students have no problems about opening up and sharing information and stories that they would otherwise not share.

As a result, I felt that the impact of my position of power would not be too strongly felt within the data. However, this does not mean the potential for socially desirable responses or the withholding of information by the participant is removed. This is still a limitation of interview data and will be discussed in more detail later in section 3.9. In addition, the possibility that my position of power might not open me up to another potential ethical dilemma by potentially being in possession of very personal stories and information which participants may not want to be known by a wider audience.

Although insider research does present some ethical issues which the researcher must take into consideration, it has also been noted that being an insider does bring some advantages in terms of ethical conduct. Due to the insider relationship between researcher and participant, the pre-existing social bond between participant and researcher further strengthens the responsibility that the researcher holds in terms of protecting their research participants from harm in their shared environment (Mills & Stewart, 2015; Noffke & Somekh, 2009).

I feel this is particularly true of my exploratory interview study, where I do feel protective over students in my institution and I would not want to expose my participants to internal criticisms or scrutiny (Mills & Stewart, 2015; N.-J. Smith, 2009). Therefore, if I did feel that I was in possession of a particularly sensitive story or piece of information that I would

use my own sense of responsibility and commitment to the students from my institution when deciding whether or not that story *really* needed to be shared in my doctoral thesis.

3.7.3 Researcher Biases

Since "the researcher's self…is the primary tool of inquiry" (Josselson, 2007, p. 545) within thematic analysis-driven research, it follows that the researcher must be aware of their own biases and report these clearly in the research report (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Holian & Coghlan, 2013). My own biases stem from my personal experience with study abroad and life in another country, and my role as a teacher.

My experiences of living abroad in Japan as a teacher and studying abroad in my undergraduate degree has left me with a favourable view towards the power of study abroad for personal growth and change. Looking back on my experiences I can see the transformative effect these experiences have had on me and how the person I am today can be traced back through these experiences.

As a language teacher dealing with foreign students who have an interest in foreign cultures and study abroad programmes, I want them to experience the same effects I have, and to be able to look back on their experiences abroad as defining moments in who they become. As a teacher, I also have the habit of encouraging students to find the learning opportunity in anything they encounter or experience. It is natural for me to encourage students not to look at the surface of a given text or experience and think more deeply about the implications and what they can learn from it.

These two biases have implications on the interviews and the data analysis for this exploratory interview study. When listening to the participants in the interviews, or coding the interview data, I had to be aware of the fact that though my own international experiences have resulted in change, that may not necessarily be true to my participants. I

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also had to be careful not to incorrectly view every event recalled by participants as a learning opportunity, unless it was clear from the context in the data.

Since the researcher cannot be removed entirely from the type of research used to answer these research questions (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Holian & Coghlan, 2013; Josselson, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), my aim was to try to minimise how far my biases coloured the data. In order to do that, I had to ensure I stuck to the principle of recursive coding, and ensure I was not enforcing my own experiences or expectations onto the themes and patterns which would emerge from the data.

Thematic analysis is recursive in nature, meaning the data set, codes, and themes are reviewed many times before the final themes are decided (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). When building categories from codes and combining categories into themes, the researcher must always return to the data within and review it to ensure consistency between the themes and the data within (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As noted in section 3.2, I was able to do this by continually re-checking the coding at the end of every stage, both within the codes and themes, but also within the data set as a whole. This helped me to ensur I was doing my best to minimise the chance that I enforced my own biases onto the data, rather than allowing themes to emerge which were representative of the content of the data.

3.8 Validity and Reliability of Data

Thematic analysis presents some important challenges related to validity and reliability of the data presented in this thesis. Ryan and Bernard (2003) suggest that with qualitative research "There is no ultimate demonstration of validity, but we can maximize clarity and agreement and make validity more, rather than less, likely" (p.108). In other words,

they are arguing for the researcher to be clear and honest about their choices in order for the

reader to be able to make their own decisions on the validity and reliability of the data.

Castleberry and Nolan (2018) add a further nine points for ensuring that research in

thematic analysis is valid and reliable, which also focus on the researcher establishing their

credibility to the reader in the write up of the research. Key suggestions from the list include:

- The researcher should surround themselves with a team of experts
- The coding should be done by multiple coders. If this is not possible, keep detailed notes
- The researcher should take their time when coding
- The researcher should not be afraid to start over again if the coding is not working
- The researcher should openly report their own biases
- The researcher should use sound research methods
- The researcher should use brief, clear quotations to illustrate the quality of their coding, themes, and conclusions
- The researcher should answer the research questions in the write up
- The researcher should build trust by being transparent on decisions made at all levels of the research process

To begin addressing these points, the first two pieces of advice regarding surrounding

myself with experts, and using multiple coders were largely influenced by the context of

completing a doctoral thesis. In terms of experts, I consider both of my supervisors to be the

experts, and they have provided me with valuable guidance during all stages of this doctoral

research. However, in terms of using multiple coders, I felt that due to the doctoral thesis

being representative of my own work, this would not be a desirable approach. Instead, I kept

copious notes both in a hand-written diary and a set of notes and reflections within the coding

programme I used in the analysis.

During the coding stage, I was well aware of the next two points regarding taking time

and being unafraid to restart coding if I felt I was being unsuccessful. Since the two rounds of

interviews were spread over time, in some cases almost a year, I was in a situation where I

was unable to rush the coding process. Instead, I was able to refine, recode, and reconsider

the coding many times during the process, and at some points I was able to take some time away from the data and return to it with fresh eyes and a clear mind.

The final set of recommendations presented above are with regards to the content of the thesis. They recommend a clear statement of bias, which I included in the researcher profile in chapter one, and sound research methods, which have been described in this chapter. In addition, they recommend the use of clear quotations to highlight the themes, which I will present in chapter four, and that the researcher answers the research questions, which will be covered in chapter five. Finally, this methodology section has gone into detail on decisions made during the research process, which is also recommended above.

3.9 Limitations

The limitations to be considered in this exploratory interview study are with regards to methodological concerns and will therefore be addressed in this section, before the findings and conclusions are presented in the remaining chapters.

3.9.2 Limitations Regarding Data Collection

In terms of data collection, a limitation which should be taken into account is with regards to the timing of the data collection. As discussed in section 3.2.1, I rejected onsite data collection methods such as direct observation and diary collection due to restrictions around the variety of locations and timing of the various study abroad programmes, and the reliability of ensuring all participants produce a diary for me to analyse at the end of the study abroad programme.

This raises a limitation with regards to triangulation. Triangulation of either data analysis, data collection, or data types refers to a process which aims to reduce bias and deficiencies, and increase reliability and validity in a piece of research (Given, 2012). The data

presented in this exploratory interview study is only based on two interviews, one before and one after the study abroad programme. Therefore, it does not contain any triangulation, and as a result, the findings and conclusions presented in this exploratory interview study should be considered as tentative.

3.9.1 Limitations Regarding Self-Reports Through Interview Data

Self-reports offer additional limitations with regards to how accurate and complete the data set can be considered. Since the data for this exploratory interview study is from the participant perspective, it is limited only by what they are able to observe or remember, and what they are willing and able to articulate in an interview setting. In this sense, limitations such as socially desirable responses, and the difference between 'knowing' and 'telling' (Alvesson, 2014; Rosenblatt, 2011; van de Mortel, 2008) are important considerations.

Socially desirable responses cover situations where the participant may feel pressure to say something which can help them to save face by conforming to specific societal conventions or saying something which they feel might get them some form of approval. Similarly, the participant may opt not to tell certain pieces of information in order to avoid criticism. In addition, self-deception is another form of socially desirable response, whereby the interview participant may be reporting what they believe to be the truth, when in fact it is an untruth born of self-deception (Rosenblatt, 2011; van de Mortel, 2008).

The differences between 'knowing' and 'telling' are related to the way a participant can express themselves verbally. They could manifest in one of two ways, the first is a situation the participant knows what they want to say, without having the ability to fully express what they mean. The reverse is also possible in the way that some people are very good at expressing ideas verbally, while having no real knowledge about what they are expressing (Alvesson, 2014).

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In the context of this exploratory interview study, these issues could manifest in some specific ways. As discussed in section 3.7.2 on insider research and perceived position of power, there is a possibility of the participants reporting what they felt I wanted to hear, a form of socially desirable response. In addition, considering the amount of time and money the participants have invested in both the lead-up to, and participation in, the study abroad programme, there is potential for some self-deception in their responses. Finally, as discussed in section 3.2.2, these interviews were held in a second language, which has the potential to result in a situation where participants might have the knowledge of what they want to say, but lack in the ability to express it.

Both sections 3.2.2 and 3.7.2 addressed these issues and how I have attempted to minimise their influence on the data. However, the potential for impact of the limitations on the data cannot be completely removed, meaning that any interpretation of the data in the following chapters must take these limitations into account.

3.9.2 Limitations of Qualitative Data and Exploratory Research

Exploratory research in the social sciences has been described as perspective in which the researcher and the research is positioned as an explorer on a journey of discovery, with results that may be inconclusive, messy, and vague (Davies, 2011). Furthermore, as a piece of qualitative research, this exploratory study does not aim to produce generalisable results (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

Therefore, the results presented in chapter 4 should be considered tentative, and exploratory in nature. Subsequent research in other contexts may add further to the results suggested in this exploratory interview study or may find no evidence within their context of some of the same results reported in this thesis. This will be taken into consideration in all subsequent chapters of this thesis.

3.9.3 Concluding Remarks

The limitations presented above can be situated within the methodological approach chosen for this exploratory interview study. Due to limitations resulting from the timing of the data collection before and after the study abroad programme, the reliance on self-reported data, no triangulation of data, and the decision to approach these research questions as an exploratory study, the findings and conclusions presented in the following chapters should be approached carefully.

The claims made in this thesis for outcomes of participation in study abroad programmes should be considered as tentative until they have been addressed more fully through additional research, and may not be generalise these results to other contexts. Any researchers using these conclusions as the basis for further research are recommended to reflect on their own context and consider to what extent it overlaps with the context for this research thesis (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

3.10 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has taken a top-down approach to the research design process. Moving on, the following chapter will now describe the findings from the thematic analysis of the two rounds of interviews. In total, seven themes will be presented, along with description and illustrative quotations.

4.0 Findings

This chapter presents the findings from the thematic analysis of the interview transcripts. Overall, seven key themes were identified and are presented below. They have been grouped into two sets with the first group being themes related to outcomes of participation in a study abroad programme, and the second related to managing expectations of participants on study abroad programmes.

4.1 Themes 1 – 5: Outcomes of Participation in a Study Abroad Programme

This group of themes is focussed on the outcomes of participation in the study abroad programmes. Since the majority of the interview questions (Appendix) focussed on this area, they are by far the most prevalent within the data set. There are four themes in this section; curriculum-related outcomes, breaking stereotypes, having a good time, and maturation.

The discussion of each theme will follow a similar structure, beginning with a general definition and a list of the categories within the theme as an introduction. Each category will then be further defined in its own section and supported with quotations from the data. The quotations will be assigned to each participant from figure 4 (chapter 3.3). Finally, since RQ1 and RQ2 of this exploratory interview study focus on participant perceptions on outcomes *before* and *after* the study abroad programme, the findings within each category will be presented in two parts reflecting this distinction. The discussion of the theme will then end with a brief summary before moving on to the next theme to be discussed.

4.1.1 Theme 1: Curriculum-Related Outcomes

Curriculum-related outcomes refers specifically to the curriculum on the study abroad programme in which the participant is taking part. These outcomes broadly mirror what one might expect to see in the advertising material for the programme, or in a programme

syllabus, and contains four categories; *Work experience*, *Employment*, *English language or subject knowledge*, and *Learning foreign culture*.

Work experience and Employment

To begin, the two linked categories of *Work experience* and *Employment* will be discussed. The category of *Work experience* contains participants' comments on opportunities for work experience *within* the curriculum of the study abroad programme and skills they may learn as a result. For this reason, it was included as a category within the theme of *Curriculum-Related Outcomes*, and not made into an independent theme. In the pre-departure interview, this category was mainly discussed by participants enrolled on study abroad programmes with an internship component and focussed a lot on gaining customer service skills.

Though this category was mainly discussed by participants enrolled on internships prior to departure, there was a single instance in which a participant on a programme with no internship component commented on opportunities for work experience in the pre-departure interviews. Participant S03 was registered on an academic programme, and though the programme curriculum does not offer this opportunity, the participant expressed that they "would like to take part in volunteer activities as much as possible, in social communities" because they had been volunteering in Japan and intended to continue growing this experience.

Upon their return, participants continued to discuss this category, speaking specifically about what skills they felt they had gained from the work experience. In particular, they focussed on improving their customer service ability. Participant S12 in particular commented on how their experience in the internship has impacted upon their part time job they started on their return to Japan:

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> …my goal was to improve my English and to improve my communication skill because I want to work in a hotel or in the hospitality industry in the future…I think I did make some improvements. For example, in my part time job, now I can talk to customers (S12).

Participant S03, who indicated they wanted to gain experience in volunteering prior to studying abroad, also commented on their experience and what they gained from it:

> I was able to do some volunteer work by holding a Japanese conversation group every week for students who are studying Japanese, and I had many participants every week. I'm so happy I did it because I'm really interested in how people learn language, because I have difficulties now, so I could share their emotions and difficulties to learn languages (S03).

A linked category to that of *Work experience* is the category of *Employment*. This refers to the way in which the content of the curriculum can impact upon future career opportunities. This is slightly different to *Work experience*, since it is more about the content of classes the participants took, rather than a practical internship experience. For the most part, prior to departure, participants had a post-graduation career in mind and considered how the study abroad experience would contribute to it:

> I'm thinking about working in an international workplace in the future, or using English in a job after my graduation. So maybe I'm going to have some opportunities to communicate with people from other countries in work, so, the global perspective is going to be important for me in the future (S09).

Interestingly, participant S04 did not have a specific job that they wanted to do after graduation, and they saw the study abroad programme as an opportunity to explore future career opportunities, or "dream" as it is often referred to by Japanese students:

> I am in the education department in my university in Japan, but I don't want to be a teacher. So now I want to find my dream, which is why I want to take the hospitality class on my study abroad programme (S04).

In the post-study abroad interviews, participants reported a greater understanding of what they wanted to do in their future career, in some cases even changing their planned career entirely as shown in this quotation from participant S09:

> At first, I was interested in working in hospitality, so I took the hospitality and tourism management programme. But…during my study abroad programme I actually became more interested in teaching (S09).

Interestingly, participant S06 became less interested in *what job* they wanted, and more interested in *what kind of life* they want to live:

> Now, getting a good job is not my the most important thing to me. I just want to be happy. Before I studied abroad, what made me happy was getting good job, but now, what makes me happy is staying with my boyfriend or just having fun in my daily life (S06).

These two categories describe curriculum-related outcomes in terms of post-graduation employment. In both the pre-departure interviews, and upon completion of the study abroad programme, participants were aware of how the content of the curriculum might have an impact upon their future career path. In one interesting case, the effect of the programme caused a larger change in the participant's mindset from being career-focussed to being more interested in how they can live a happy life after graduation.

English language and subject knowledge

The category of *English language and subject knowledge* discusses classroom-based outcomes focussed on the content of the classes the participants would be attending. In the case of English language, prior to departure, participants spoke mainly about improving their English test scores as a desired outcome:

> The most important thing about studying abroad for me is to improve my English level (S05).

My final goal is actually to get a good TOEIC score (S06).

In other cases, participants spoke more about their abilities with communicative English, particularly with regards to spoken English fluency, something they felt they were lacking prior to departure:

Now, I'm not good at speaking English, so I want to get more speaking skills (S10).

I want to get a higher TOEIC score, and I want to speak English more fluently (S16).

Upon their return, participant comments on English language were varied. In some cases, participants reported feeling their communication skills had indeed improved, using examples of when they could communicate with someone, either in the classroom or on the internship programme to support this claim:

Of course, I improved my English skills by communicating with people from all over the world (S09).

However, for some participants, they felt their English had not improved as much as they had wanted. In one case, the participant recognised that their expectations had been set too high, which had a detrimental effect on their mental health:

I tried to speak with domestic or international students, but it was difficult to keep conversation because my English skill was very low before I left. So, it was difficult to communicate and I got depressed…My goal was to improve my English skills so that I could speak fluently about not only casual things, but political or cultural things, but I couldn't…so I quit trying to speak to domestic or international students (S14).

Finally, for some participants, they expressed a change in perspective on communication in a foreign language. Moving away from a focus on test scores, accuracy, and

fluency, and being more focussed on ensuring that they are communicating their meaning clearly, as shown in this quotation from participant S08:

> My perspective for English changed because I think a lot of Japanese people think they have to speak perfect English. But on my study abroad programme, there were a lot of people who came from different countries, and their English was not perfect, but it didn't matter because English is just a tool. If we understand what they say, even if it is not perfect pronunciation or perfect grammar, it doesn't matter (S08).

A further interesting comment on the change in perspective on English came from participant S09, who saw English as a global language and the way it can help bring people from various cultures together:

> This programme made me think about how English is important to communicate with many people around the world…I thought it is really good for children if they can speak English, they can broaden their perspective…and that made me think about how I want to become a teacher (S09).

In the case of *Subject knowledge*, it is related to the specific content that would be taught in non-ESL classes, for example gaining knowledge about international business or public health. Prior to departure, participants spoke about this knowledge from the perspective of its use for future employment. For example, participant S10, who wanted to learn about tourism because "I want to work in a travel agency".

In one case, participant S06 viewed the study abroad programme as an opportunity to study subjects which they would not otherwise have access to in their Japanese university department:

> I really want to take marketing now because I'm interested in the marketing industry…and I can't take any marketing classes in my department because it is The Department of English and Contemporary Society (S06).

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Upon their return, some participants were able to express interest in studying their subject knowledge in more detail, including two participants who intended to get further qualifications in their subject area:

> I studied business as my minor on my study abroad programme…at home, I am an education student. Now, I want to study for a business English license (S14).

> I've decided I want to get a psychology certificate in Japan (S16).

For participant S04, they realised their subject area was not as interesting as they had thought, and their opinions changed on that particular field of study:

> I studied hospitality business management for one year, but I found hospitality is not my thing…I also studied marketing, accounting and economics, and I found they are really interesting, so I want to continue studying these subjects (S04).

To summarise the category of *English language and subject knowledge* participants expressed increasing their knowledge and skills in one or both of these areas prior to departure. Upon their return, various outcomes were present in the data. In some cases, participants reported growth in their knowledge or skills of the subject area, and even an interest in gaining further qualifications in that particular area. However, other participants noted that their original interest had faded and been replaced by an alternative, and in one case, it was found that having unrealistic goals in terms of growth in skills resulted in the participant withdrawing from social contact. Finally, in some cases, there was a deeper change in perspective, particularly with regards to the participant's understanding of the nature of English as a tool for communication.

It should also be recognised at this point that considering the link between the subject knowledge and future employment, it is not surprising that there is a similar developmental

path to the category of *Employment*, which was described above. As they got to know more about the field in which they intended to work through subject classes, they realise that the subject not as interesting as they imagined. Similarly, as they get to know more about the field of work they intended to enter, their planned career path also undergoes a change.

Learning host culture

The final category in the theme of *Curriculum-Related Outcomes* discusses *Learning host culture*, which the participants described from two perspectives; historical and comparative. In other words, they spoke about learning knowledge of the host culture, for example, history, and in the case of comparative, they talked about learning how similar or different the host culture was to Japanese culture.

The decision to include this as a category within *Curriculum-Related Outcomes* and to not create a separate theme was made due the fact that in a sense, life abroad and interacting with the host culture is a part of the study *abroad* curriculum. As participant S03 commented, "…studying abroad is helpful to understand the culture of the country". In this sense, learning about the host culture is not separate from the study abroad curriculum, rather it is another part of the curriculum they have registered for.

Prior to departure, when considering *Learning host culture* from a comparative point of view, the participants mainly spoke about the desire to learn in what ways the host culture was different to Japanese culture, particularly with regards to character, politeness, and lifestyles. When prompted to give specifics on what they hoped to learn about the host culture, participant S12 commented "Everything. News, politeness, and the personality of local people".

From a historical point of view, some participants were much more specific on what they wanted to learn prior to departure. Participant S13 spoke about wanting to learn about

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"Japanese-American World War Two internment camps", participant S03 spoke about learning "differences between religions", and participant S15 spoke about learning "British music like The Beatles, Led Zeppelin, and Pulp" or famous British historical figures like "Braveheart" and "Lawrence of Arabia".

An important observation to make with regards to the data so far is that prior to departure, participants were speaking from the perspective of gaining specific cultural *knowledge*. In the discussion on the development of intercultural competencies in chapter 2.2.1, the importance of *deep* cultural knowledge was highlighted, or the type of knowledge that moves beyond items such as food and greetings and into the social, historical and political context of the culture (Deardorff, 2006). To this extent, participants seemed to be expressing interest in the type of knowledge that could contribute to the development of intercultural competencies, albeit in general terms.

Upon their return, this category had broadened somewhat. Not only were participants able to compare aspects of the host culture to Japan, but also other cultures due to their experiences socialising with other international students who were studying in the host institution.

> There were students from Saudi Arabia and Korea in my class…so they told me about stories, national holidays, and cultural things from their country (S15).

Also, in addition to the history of the host culture, some participants detailed a growth in knowledge of world religions, and in one case a greater awareness of their own religion:

> My host university was a Christian university, so I could learn both Muslim culture and Christian culture…and it gave me a chance to think about my religion because in Japan most people, like me, don't think about religion (S13).

This is surprising, since prior to departure, participants were only discussing the opportunities they would have to interact with the *host* culture, unaware of the opportunities that would be afforded to them to interact with other cultures also present in the international student cohort.

Furthermore, from the perspective of the development of intercultural competency, it seems that participants did gain some exposure to aspects of deep culture, including the religious context of both their host community and other cultural groups they interacted with on campus. In addition, they started to have a growing interest in, and knowledge of cultural differences, another component of Deardorff's (2006, 2009, 2015) process model.

Finally, there was also some evidence of a growing cultural self-awareness, another component of intercultural communication (Deardorff, 2006, 2009, 2015). Participant S13, who spoke about religion in the quotation above reported returning back to Japan with an interest in learning more about themself and their own culture:

> When I came back to Japan, I bought a lot of books about religion, culture, history…I keep thinking, you know, just right now I'm thinking what I belong to because that is a really hard question for me, but I just think I belong to Shinto, not like Buddhism or something…this experience let me think about myself (S13).

To conclude this discussion of the theme of *Curriculum-Related Outcomes*, participants displayed some awareness of the content of the curriculum on their study abroad programme prior to departure and were able to identify specific outcomes of the curriculum upon their return. Perspectives included specific knowledge to be learned through their education, as well as the potential career impact of studying abroad, and the opportunities they would have to learn about the host culture.

Some interesting observations in this theme included expectations which were not in line with the type of programme in which the participant was taking part, as in the case of a participant looking for some work experience while participating in an academic programme. There were also large changes observed in participants' comments on their post-graduation career before and after the study abroad programme, including two instances where the perspective changed from what they wanted to do for their career to how they wanted to live their life. There was a shift from a single focus on the host culture when participants were discussing acquisition of cultural knowledge, to that of learning other cultures by virtue of meeting other international students on their programme. Finally, in terms of intercultural competence development, there was some evidence of an interest in deep cultural knowledge prior to departure. Upon return, there was a hint that participants had gains in the areas of deep cultural knowledge, awareness of cultural differences, and a growing cultural self-awareness.

4.1.2 Theme 2: Breaking Stereotypes

Though this theme shares some similarities to the category of *Learning foreign culture* within theme 1 (discussed in section 4.1.1), there is an important distinction to be made between the two. Where *Learning foreign culture* is about the acquisition of specific knowledge, the theme of *Breaking Stereotypes* is more active in tone and describes a willingness within the participants to challenge their own preconceived notions of the host culture in light of their own experience during the study abroad programme. Prior to departure it was expressed as something the participants wanted to actively attempt to do, as the following extracts illustrate:

Right now, I unconsciously judge foreign people, which I don't think is very good, so I want fix it and have a more open mind towards foreign people (S14).

So, I hope to fix my stereotypes, because if I hold incorrect stereotypes after studying abroad it is shameful. When I come back, I will have experience living in a foreign country, and if I don't clearly understand the stereotypes of my host culture, that is not good (S13).

In one case prior to departure, participant S03 was aware of a change in their own role from a regular member of society to an immigrant and hoped for that experience to inform how they interacted with immigrants back in Japan once the programme was over:

In Japan, other students are foreigners, but when I study abroad I'm a foreigner. So, when I come back to Japan, I won't be surprised when I meet foreigners in Japan (S03).

In the post study abroad interviews, there were many occasions in which participants reported having to confront their own pre-conceived stereotypes of foreign cultures, whether they had previously discussed this as an expected outcome in the pre-departure interview or not. In a similar manner to theme 1, the focus had also shifted from confronting stereotypes not only of the host culture, but other cultures they met through the international student cohort. In particular, participants commented on their stereotypes of other Asian countries, which were generally negative in tone, but through interaction with international students from those cultures, their stereotypes were challenged, and ultimately changed.

It is really political, but before I studied abroad, I didn't have a good opinion about Korean people. But in my English classes there was one Korean guy...but I didn't consider about him as one Korean *guy*. I only considered him as *Korean*. But he was really kind...and one time I had a chance to talk with him about World War Two. It's really sensitive and his opinion is really neutral. Not like what I know about Korean people from Japanese TV, you know? So that makes change my point of view (S13).

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Before I studied abroad, I held some kind of discrimination towards Chinese people. But my classmates were mainly Chinese…they are so nice and they always helped me and they took me around the local area. I realised that I shouldn't see the person because of their nationality. Instead, I should see their personality. We should not judge the person on their nationality (S11).

In some cases, upon their return participants did not express specific stereotypes which were confronted, but expressed a more nuanced understanding of the nature of stereotyping, and how it doesn't account for individual differences in people:

I think Japanese people think Western people are more outgoing or extrovert and Asian people are more introvert, but I don't think it is right because some people are really extrovert, but others are not. So, it depends on the person or people (S04).

Well, my idea now is based on the people that I met during my study abroad. I learned that some stereotypes are not true for everyone, because some people that I met were not the same as my stereotype…Some people are really friendly, but some people are not. This is kind of the same as Japan, some people are friendly, some people are unfriendly (S07).

Through these confrontations with stereotyping, participant S04 began to question the implications of the stereotypes they held, as well as questioning the relationship between the individual, their ethnicity, and their nationality.

Now, I try not to think where they are from. So, like I will look at people as they are, not their background. Just their personality…Also, I was thinking what makes an identity? Is it because of the language I speak or my personality or my background or my culture? (S04)

To summarise theme 2, prior to departure some participants had described a willingness and openness to confronting their own stereotypes of the host culture. For those who were able to do so, the results of this confrontation resulted in a variety of outcomes. For some participants, they realised that not only had they confronted their stereotypes of the host culture, but also stereotypes they held of other international cultures, particularly

other Asian countries. For others, there was a deeper change in their understanding of stereotyping as a concept and how it can lead to overgeneralisations. Even more deeply, this also resulted in some participants beginning to question the nature of identity and to what extent this can be dictated by one's nationality or ethnicity.

4.1.3 Theme 3: Having a Good Time

This was designated as a theme due to the fact that participants spoke at length of the importance of *Having a Good Time* on their study abroad programme both in the pre-departure interviews and the post-study abroad interviews. Categories of *Sightseeing* and *Making friends* were chosen for inclusion in this theme due to the fact that these represent experiences that are external to the curriculum and represent free-time activities that participants would engage with in order to have a good time on their study abroad programme.

Sightseeing

Prior to departure, participants spoke a lot about the importance of having a good time on their study abroad programme, viewing it as an opportunity for travel and discussing it almost like a holiday. This is particularly represented in the category of *Sightseeing*, whereby participants specifically mentioned places they would like to go such as "Liverpool" (participants S04 and S15), "Missouri" (participant S07), and "New York" (participant S13). The participants also mentioned specific sightseeing activities they would like to do, such as "visit a big city" (participant S02) and "go shopping" (participant S16).

Upon their return, participants spoke effusively about their sightseeing experiences, some of which were quite profound, with participant S02 commenting upon an experience visiting Brussels:

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> In Brussels, there were many international people, creating a great atmosphere…Some musicians were playing music and everyone was dancing together and connecting with each other…it was really wonderful and beautiful…I felt that all cultures can understand each other and bond with each other (S02).

Participant S14, however, had high expectations of their opportunity to travel with domestic students before they left Japan, and once they realised their expectations were too high, they gave up on trying to engage in sightseeing activities.

> My Japanese friends who studied abroad in other cities posted gorgeous pictures on social media, but my experience was not like that, and I became jealous of them…they also made short trips with other Japanese students, but I didn't want to do that, so I looked for other international students or domestic students to join me on a trip, but I couldn't find any. So, I closed myself off from everyone and I couldn't go on a trip anywhere (S14).

A final note on the category of *sightseeing* is with consideration to the negative experiences a study abroad participant might have when visiting local areas. Participant S03 had a negative experience in a shopping mall, which ended up causing them some distress.

> I was in the shopping mall having a cup of hot chocolate when this lady attacked me and my hot chocolate spilled on my coat. The lady didn't say anything, and she just laughed…I was angry and then so sad because I experienced that…I thought it was because I am Japanese, not Irish…I'm still angry at her (S03).

This category highlights the importance of the desire participants have to go sightseeing on their study abroad programme. Though some participants get the opportunity to do so, and have some meaningful experiences, there is also potential for more negative outcomes. Not every sightseeing experience can be meaningful in a positive way, as one participant reflected on a negative experience with a local person in a shopping mall. Also, similar to the category of *English Language and subject knowledge*, there is a danger of participants having unrealistic expectations of what sightseeing opportunities are available to

them. In one participant's example, these unrealistic expectations can cause them to cease their efforts to go sightseeing, and end their study abroad programme with this desire unfulfilled.

Making friends

The next category within the theme of *Having a Good Time* is the theme of *Making friends.* Similar to the category of *sightseeing*, this was something that participants spoke about at length in the pre-departure interviews. Specifically, participants spoke about making friends with members of the host culture, for example "I want to make many American friends" (participant S16) and "I want to make friends with local people" (participant S14).

However, when reviewing this category in the post-study abroad interviews, there was a change in focus. Participants comment more on making friends within the international student cohort, rather than domestic students and local people. A small number of participants referred to making friends with domestic students and local people (S02, S03, S08, and S09), but for the most part, participants discussed making friends with other international students, such as Saudi Arabian, Chinese, Korean, and Colombian students.

Within the post-study abroad interview transcripts, several explanations can be found as to why participants were not able to make as many domestic friends as they had intended. For some participants, it was a matter of access, particularly those on ESL programmes. Their friendship circle was limited only to members of their class, who would naturally be international students, since domestic students do not typically need to enrol in ESL classes. When participants did try to make friends with domestic students outside of their classes, similar access issues occurred, since they were participating in events organised for international students, or joining clubs and societies aimed at international, rather than domestic students.

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When participants did try to engage with domestic students in order to make friends, they often found it difficult and gave up trying. One of the main difficulties cited in the post-study abroad interviews is the language barrier:

> …at the beginning of study abroad, I had a lot of passion or enthusiasm to speak English…so I speak, I tried to speak to domestic students or international students, but actually it was because my English skills were not as good as I thought. So, at the beginning of the programme, it was difficult to communicate so I got depressed (S14).

Though issues with the language barrier is something which is not entirely surprising, it is important to note that in the above quotation there is another example of where a participant's expectations prior to leaving Japan were unrealistic. They were under the impression that their language skill would be sufficient to make friends, and that finding and maintaining relationships with domestic students would be relatively easy. However, these expectations were unrealistic, and the cost to the student was emotional distress at the very start of the programme.

Not all participants had such a negative reaction to the difficulties in making friends with domestic students. During the programme, participant S16 reflected on how the domestic students did not seem as interested in making friends as they had hoped, and came to the realisation that it was not something domestic students were required to do; "During the last semester, I had classes with Americans, but they were a little bit dry. They were not interested in me. But they didn't have to be".

Participant S14 also spoke of Japanese social norms as a barrier to interacting with domestic students. They commented that "…there were about ten Japanese people in my class and it is necessary to speak Japanese to keep the relationship with them. It's a Japanese

social thing". In other words, this student felt they needed to maintain relationships with Japanese students, rather than try to build relationships with domestic students.

Though participants experienced barriers to forming friendships with domestic students on campus, they were able to have some interactions with members of the host culture, usually in chance encounters on trains and public transport, or when visiting sightseeing spots. S16 recalled one of these moments, and reflected on how meaningful it was for them:

> I went sightseeing by train and the woman next to me was from the local area. She was so friendly and we spoke for around one or two hours…I could learn a lot from her, but in Japan we don't speak so much on the bus and train, so this experience was so nice (S16).

Participants who were able to have deeper connections with members of the host culture were those who engaged in a homestay programme, with participant S02 referring to their homestay family as their "treasure". Though most homestay participants reported a positive connection with their homestay family, participant S12 had a difficult time communicating with their host mother at first. However, by the end of the programme, these problems began to lessen:

> …I really didn't like my host mum at first, she was so indirect, and I couldn't understand her feelings or her thoughts and it was really stressful at first... But I could deal with it by the end of the programme. I think we had trouble because I was also indirect at the beginning, but I slowly became more direct and it helped us to communicate smoothly (S12).

To summarise the category of *Making friends*, though it could be argued that participants had failed to achieve their goal of making friends with members of the *host* culture due to the various barriers outline above, the majority of the participants did not

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express disappointment in this. They reported finding value in their international friendship groups and seemed satisfied with their smaller interactions with members of the host culture.

When considering the theme of *Having a Good Time* as a whole, it becomes clear that to some extent, participants considered the study abroad programme as an extended holiday and an opportunity to travel, without really considering how a study abroad programme might differ from a short trip to a foreign country. This is backed up in some of the pre-departure interviews, where participants commented that "I just want to go study abroad and live somewhere outside of Japan" (participant S06) and "…for many students, their goal is only to study abroad" (participant S08).

In the post study abroad interview, participant S14 commented on how they realised that study abroad is not the same as going on holiday, and presents a different set of challenges to that of a short holiday:

> I expected study abroad would be like only studying English or academic subjects, but it wasn't. Studying abroad is to live there, from waking up to sleeping. There are a lot of things to consider, emotionally and physically. A lot of things, which I didn't expect (S14).

This is another example of unrealistic expectations that participants held before they departed on their study abroad programme. To some extent, they saw the study abroad experience as analogous to a holiday, with the addition of some regular classes in a university. However, as the participant above noted, once the programme began, for some participants they realise that the study abroad programme is not in fact a holiday, and presents physical and emotional challenges as they *live* in a foreign country.

To sum up this theme, it appears that prior to departure participants were not considering the unique challenges they may face as part of living in a foreign country, and saw it as an opportunity for travel, focussing on things such as making friends and sightseeing. For

the most part, participants were able to have a good time on their study abroad programme, though not necessarily in the way they expected, particularly with regards to making friends. Prior to departure, participants had not really considered the international cohort as a place to also create relationships with people from outside of Japan.

In addition, similar to the themes described above, there are examples of unrealistic expectations which the participants held prior to departure; study abroad as a holiday, the ease of making friends with members of the host culture, and their own language proficiency. As with the themes above, when it becomes clear to the participants that their expectations are unlikely to be fulfilled, there is a chance that this could cause them to reign in their efforts, and in some cases, it could cause some emotional distress.

4.1.4 Theme 4: Maturation

The next theme for outcomes is that of *Maturation*. This theme covers the idea of study abroad as an opportunity for the participant to grow and mature. In addition to seeing study abroad as an opportunity for travel, as described in theme 3 above, participants also see the study abroad programme as an opportunity for them to mature, away from home. This is due to the fact that for some of them, this will be their first experience living away from their family home. For this theme, categories identified were *Confidence, Independence, Expressing personal opinions,* and *Self-awareness.*

Confidence

Prior to studying abroad, participants spoke of *Confidence* in terms of overcoming their own perceived shyness in various contexts. The two most common contexts in which they described this shyness was in speaking English specifically, and speaking with new people more generally, regardless of the language of communication. This is demonstrated by the

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following excerpts, where the participants expressed an intention to overcome their own

shyness in English and with strangers in order to become part of a new friendship group and

be more open to communication with new people.

> I want to have more courage when talking to native English speakers, or
> people I don't know. I want to be able to say hello to people without
> hesitation...studying abroad is a jump to a new world, so all of the people I
> will meet are new, so I need to have confidence to communicate with them
> and to enter a new circle of people (S02).

> I'm too shy and I can't speak in front of other people. But in my heart, I want
> to talk to new people, and I want to have more communication (S11).

Participants also expressed a desire to improve their *Confidence* in the classroom. As

described in chapter 3, Japanese students are known for their reticence in the classroom, and

it appears that the participants in this exploratory interview study are also aware of this issue.

Rather than defending the reasons behind classroom reticence, participants saw this as an

issue they would like to overcome and expressed the intent to become more confident in

sharing their own ideas in the classroom environment.

> In class, I have to try to show my feelings, because I think saying nothing is
> kind of rude in the country I will visit. So, I have to show my feelings I think.
> In Japan we cannot say anything in class, but on my study abroad, I have to
> (S15).

Upon their return, participants did report a growth in *Confidence*, initially with regards

to their ability to communicate in English, as described in theme 1. Additionally, the

participants reported a growth in *Confidence* with regards to classroom-based interaction.

> In my classes, the students were really willing to share their opinions, raise
> their hands or just talk to the teacher directly. This behaviour is really rare
> in Japan, but I followed my classmates' actions. So, thanks to that, I was
> willing to share my opinion to the whole class. It was impossible for me

before I studied abroad. I used to just listen to the professor, the teacher or my classmates. I just took notes (S07).

An interesting cause for growth in *Confidence* came from situations where participants experienced some kind of conflict with another person and had to overcome it. Conflicts arose in various areas for the participants to resolve, either in teamwork for a class project, with other students living in the same dormitory, with homestay families, or in the example given below from participant S12, with teachers.

I was so stressed about the problem, but at the same time I was kind of enjoying it. I didn't back down and I knew it would be hard, but at the same time I recognised it's my life, so I should do something. Actually, it was fun to fight with the teacher (S12).

Interestingly, in the excerpt above, participant S12 did not see conflict resolution as an emotionally charged event, rather as a game. This view of conflict resolution as a 'game' was referenced by other participants too:

I knew I couldn't understand what they said, but I thought just giving up was not good for me, so I tried to listen to what they said and to understand their point. I couldn't understand everything, but I tried many times. At first it was very challenging at first. But after I did it many times, I thought it was not challenging, but more like a game (S10).

A final observation to make on the quotation from participant S10 is with regards to the skills needed to solve such conflict, in addition to the attitude of conflict resolution as a game. At first, the participant did not view conflict resolution as a game due to the fact they were not equipped with the skills to aid in conflict resolution. Though they came to a solution eventually, they initially saw it as a challenge and had to make "many" attempts to solve the conflict. This highlights that not only do participants require the confidence to approach a

situation of conflict resolution, but also the skills in terms of language and intercultural conflict resolution.

In summary participants spoke about the desire to increase their confidence before embarking on their study abroad programme. Upon return, not only did some participants report improvements in their confidence with English, as described in theme 1, but also improvements in confidence in classroom interaction, and conflict resolution. In both classroom interaction and conflict resolution, it seems that if participants are able to emulate their peers in class, and not shy away from conflict with teachers, friends, and host families, then gains in *Confidence* can be made.

Independence

Independence was a category discussed by several participants prior to going abroad, with particular attention given to gaining independence from their parents. As is common with most students at my institution, most of the participants appear to live at home with their parents, and saw the study abroad experience as an opportunity to gain independence from their parents and learn some basic independent living skills that would serve them in the future, once they graduate from university and move out of the family home for work.

> I live with my parents now so I don't need to housework at all, but I have to do it on my own when I study abroad, so I would like to get these skills for my life (S03).

> I'm living in my hometown with my family so my parents help me with everything. I can't cook well, I can't wash or do housework, so I have to do this when I live without my parents (S05).

Unsurprisingly, for the most part, participants expressed gains in *Independence* as an outcome of their study abroad programme. This is unsurprising because the type of independent skills outlined in the quotation above (cooking, washing clothes, housework) are

facts of life when participating on study abroad programmes. When living away from home, there is no choice but to do these things on a day to day basis, regardless of how well one can do them.

However, some participants did speak of growth in *Independence* in a new way. They spoke in terms of problem-solving, and similar to the discussion on conflict resolution above, participants saw these moments as a challenge to overcome. An interesting example comes from participant S11 whose parents offered to pay for them to fly home early and quit the study abroad programme halfway through, due to the participant feeling homesick and stressed. The participant refused this offer because "I couldn't imagine going back home…Because I have pride. I went to Australia with my mission so even if I feel sad, angry, or negative, I have to do it".

A more day-to-day challenge for participant was getting used to public transport, knowing how to use the bus, and which bus to take:

> I was surprised and shocked because I had to go to university by myself, but no one told me how to get there. So, I had to solve the problem by myself, which was a kind of challenge for me. I tried to forget the feeling I was shocked and I tried to explore. Then I tried to enjoy the situation because in Japan I cannot have the situation where I have to solve a problem on my own (S15).

On the one hand, the category of *Independence* is not surprising both as a desired outcome, and something which the participants achieved, especially with regards to independent living skills, which are unavoidable when living away from home. However, it also highlights a growth in maturity in the way study abroad participants handle adverse situations. Similar to situations of conflict resolution, if participants approach these situations as a challenge to be overcome, and are equipped with the intercultural mediation skills, then success can result in a growth in maturity for study abroad participants.

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Self-awareness

The final category of *Self-awareness* does not appear in the pre-departure interviews as a desired outcome. Instead, this is something participants only reported in the second round of interviews, after their study abroad programme was complete. The category of *Self-awareness* describes how participants reported a greater understanding of their own character and preferences on how they want to live their life in the future.

With regards to a greater understanding of themselves, participants reported identifying new aspects of their character which they did not previously have an awareness of. In some cases, this was an aspect of their character which they realised they wanted to improve or change.

> I'm a very weak person, emotionally and psychologically. I'm not outgoing, so I don't ask my friends to hang out. I'm always passive, so I'm waiting for friends to invite me. If they don't, I'm stuck in my room, using my phone and watching YouTube. I was really bad, and there was no difference between my Japanese life or my study abroad life life…But now I can improve myself from this realisation (S14).

In other cases, participants were able to identify ways the study abroad experience had improved their character for the better.

> Maybe I am able to think more positively. I was so negative when I was in Japan, but I realised that sometimes I can't do anything when something bad happens. I realised that in these situations, it is helpful to have a positive outlook because I can move on and think about something else (S03).

> Before studying abroad, I used to care too much about what other people think about me, so I wanted to be perfect. But on my programme, I met a lot of people and I learned different values and cultures. So now I think I became kind of easy going, and I think it is good for me (S09).

Finally, some participants also reported a deeper understanding of how they wanted to live their life, and their ambitions for the future.

> I used to think my life in Japan was boring. I was just studying every day and, on the weekend, I went to my part time job. I thought it was a boring life, but I guess I just enjoy studying and working. So now, I really like my lifestyle and I really like myself and my character…(S12)

> Before I studied abroad, I knew that I would have to do job hunting after the programme ended, so I was always thinking about how I can get a good job or what qualifications should I get. But I realised that getting a good job is not the main part of my life. I just want to be happy. Before I studied abroad, what I thought would make me happy was getting a good job, but now I realise what makes me happy is staying with my boyfriend or just having fun in my daily life (S06).

It is important to note that for some participants, they were unable to articulate how they had changed, but they were aware that something within had indeed changed. Participant S06 commented that "I don't know what happened to my mind", while participant S04 recognised "I think the experience has changed the way I think, but I am not sure how. I can't think of any examples. But I'm sure it has changed my view or my perspective a lot".

As noted in the literature review, this inability for the participants to fully articulate how they had changed could be explained by a variety of factors. As noted in chapter 2.2.1, there are a variety of influences on the outcomes of participation in a study abroad programme such as whether or not the programme contains opportunities for critical reflection, or whether or not the participants had the opportunity for social interaction. In addition, there are also many alternative developmental pathways such as the fact that the participants may not have actually gone through and perspective change, or may have experienced less desirable perspective transformations, neither of which these participants may not have wanted to share in an interview setting.

In conclusion, the theme of *Maturity* has found some expected, and some unexpected outcomes in terms of *Maturity*. Prior to departure, many participants saw the study abroad programme as a maturation process, learning independent living skills and growing their own self confidence. Whilst most of the participants were able to identify growth in these categories upon their return, there were also some additional changes not anticipated or directly noted by the participants in the transcript. These changes were growth in *Self-awareness*, with the participants noting aspects of their character they were unaware of, or a changed view of themselves and the type of lifestyle they want to live.

A key factor in these changes appears to be based around experiencing some form of conflict with a teacher, roommate, or friend. In addition, overcoming problems or challenges faced during the process of study abroad offered participants an opportunity to grow certain aspects of their character.

For some participants, they reported that they had experienced change of some kind during the programme, though they were unable to clearly articulate how. The reasons for this were unclear, with one possibility being that their programme was lacking in critical reflection. It is also possible that the participants had not actually undergone any transformation, or had experienced a less desirable transformation, resulting in them being unwilling to share this information in the interview.

4.1.5 Theme 5: Growth in Understanding of Japanese Culture

The final theme on outcomes of participation in a study abroad programme covers participants' understanding of their own culture; Japanese culture. Prior to departure, none of the participants discussed this as a desired outcome. However, in the post-study abroad interviews it was found that participants either had a deeper understanding of their own

culture, were beginning to question aspects of their own culture, or in one case had a new perspective on their own culture.

In terms of gaining a deeper understanding of Japanese culture, participant S10 described being questioned about Japanese religion and their own faith, something which they did not know how to answer.

> …one of my friends asked me about my faith and he said what do you believe, or what is your faith? And I didn't know about my faith at first, so I couldn't answer his question. I was not religious, but I wanted to answer his question, so I searched about my father's family's religion and it was Buddhism (S10).

In another case, being asked about Japanese religion caused a deeper reflective experience that continued beyond the end of the study abroad programme. This began when participant S13 was asked about their culture in class and they came to a realisation that they did not know a lot about their own culture.

> I couldn't tell other students about my culture, which was really shocking to me because that's *my* culture and that's what *I* belong to, but I couldn't explain. That is the very moment I realised I didn't know about my culture. When I came back to Japan I bought a lot of books about Japanese religion, culture, and history. Right now, I'm researching what I belong to, because that is really hard question for me (S13).

The deeper understanding of Japanese culture in the instances above come from direct questioning by other students on campus. However, in other cases it was direct experience of something in the host culture that started a reflective process within the participant. This usually began as a comparison between the two cultures, and sometimes ended in a qualitative judgement on that aspect of Japanese culture. An example of this is in the excerpt below, where participant S07 is reflecting on levels of politeness between the host culture and Japanese culture.

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I found that local people on my study abroad programme were not polite, but they were friendly, which I think it is better. Because politeness is really important for Japanese people. I think politeness is a Japanese virtue but too much politeness is not good because I can't feel relaxed…It is too polite. I visited some restaurants and some cafes where people were not polite, but they were friendly. They talked to me with a smile. It was good for me because I could feel relaxed and there was no pressure for me in that conversation or the relationship (S07).

A further example of a participant reflecting on social norms shows an even deeper effect which lasted beyond the end of the study abroad programme and caused some tension as they tried to readjust back to life in Japanese culture. The experience which began this process was a conversation participant S15 had on public transport with a member of the host culture who the participant had never met.

I could learn a lot from her and she was so kind. It felt good because in Japan it never happens. In Japan, a lot of foreigners don't talk to Japanese people on the bus and trains. Before I studied abroad, if I made eye contact with a foreigner, I would only smile. When I came back to Japan I felt sad and lonely on the bus or the train because there were strangers, but I could not talk to them. Everyone was using their phone and listening to music, so I was very sad (S15).

Participant S15 also experienced a change in perspective on Japanese culture, namely their opinions on how foreign citizens are treated in Japanese society, and Japan's efforts to globalise.

In my host country, there were a lot of options for foreigners like me. In Japan there are no options for foreigners because Japan is an isolated country so not so many people try to speak in English. Local people on my study abroad programme tried to listen to foreigners' opinions, but in Japan, we do not, and it never changes. Because of Tokyo Olympics, the Japanese government are trying to do a lot of things for foreigners, but they don't care, they don't respect them, and they don't try to change for them or make the rules easier for them. Instead, they just use the talent. That's why a lot of foreigners leave Japan. In Japan we don't have the chance to listen to foreigners' opinions …we don't have the chance so we don't improve, we cannot improve (S15).

For this theme, as with the other themes described above, a key component for the outcome of *Growth in Understanding of Japanese Culture* seems to be social interaction. For some participants, this comes from direct questioning by members of the host culture, or in classroom conversations. For others, it was reflecting on experiences they had when engaging in the host culture, either in day-to-day experiences like going to a coffee shop, or when reflecting on the experience of being a foreigner in a foreign country.

In addition to this, there is some suggestion that this outcome may not be complete by the end of the study abroad programme. For one participant, their awareness of their own lack of knowledge of Japanese culture prompted them to continue researching Japanese culture once they returned home from the study abroad programme. For another, their new perspective of Japanese culture actually caused them some difficulties in readjusting back to life in Japan. From the perspective of intercultural competence development (Deardorff, 2006, 2009, 2015), these observations suggest a growing cultural self-awareness through participants' experiences during the study abroad programme, and upon their return back to Japan.

4.2 Themes 6 – 7: Managing Student Expectations and Maximising Experiences

The following two themes have been grouped together under the title of *Managing Student Expectations and Maximising Experiences*. This is due to the fact that they are not specific *outcomes* of participating in study abroad programmes. Rather, they are related to participant expectations of study abroad programmes and are connected to RQ3 of this exploratory interview study which aims at giving advice to study abroad programme designers on how to manage student expectations and maximising student experiences. The two themes presented below are *Sources of Influence on Pre-Departure Expectations* and the *Pre-*

Departure Training Programme that all participants in my institution must go through prior to departing on a study abroad programme.

4.2.1 Theme 6: Sources of Influence on Pre-Departure Expectations

Themes 1-5 identified some of the expectations of the study abroad experience and outcomes held by participants prior to departure. Theme 6 shines further light on these expectations by identifying *Sources of Influence on Participant Expectations*. Each category identified for this theme is a different source of influence. As with previous themes, each category will now be discussed in turn; *Family, Pre-departure training programme, Social media,* and *Mass media*.

Family

With regards to *Family*, participants spoke of their parents' concerns over the quality of life on study abroad programmes, such as participant S16's father who "…was worried about whether they would have a bed for me, so he sent an email to my host university". In addition, participants also reported familial concerns over the participant's safety in the host country, such participant S07's mother, who said "Guns are really dangerous in the United States".

Though this type of familial concern may not be very surprising, it is important to note that in terms of tone, this category sets a fairly negative tone for participants pre-departure expectations. It is also not the only category in which a more negative tone is set for the pre-departure expectations. The next category, *Pre-departure training programme*, also sets a more negative tone on pre-departure expectations.

Pre-departure training programme

The category of *Pre-departure training programme* covers the way in which the university's compulsory pre-departure training programme influences participant expectations of the study abroad programme. Similar to the *Family* category, the dangers of life in a foreign country were also reinforced in the *Pre-departure training programme*. Generally speaking, participants were reminded of the relative safety of Japan in comparison to other countries, with participant S15 recalling being told "… England, America, and Canada are not Japan, so you have to be careful" and S14 recalling being told "The world outside Japan is more dangerous than Japan".

More specific advice participant S14 was able to recall was concerned with the danger of illegal drugs, and physical and mental health:

> For example, in some American states it is legal to use drugs, cocaine, marijuana. That's OK, but it is very scary for me. I don't want use drugs. Also, there are many thieves, so, I must take care of myself to prevent my bags being stolen (S14).

> They said that if we have mental sickness now, but we think studying abroad will help make it better, it is not a good idea. If we have mental sickness it will get worse, if we go to study abroad (S14).

Finally, participant S15 also mentioned being warned about the dangers of drinking tap water in foreign countries "The water was not so good. You cannot drink directly. In Japan, water is very clean so you can drink, but in overseas, you should not drink".

It should be recognised that the university, through the *Pre-departure training programme*, must ensure participants are well-prepared in terms of general health, mental health, and personal safety. However, participant S14 reported that these discussions had a negative impact on their expectations prior to study abroad.

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I've not been to America, and my image of America is that it is a dangerous place, more dangerous than Japan. So, it is scary for me, and so the advice from the training programme made me more anxious (S14).

To summarise, though understandable in some cases, the first two categories in the theme of *Sources of Influence on Pre-Departure Expectations* combine to create a rather negative expectation of the study abroad programme. The picture painted by the categories of *Family* and *Pre-departure training programme* is one of foreign countries being very dangerous, with a lot of crime and drugs, and of the study abroad experience as being damaging to mental health if the participant is not properly prepared mentally for the experience. In one example from the data set, the combined influence from these two categories did not in fact help the participant feel more prepared for the study abroad programme, it actually made them feel more anxious about the experience than before.

Social media

The third category for the theme of *sources of influence on pre-departure expectations* represents a source of influence which is more positive than the first two, the category of *social media*. Participants spoke specifically about Instagram, YouTube, and my institution's student blog as providing them with positive expectations of the study abroad programme. However, as identified in themes 1-5, sometimes these expectations were unrealistic, causing some participants to experience distress when they realised their expectations did not match the reality of their experience.

According to participant S14, the images presented through social media gave the impression that they would be able to see "brilliant" sights and have lots of international friends. However, when participant S14 began the study abroad programme, they realised that their university was "very rural" and unlike the images they saw through social media.

This also continued through the early stages of the study abroad programme, as the participant continued to follow the social media posts of other friends who were studying abroad in other places.

As participant S14 continued to note the differences between their experience and what they were seeing on social media, the participant reported that their view of study abroad became "distorted", causing them to experience jealousy of their friends on other study abroad programmes, and eventually depression. This caused them to readjust their goals for the study abroad programme. Where they had wanted to go sightseeing, experience foreign culture, and make lots of international friends, their new goal became only to have fun with other Japanese students on campus.

> My goals and my expectation of what the study abroad would be like were not right. So, I restricted myself from some activities because I thought I should be like what I imagined. But I realised I could not be like that image of myself. So, I got depressed, then I tried to have a relationship with the Japanese students. It was the easier way to have fun (S14).

Participant S16 faced the same situation, where their experiences on the study abroad programme were not matching the images presented on social media. However, the effect was different. Rather than causing depression in the participant, they realised that they had the opportunity to make their own unique experience.

> I decided that I don't have to be a typical study abroad student…every time when I read a blog or watched a vlog on YouTube, I noticed that people who study abroad have so many international friends…But me, I couldn't. So, I realised that I don't have to try to mimic them. This is my study abroad and I don't have to have a typical study abroad experience (S16).

To summarise the category of *Social media*, the participants were exposed to a variety of positive images to impact on their pre-departure expectations. However, it seems that the

participants were not approaching the images presented in a critical manner and were expecting their own experiences to mimic what they had seen. Once again, in some cases this dissonance between the expectation and the reality can cause some distress for participants in study abroad programmes, though for one participant they were able to recognise that the study abroad experience can be unique for each individual and they had the power to shape their experience however they wanted.

Mass media

The final category for *Sources of Influence on Pre-Departure Expectations* covers the category of *Mass media.* This differs from *Social media* in the sense that this represents images presented to participants through traditional mass media such as news programmes, TV shows and newspapers. Prior to going abroad, participants were aware of the influence of *mass media* on their expectations, but they were very sceptical of the reliability of these images, with some participants citing this scepticism as a reason for wanting to study abroad.

> In Japan, our TV shows and newspapers are not permitted to broadcast the real news. Real videos, like violence and war. It's not open. They control our information (S15).

> …it is difficult for me to understand foreign culture by reading books or hearing news or taking lectures, so I want to go and experience it for myself (S03).

> Because only we read Japanese newspapers or watch Japanese TV, I think it is better to learn foreign cultures by ourselves through study abroad programmes (S06).

In the post-study abroad interviews, participant S13 continued to reflect on the influence of mass media on their expectations with regards to their stereotypes of Korean nationals and their experience making friends with a Korean student on campus.

I just believed the image of Korean people that was broadcast on Japanese TV. I judged Koreans based on that. However, my friend was not like the Korean people who are broadcast on Japanese TV. So that made change my point of view (S13).

The category of *Mass media* described how participants were aware not only of the bias in Japanese mass media, but were also sceptical of it before studying abroad. They saw the opportunity to study abroad as being an opportunity to get a more authentic, personal experience of foreign culture. In one case, this scepticism towards mass media caused the participant to confront how their own stereotypes were influenced by mass media and ultimately to adjust them based upon their experiences on the study abroad programme.

In summary, themes 1-5 identified some of the expectations held by participants before they departed on their study abroad programme. Theme 6 has now added further detail to this picture by identifying sources of influence on these expectations. Sources identified were *Family, Pre-departure training programme, Social media,* and *Mass media.* To review some of the observations from themes 1-5, a connection between the sources described above, and some of the expectations described in the first five themes can be seen.

Theme 3 (having a good time) discussed categories such as making friends with people from the host culture, sightseeing and shopping. These goals are reminiscent of the images described by participants when discussing influences from social media. It might also help to account for the fact that, as described in theme 3, participants had not considered the fact that there would also be opportunities to make friends with other international students, not from the host culture or Japan.

Similarly, theme 2 (breaking stereotypes) may be connected with the participants' scepticism of the images presented to them through mass media. In theme 2, participants discussed that they wanted to break the stereotypes they had of the host culture. It also found

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that not only did they face stereotypes held of the host culture, but of other international cultures, too. As this theme found, in both cases, participants were aware of the stereotypes presented to them through mass media and were able to reflect on this both before and after participating in the study abroad programme.

4.2.2 Theme 7: Pre-Departure Training Programme

The final theme found in the data covers participants' thoughts on the pre-departure training programme they went through before embarking on their study abroad programme. This theme differs from the category of *Pre-Departure Training Programme* included in theme 6 in terms of scope. Theme 6 covered the way in which the pre-departure training programme influenced participant expectations. This theme covers participant comments on the *content* of the pre-departure training programme, how well prepared they felt, and ways in which the programme could be improved. Categories within this theme are *Paperwork, Personal safety, Opportunity to discuss goals,* and *Researching host country and institution.*

Paperwork and Personal safety

With regards to *paperwork*, participants viewed the pre-departure training programme as useful in helping them to prepare the necessary documents required to study abroad, which participant S07 found to be a particularly useful part of the pre-departure training programme; "…they told us the rough process. Like fill in this form, visit this website, and submit these documents. Then go to Osaka and get a visa".

However, participants also described in detail the amount of time spent on *Personal safety* during the pre-departure preparation programme. For some participants, they felt that this focus was not as helpful, and actually caused them anxiety about studying abroad, as described in theme 6. Participant S03 in particular commented that this shaped their

motivation to attend the pre-departure training programme in general by saying "I really didn't want to attend the guidance because what they do is just alarm, alarming".

One interesting comment from participant S15 saw the preparation programme as more of an opportunity for the university to do their due diligence on *Paperwork* and *Personal safety*, rather than as an opportunity to prepare students for a study abroad programme.

> …actually, a lot of students don't remember what they said and so it's not so important. Honestly, I thought it was only for the teachers, it's not for us. It should be important for us, but it's more important for the teachers I thought (S15).

The first two categories of *Paperwork* and *Personal safety* described how the participants saw the preparation programme as an opportunity to complete paperwork, and for the university to do its due diligence. Though participants were happy with the support for completing *Paperwork*, they were less happy with the way in which *Personal safety* was handled. In some cases, participants considered it as "alarming" and causing them to feel anxiety about the study abroad programme, which impacted on one participant's motivation to attend the preparation programme.

However, the participants did describe changes to the programme which they felt might make it more useful for future participants in study abroad programmes. The final two categories cover areas in which participants expressed a desire for more support or information; *Opportunity to discuss goals* and *Researching host country and institution.*

Opportunity to discuss goals

The category of *Opportunity to discuss goals* discusses to what extent the participants were afforded this opportunity. Participants reported that there was an opportunity, but it was very early in the application process to be allowed to participate in the study abroad programme. Asking participants to express their goals as *part of the application process* has

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an interesting effect, where the participant may not express their true intentions, for fear of being denied access to the study abroad programme. Rather, they would choose to say what they thought the application board would like to hear, in order to increase their chances of being given a place on the programme, as participant S06 commented.

> When I applied to study abroad, I wrote my goal, but it was not true because if I thought if I wrote the wrong thing, maybe they won't choose me as a study abroad student so I didn't write my real goals (S06).

As part of the first round of interviews, participants were directly asked what their goals for the study abroad programme were, and towards the end of the interview, they commented positively on the usefulness at being asked to identify their goals so close the study abroad programme beginning. They also acknowledged that the study abroad experience offered them a great opportunity and they felt that having an opportunity to identify and discuss their goals before departing would be useful in helping them make the most of their experience abroad.

> Studying abroad takes a lot of time and money, so we cannot waste the chance, I think. I don't want to waste my chance, because my study abroad programme is only three months long. Some students don't think like me though, so this interview is good for their changing their mind. So, we need this interview before studying abroad (S15).

> Having this conversation can help us to identify the purpose of study abroad. I should have a purpose because it takes a lot of money and it can be the turning point of my life so it is important (S11).

In summary, this category highlights both the current situation of the pre-departure training programme, and suggestions from the participants on how it could be improved. It was found that due to the fact that identification of goals is used as part of the application process, participants are less inclined to be honest about what they want to achieve for fear

of being rejected. However, when given an opportunity to speak more openly and honestly, away from the application process, they find the exercise to be productive and rewarding.

Researching host country and institution

A final point of improvement discussed by the participants is represented by the category of *Researching host country and institution*. This category describes the lack of information participants are given on their study abroad destination and host university as part of the pre-departure training programme. Participant S06 described the information presented as being very "abstract" in nature, due to the many destinations in which students at my university can go for a study abroad programme, so they commented that they would like more information on specific countries.

Though the opportunity to learn about the host culture was not present in the preparation programme, participant S15 did report asking for more information about the host institution and culture and received this response; "They just said 'you should search much more by yourself'".

To summarise the theme of *Pre-Departure Training Programme,* participants views on the effectiveness of it were mixed. On the one hand, they found it useful for getting advice on how to complete *Paperwork*, but were critical of the focus on *Personal safety,* the *Opportunity to discuss goals*, and *Researching host country and institution*. An overemphasis on *Personal safety* has the potential to cause anxiety in students, and to cause a loss in motivation to attend the pre-departure training programme. Whereas using the application process as an opportunity for participants to express their goals encourages participants to be less truthful for fear of being denied access to the study abroad programme. Though participants admitted this, they did comment that the opportunity to discuss their goals in

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the interview for this doctoral thesis prior to studying abroad was a useful exercise, and one they would like to be included in the pre-departure training programme.

4.3 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter discussed seven themes found in the thematic analysis of participant interviews held once prior to studying abroad and again after they had returned back to Japan. A total of seven themes were identified:

1. Curriculum-Related Outcomes
2. Breaking Stereotypes
3. Having a Good Time
4. Maturation
5. Growth in Understanding of Japanese Culture
6. Sources of Influence on Pre-Departure Expectations
7. Pre-Departure Training Programme

Now that these themes have been identified, attention will turn to addressing the research questions, which will be covered in the next chapter.

5.0 Discussion

This chapter will address the three research questions designed for this doctoral thesis. The three research questions were:

RQ4. How far do students view the study abroad programme as an opportunity for personal growth and change before departure?

RQ5. After the programme, how do students perceive their actual growth and change?

RQ6. How can a Japanese institution manage student expectations and maximise student experiences on study abroad programmes?

In order to address these research questions, I will be referring to the seven themes found in the transcripts of the interviews conducted before and after the participants completed their study abroad programme. The themes were discussed in detail in chapter 4, though a list of the seven themes is provided below for reference. Finally, each theme may be addressed across multiple research questions, wherever relevant.

1. Curriculum-Related Outcomes
2. Breaking Stereotypes
3. Having a Good Time
4. Maturation
5. Growth in Understanding of Japanese Culture
6. Sources of Influence on Pre-Departure Expectations
7. Pre-Departure Training Programme

5.1 How far do students view the study abroad programme as an opportunity for personal growth and change before departure?

Generally speaking, participants see the study abroad programme as an opportunity to have a good time travelling around a foreign country while acquiring independent living skills. However, when looking more closely at participant transcripts, it can be seen that the actual goals participants expressed were vague, immeasurable, and in some cases unrealistic. This indicates that to some extent, participants were not thinking too deeply on how far the study abroad programme is an opportunity for personal growth and change.

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The outcomes expressed by students in the pre-departure interviews largely mirror findings reported in the literature review. Studies across various cultural contexts on desired outcomes of participation in a study abroad programme found that they can be grouped into four main categories; benefits to employment, gaining academic knowledge, gaining cultural knowledge, and personal transformation (Badstübner & Ecke, 2009; Bikos et al., 2019; Liu, 2013; Nghia, 2019; Nilsson & Ripmesster, 2016; Salyers et al., 2015; Walsh & Walsh, 2018; Zhai et al., 2019). These four types of desired outcomes are represented in themes 1-5 from the data analysis, indicating that though this exploratory interview study was conducted in the Japanese higher education context, they are not unique to the Japanese context. A possible exception to this is theme 3, *Having a Good Time*, which does not fit into the established categories from the literature review, and will be discussed further below.

In terms of ranking, the most common desired outcome identified by *all* participants was *Curriculum-Related Outcomes* (theme 1)*.* Specifically, the participants focussed on goals related to the categories of improving their English language ability and gaining more knowledge about the host culture. *Maturation* (theme 4) and *Having a Good Time* (theme 3), were also mentioned by the vast majority of the participants in the pre-departure interviews, whereas *Breaking Stereotypes* (theme 2) and *Learning Japanese Culture* (theme 5) were mentioned in the pre-departure interviews as desired outcomes by less than half of the participants.

When considering the ranking of the themes in the pre-departure interview data, there are some important observations to be made. Firstly, that *Curriculum-Related Outcomes* (theme 1) was ranked so highly and referenced by all of the participants. This could be considered surprising, since the literature review characterised perceptions towards higher education in Japan as university being a place to relax and have fun, rather than as a

place of learning (Goodman, 2010; McVeigh, 2002; Ota, 2018; Y. Sugimoto, 2014). Therefore, one might expect *Curriculum-Related Outcomes* (theme 1) to rank far lower.

Two possible explanations for the high ranking of theme 1 are related to my role in the institution and how it could have influenced this result. Firstly, as an English-language teacher, the participants may have assumed that my exploratory interview study was into English language education and tried to answer my questions from the perspective of language education. Additionally, theme 7, *Pre-Departure Training Programme*, identified how participants felt pressure during the interview stage of the study abroad application process to say what they thought the interviewers would like to hear, for fear of their application being rejected. It could be the case that this dynamic may also have been at play in the data collection for this exploratory interview study. Though I had no power to affect their study abroad programme, they may still have felt some pressure to say what they thought I wanted to hear. As a result, I would consider the high ranking of theme 1, *Curriculum-Related Goals*, to be an exaggerated result due to the context in which the exploratory interview study was conducted.

The second observation to be made on the rankings is related to theme 3, *Having a Good Time*, which is more representative of perceptions towards Japanese higher education as a place for students to relax, have fun, and do some travelling before entering full-time employment (Goodman, 2010; McVeigh, 2002; Ota, 2018; Y. Sugimoto, 2014). Furthermore, the literature review identified that with regards to study abroad, Japanese students tended to only want a superficial international experience (Yonezawa, 2014), which is again reflected in the high ranking of *Having a Good Time*.

A further observation to be made on the popularity of theme 3, *Having a Good Time*, is to be made in the context of *Sources of Influence on Pre-departure Expectations* (theme 6).

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It was found that social media gave participants the image that on a study abroad programme, they would the opportunity to travel extensively, spend time in the big city, and make lots of friends from the host culture. This suggests that in addition to images from study abroad advertising (Miller-Idriss et al., 2019), social media plays a key part in setting expectations for participants on study abroad programmes.

Finally, when viewing the content of all the themes in the pre-departure interview data, it becomes clear that in general the participants are quite vague in their description of their goals. Some specific examples of vague and ill-defined expectations on outcomes from the data are comments such as "I want to improve my English skill" or "I want to learn foreign cultures". As identified in the literature, this is not a phenomenon unique to Japan, since other studies have found study abroad participants with vague or unrealistic goals in various cultural contexts, including Japan (Badstübner & Ecke, 2009; Jackson, 2008; Kato & Reeder, 2015).

Since this has been noted in other international contexts, the vagueness of the goals identified in this exploratory interview study may be more representative of the fact that, much like other preparation programmes described in existing literature (Jackson, 2008), the current preparation programme in my institution focuses mainly on logistical matters. The literature recommends that preparation programmes provide participants with an opportunity to clearly articulate, refine, and plan for realistic outcomes in order to foster achievement and avoid participants returning with a feeling of failure (Jackson, 2008; Larsen & Howell, 2018; Salyers et al., 2015).

The current preparation programme in my institution does not currently afford study abroad participants this opportunity, something which was identified in section 1.2, and also discussed by the participants in theme 7, *Pre-Departure Training Programme*. A matter of

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particular concern is the fact that currently, the main opportunity for participants to discuss their goals comes during the application phase, during the interviews. As a result, in theme 7, participants reported that this approach actually encourages them to be less than honest about their goals, due to the fear of failing the interview. In other words, the current way that identification of goals is being handled in the preparation programme is actually counterproductive in terms of getting participants to make honest, realistic goals for their study abroad programme.

To conclude this discussion on research question one, some key observations include that despite being afforded an opportunity to discuss their goals, the manner in which it was conducted did not result in clear, achievable, honest goals. Rather, participants felt they needed to say what the interviewers wanted to hear, resulting in vague and sometimes false answers from the study abroad participants. However, when encouraged to think more deeply during the pre-departure interviews, participants were able to express desired outcomes in a variety of areas similar to those identified in the current body of research in the area of study abroad in other international contexts.

Finally, it seems that due to these influences, participants had not fully considered how the study abroad experience may result in personal growth and change. The main focus was on the theme of *Having a Good Time* (theme 3), without much mention towards the potential for personal growth and change. There was some mention towards the role it might play in the maturation process, by giving them an opportunity to learn some independent living skills, but this was not mentioned by all participants. The next research question will address participant perceptions of their outcomes once the study abroad programme had concluded, and some time will also be spent addressing the impact of participants departing on study abroad programmes with vague goals.

5.2 After the programme, how do students perceive their actual growth and change?

In the post-study abroad interviews, participants were much more effusive with regards to personal growth and change. Themes related to personal growth and change appeared much more often in the transcript data, with those themes being *Breaking Stereotypes* (theme 2)*, Maturation* (theme 4)*, and Growth in Understanding of Japanese Culture* (theme 5)*.

Generally speaking, the outcomes identified in this exploratory interview study align with the common types of outcomes found in study abroad research conducted in other international contexts and outlined in section 2.2.1. Outcomes such as returning home with a greater knowledge of the host country (Lindsey Parsons, 2010), broadened horizons, international friends (Allen et al., 2019; Lindsey Parsons, 2010), and greater intercultural curiosity and awareness (Benthuysen, 2012) were all identified in the post-study abroad interview transcripts.

With specific regards to personal transformation, the literature review presented research that identified study abroad participants returning to their home country with a greater interest in politics, a greater awareness of the participant's personal politics, a more flexible attitude to life, potential benefits to mental health, and a more open attitude to the unknown (Allen et al., 2019; Bathke & Kim, 2016; Benthuysen, 2012; Lindsey Parsons, 2010). All of these items were also suggested in the data from the post-study abroad interviews, with developments in participants view of other Asian countries, and a more flexible approach to their life, as discussed in the theme of *Breaking Stereotypes* (theme 2) and the theme of *Maturation* (theme 4).

Not only did the findings from the data analysis suggest some potential transformation in terms of personal growth and change, they also gave some insight into how

they were achieved. Research presented in the literature review suggests that specific moments of social interaction, rather than simple exposure to a foreign culture can have an impact upon outcomes related to personal growth and change (Ellwood, 2011; Kato & Reeder, 2015; Pellegrino, 1998; Tanabe & Kiad, 2019). This is clearly represented in the findings where some participants were able to recall specific moments of their experience which had an impact on outcomes, such as meeting a local person on a train, having an interaction with a server in a coffee shop, or making friends with a student from a country they previously held negative stereotypes towards.

From the perspective of intercultural competency development, there are some interesting observations to make. Chapter 2.2.1 outlined Deardorff's (2006, 2009, 2015) process model of intercultural competence development (see figure 2), which will be used for this part of the discussion. Theme 2, *Breaking Stereotypes*, is of particular concern for this discussion as it suggests development in many areas of this model through participant accounts of their changed attitudes towards both the host culture and other Asian cultures.

Looking at participant accounts of *Breaking Stereotypes* (theme 2), there is some suggestion that participants made gains in the attitudes of respect, openness and curiosity and discovery, as well as the skills to listen, observe, analyse, and relate (Deardorff, 2006, 2009, 2015). An example of this comes from participant S13, who related their growing relationship with a Korean student, and how they were able to discuss their perspectives on sensitive topics such as World War Two with the attitudes of respect, openness and curiosity.

Through the participant's retelling of this event, it also suggested gains in the participant's ability to analyse and relate this experience (Deardorff, 2006, 2009, 2015), though it should be noted that participant S13 was not the only participant to display these skills. Furthermore, both participant S13 and others related perspective changes that suggest

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gains in the internal outcome of an informed frame of reference shift from an ethnocentric perspective towards an ethnorelative point of view (Deardorff, 2006, 2009, 2015).

In terms of knowledge and comprehension (Deardorff, 2006, 2009, 2015), participant transcripts also suggested some development in the areas of cultural self-awareness and deep cultural knowledge. The theme of *Curriculum Related Outcomes* (theme 1) suggests some growth in knowledge with regards to deep culture, particularly with the topics of historical context and religious context of the host country. Building on this growing knowledge of the host culture, participants also reported a growing knowledge and interest in Japanese culture (theme 5), with one participant reporting that they bought books on Japanese history and culture upon their return.

Finally, the process model of intercultural competence also highlights the importance of sociolinguistic awareness under the section on knowledge and comprehension (Deardorff, 2006, 2009, 2015). Theme 4, *Maturation*, suggested that for some participants, there was a growth in sociolinguistic awareness through the examples given on conflict resolution whereby participants were unable to manage in these situations at first, but over time developed some ability to deal with conflict.

However, for other participants a lack of gains in this area proved detrimental to their study abroad experience. An example of this can be seen in theme 1 (*Curriculum-Related Outcomes*) and theme 3 (*Having a Good Time*) where participants reported difficulty communicating with students from the host country made them withdraw into Japanese friendship groups.

A potential explanation for this can be found in *Curriculum-Related Outcomes* (theme 1), when participants are talking about their language ability prior to departure. Participants often referred to development in their English ability by referring to their scores on a

standardised test, the TOEIC test. This could be deemed a rather limited view of language development, since it limits the participants to judging their linguistic awareness of English (grammar, vocabulary, general comprehension), rather than sociolinguistic awareness of the social context in which language is used. It should be noted that upon return, some participants did move away from discussing accuracy, fluency and test scores, to talking more about English as a tool for intercultural communication. To this extent, the participant transcripts suggest varied development in sociolinguistic *awareness* both prior to departure and upon their return to Japan.

To sum up this part of the discussion on intercultural competency development, the findings suggest potential growth in some areas, particularly with regards to the internal outcome of an informed frame of reference shift (Deardorff, 2006, 2009, 2015) in theme 3, *Breaking Stereotypes*. However, there was more limited growth in awareness of the sociolinguist aspect of language learning and use. Attention will now turn to unrealistic expectations held by participants prior to departure.

The literature review identified ways in which study abroad participants can depart on programmes with unrealistic expectations of the programme, and equally unrealistic or vague goals for their experience. Furthermore, it also added that departing on a study abroad trip with vague or unrealistic goals can lead to a feeling of failure at the end of the programme, while more well-defined goals can have a stronger impact on outcomes (Larsen & Howell, 2018; Salyers et al., 2015). It was also found in chapter 5.1 that the participants had departed with similarly vague goals for their own programme. Attention will now turn to the impact this had on outcomes for the participants in this exploratory interview study.

When looking at the participant transcripts for the post-study abroad interview, it can be seen that for those participants whose goals were unrealistic, their feeling of failure did

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not come at the end of the programme, but during the course of the programme itself, leading to a withdrawal of social interaction, and thus impacting upon outcomes. In other words, beginning a study abroad programme with unrealistic expectations and goals, in a worst-case scenario, could lead to a downward spiral in which the participant withdraws from social interaction during the course of the programme and risks achieving any of the unexpected goals identified above.

Furthermore, this downward spiral into social withdrawal was not only prompted by unrealistic *goals*. Participants who had unrealistic expectations of the *experience* also experienced this downward spiral. An example would be a participant who, through the impact of social media (theme 6, *Sources of Influence on Pre-Departure Expectations*), expected to make lots of domestic friends and take trips with them. However, they soon found that the domestic students were "dry" and "not interested" in speaking with foreign students. Other participants also commented on the fact that differences in culture and the need to communicate only in English was overwhelming to them. One particularly insightful comment from the post-study abroad interviews highlights the way in which participants in this exploratory interview study were not entirely clear on what the *experience* of study abroad would be; "study abroad is to live there, from waking up to sleeping. There are a lot of things to consider, emotionally and physically…which I didn't expect".

A final observation to be made is that for some participants, they were unable to express exactly how they had changed, but could feel they were different in some way. One particularly clear comment came from one participant who observed "I don't know what happened to my mind", and another participant who was able to express that they felt they had become a "new" person, but was unable to describe how they had changed, or what the differences were. It is difficult to make any strong claims as to why this may be, though it

could be related to the provision of critical reflection either during or after the study abroad programme, issues related to the timing of the data collection, or limitations regarding the type of data used for this exploratory interview study.

During the course of a study abroad programme, the literature review highlighted the importance of well-supported and guided reflection throughout the study abroad experience, (Jackson, 2018; Moak, 2020) in order for participants to reflect on, and make sense of, their experiences abroad (Jackson, 2008), thereby promoting outcomes related to personal growth and change and the development of intercultural competency. The literature review also presented findings that suggest any gains made in a study abroad programme need to be supported upon return, otherwise the gains made will be lost (Ackers et al., 2019).

On the issue of the amount of guided critical reflection during the course of the study abroad programmes for the participants in this exploratory interview study, some limitations with regards to data collection make it difficult to present any firm conclusions in this area. Chapter 3.9.1 discussed one of the limitations of self-reports as being that the data is limited only to what the participants are able to remember. Looking at the data, participants did not relate any instances of guided critical reflection, making it impossible to make any claims as to whether or not they did indeed have this opportunity. Follow-up studies could address this issue through both explicit questioning during the post-study abroad interviews and through additional data regarding the course content for the study abroad program.

For post-study abroad reflection, my institution does not currently provide study abroad participants an opportunity to reflect on and discuss their experiences and outcomes. Therefore it is unclear whether or not the two participants who were unable to express how they may have changed were able to form any conclusions on how they had changed in the time after the interview was conducted.

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It is possible that the interview was held too soon after the programme for the participants to be able to identify the manner in which they had changed, and through subsequent self-reflection they may have come to some conclusions. However, based on advice from the literature it would seem that this process needs some support and cannot be left entirely in the hands of study abroad participants.

With regards to the limitations of self-reported data, section 3.9.1 discussed the limitation of 'knowing' and 'telling', where participants may either have the knowledge that they have experience some kind of personal growth and change, but not have the ability to tell it to the researcher. It also mentioned the potential for the inclusion of socially desirable responses and self-deception. The examples above of participants claiming personal growth and change, but not being able to express it may be explained by these limitations. Therefore, follow-up studies are recommended to use data triangulation methods to address these limitations with the intention of identifying the existence, or not, of the changes claimed by participants.

In summary, the findings from this research question suggest that after completing a study abroad programme, participants are able to observe ways in which the study abroad programme was an opportunity for personal growth and change. The ways in which the participants in this exploratory interview study spoke about their changes are in alignment with common outcomes identified in the wider literature on study abroad. In addition, it was found that a key component in acquiring these outcomes was social interaction, something which was also identified in the wider literature on study abroad programmes.

With regards to vague or unrealistic expectations and outcomes prior to departure, this research question has contributed to the literature by linking expectations, experiences, and outcomes. Central to this is the experience of social interaction, which has a large impact

upon the outcomes for participation in a study abroad programme. For participants with unrealistic expectations of the experience or vague goals prior to departure, there is a risk that they withdraw from social interaction, and thereby having a negative impact upon the outcomes. Therefore, the conclusion should be drawn that ensuring participants are fully aware of what to expect from the programme and that they have realistic achievable goals is of vital importance prior to departure on a study abroad programme.

The observations made for this research question, however, are limited by the use of self-reports with no data triangulation and no additional data on the content of the study abroad programmes the participants were enrolled in. Therefore, the observations made should be considered as tentative, and it is recommended that follow-up studies should employ data triangulation techniques alongside additional data on the content of the study abroad programmes in order to gain a clearer understanding of the extent of personal growth and change experienced by participants.

5.3 How can a Japanese institution manage student expectations and maximise student experiences on study abroad programmes?

Based on existing literature from the area of study abroad research, and the discussion up to this point, it is recommended that an institution preparing students to study abroad should focus on four key areas. The preparation programme should focus on:

- …combatting unrealistic expectations for outcomes
- …combatting unrealistic expectations on the experience
- …promoting social interaction and reducing pre-departure anxiety
- …maximising participant outcomes

These four recommendations will be discussed in turn, using the existing preparation programme at my institution as an example (section 1.2), combined with the findings from theme 7 (*Pre-Departure Training Programme*) and the discussion up to this point. It will

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conclude with a list of objectives for designers of study abroad preparation programmes to consider when designing the programme.

The central idea in all of these recommendations is the aim to promote and prepare study abroad participants for social interaction. The literature review identified that in terms of personal transformation and foreign language gains, social interaction on study abroad programmes is key (Badstübner & Ecke, 2009; Ellwood, 2011; Pellegrino, 1998; Tanabe & Kiad, 2019). As a result, the literature recommends that a study abroad preparation programme should focus on the importance of social interaction, where opportunities exist for social interaction, teaching the cross-cultural and language skills they would need for social interaction, and finally alleviating anxieties which may impact on the social aspects of the study abroad experience (Jackson, 2008; Kato & Reeder, 2015; Sutton, 2019).

The first recommendation is with regards to combatting unrealistic expectations for outcomes. Research into study abroad preparation has highlighted the importance of ensuring study abroad participants have an opportunity to clearly articulate, refine, and plan for realistic outcomes in order to foster achievement and avoid participants returning with a feeling of failure (Jackson, 2008; Larsen & Howell, 2018; Salyers et al., 2015). Furthermore, previous discussion questions further highlighted how departing with vague goals beforehand can lead to participants withdrawing from social interaction, resulting in a negative impact on the actual outcomes achieved by the participant.

The current preparation in my institution does offer study abroad participants an opportunity to express their goals, but it is during the application process during an interview with members of university staff. Theme 7, *Pre-Departure Training Programme,* found that managing goal setting in this way actually encourages participants to say what they thought the interviewers would like to hear, rather than their actual goals, so as to not damage their

chances of being accepted. Furthermore, participants also reported that they found it useful to have a better opportunity to discuss their goals in the interviews for this exploratory interview study and recommended that this be a regular part of the pre-departure training programme.

To this extent, in terms of combatting unrealistic expectations for outcomes, an institution should take care towards how study abroad participants are supported in setting their goals. There should be an open forum, away from the application process where participants are free to be honest with their goals and supported in making them realistic and achievable within the constraints of their specific programme.

The second recommendation is with regards to combatting unrealistic expectations of the study abroad experience. Once again, the previous discussion questions have highlighted how unrealistic expectations of the experience can cause withdrawal from social interaction, providing a warrant for combatting these unrealistic expectations. This recommendation is also referenced in the literature, with calls for preparation programmes to combat unrealistic expectations of the study abroad experience by clearly articulating the content of the programme to participants prior to departure (Badstübner & Ecke, 2009; Kato & Reeder, 2015). These unrealistic expectations can be set through a variety of sources, including study abroad advertising (Miller-Idriss et al., 2019), and social media, as identified in theme 7, *Sources of Influence on Pre-Departure Expectations.*

With regards to the current preparation programme in my institution, theme 7, *Pre-Departure Training Programme,* identified the lack of opportunity for participants to learn anything about their host institution or country in the training programme. Currently, the participants are encouraged to research this in their own time, rather than being given some information as a part of the pre-departure training programme. Participants recommended

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that this kind of information should be a part of the pre-departure training programme and suggested that presentations by students who have completed a study abroad programme at each destination would be useful in helping them prepare for study abroad.

An illustrative example of why this would be an important addition to a pre-departure training programme comes from one participant who relied on social media and blogs to set their expectations for the study abroad experience. They had expected to be able to see "brilliant sights" and make lots of international friends. However, their rural study abroad destination did not offer this opportunity to the participant, and upon the realisation that their experience would not reflect what they saw on social media, they withdrew from social interaction.

Therefore, the recommendations for combatting unrealistic expectations of the study abroad experience is to ensure that participants are not influenced only by advertising and social media. Rather, specific information about each study abroad destination should be clearly communicated to the student. The content of the programme should also be clearly communicated, especially with regards to opportunities to embark on excursions and where those excursions might be. Finally, an institution could achieve some of this by employing previous study abroad students from each institution to act as mentors and peer-support. In this context, the social media profiles of peers who went to the same destination could also help combat unrealistic expectations set by other social media accounts and study abroad advertising.

The third area of recommendations is based upon promoting social interaction and reducing pre-departure anxiety. The lead-up to a study abroad programme can be an anxious experience for many students, particularly those who have never left their home country. From the perspective of social interaction, anxiety can be a barrier to some study abroad

participants, so reducing this anxiety prior to departure is an important goal for a study abroad preparation programme.

Anxiety can come from many sources, and the existing literature on study abroad research describes some of these. Recommendations include clearly articulating the content of the programme, as described above departure (Badstübner & Ecke, 2009; Kato & Reeder, 2015). Additionally, existing literature recommends that time be spent on language and cross-cultural communication training to promote social interaction both inside and outside the classroom (Jackson, 2008; Kato & Reeder, 2015). This should also include awareness raising with regards to sociolinguistics in order to better promote the development of intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006, 2009, 2015).

With regards to the current preparation programme, there is currently no content related to language, cross-cultural communication training, and sociolinguistic training though this could be due to the fact that all students in my university have to take compulsory English language classes as part of the main university curriculum. However, the findings presented in chapter 4 found that regardless of their language training, many participants experienced anxiety around their language skills, and for some it caused them to withdraw from social interaction.

This is not a criticism of the English language classes already in existence in my institution. The content and amount of these classes differ by department, meaning it cannot be guaranteed that the content they have studied is strongly connected to the needs for social interaction on a study abroad programme. Therefore, it is recommended that there should be some practical English language and cross-cultural communication element to a pre-departure training programme which emphasises skills needed for social interaction.

Theme 7, *Pre-Departure Training Programme*, also revealed a source of anxiety not found in the wider literature on study abroad programmes; the pre-departure training programme itself. In theme 7, participants spoke of the amount of focus on personal safety during the *Pre-Departure Training Programme* (theme 7). For a minority of participants, they found that rather than feeling more prepared for life in a foreign country, they were actually more anxious due to the fact that they were now more concerned about their personal safety than they were beforehand due to the amount of focus given to this topic. It should be noted here that the data did not find any evidence that this anxiety impeded upon social interaction for the participants in this exploratory interview study, but considering the *potential* impact it could have, this is a point that needs to be considered.

As a result, there are several recommendations to be made for promoting social interaction and reducing pre-departure anxiety. Firstly, that study abroad participants be given some practical training in foreign language and cross-cultural communication skills including awareness raising with regards to sociolinguistics. In addition, though personal safety is important, it must be handled sensitively so as to not produce unnecessary amounts of anxiety prior to departure. One way this could be handled is by helping participants identify locations where they could safely interact with members of the host community in and around campus. Personal safety could also be included in the cross-cultural communication and language classes, including lessons on communicating and interacting in a safe manner.

The final recommendation concerns maximising outcomes for study abroad participants. The discussion above found that for some participants, upon their return to Japan, they were unable to identify or express the ways in which they had grown or changed. For this reason, the existing literature recommends that a period of reflection to make sense of the experience and identify what exactly has been gained is an important part of the study

abroad process (Ackers et al., 2019; Jackson, 2008). From the perspective of transformative learning, this process of reflection would also be important, since it is part of the process towards a changed perspective, as found in the literature review (Mezirow, 2000; Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). As a result, the addition of a post-study abroad reflection programme is also recommended.

Furthermore, the literature review recommended guided critical reflection during the course of the study abroad programme (Jackson, 2018; Moak, 2020). The pre-departure training programme could support this process by promoting components of Deardorff's (2006, 2009, 2015) intercultural competency development model which would facilitate critical reflection. These would include awareness raising activities related to cultural self-awareness, deep culture, and the skills to listen, observe, evaluate, analyse, interpret and relate experiences from the study abroad programme. Not only could this be of benefit in supporting any critical reflection included in the study abroad programme, but may also help to facilitate gains in intercultural competence.

By way of conclusion, in order for an institution to manage expectations and maximise experiences, a series of practical recommendations for study abroad preparation programmes have been made:

- Combat unrealistic expectations for outcomes by…
    - …providing opportunities for study abroad participants to identify realistic, achievable goals prior to departure.
    - …helping study abroad participants identify concrete steps on how to achieve their goals.
- Combat unrealistic expectations on the experience by…
    - …including information specifically tailored to the institution the participant will visit.
    - …clearly articulating the content of the programme.
    - …providing an opportunity for participants to hear advice from students who took part in their study abroad programme previously.
- Promote social interaction and reducing pre-departure anxiety by…

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- o …highlighting the importance of social interaction on a study abroad experience.
  - o …combatting pre-departure anxiety through advice on how to get social interaction in a safe way.
  - o …helping participants identify places and activities where they can interact socially with domestic students.
  - o …providing training in cross-cultural interaction skills including sociolinguistic awareness raising activities.
  - o …providing training in language skills needed to interact socially with domestic students and local people.
- Maximise participant outcomes by…
  - o …providing awareness raising and training for the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed for the development of intercultural competency prior to departure.
  - o …providing opportunities for reflection after the programme.

Before drawing this chapter to a close, some important observations on the recommendations above should be made. In the literature on study abroad preparation programmes, they have been criticised for being "woefully inadequate" (Jackson, 2008, p. 222) in preparing participants for the experience due to their focus on logistical matters such as visa applications, buying travel tickets, and completing paperwork.

In theme 7, *Pre-Departure Training Programme,* the participants of this exploratory interview study described the current preparation programme at my institution in a similar way. They saw the current pre-departure training programme as an opportunity for completing paperwork and for the university to perform due diligence in terms of keeping students safe on their study abroad programme. This mainly involved talks on completing visa applications, filling in forms for the host institution, talks on personal safety, and presentations regarding health and travel insurance.

However, while these criticisms may be valid, it is also important to note that the list of recommendations above represent fairly large-scale and ambitious changes for any institution. Furthermore, the literature also recommends that the preparation programme should ideally begin 12-18 months prior to departure (Salyers et al., 2015). Implementing

these suggestions would require an investment in time, staffing, and resources that some institutions may not have at their disposal.

This is somewhat true of my own institution, whereby a 12-18 month preparation programme would not fit within the current system for recruiting, training, and finally sending students abroad. As described in section 1.2, this entire process takes around five months in total, meaning there is no room for such a large programme in the current system. Rather, the preparation programme would need to be around three months in length, which is around the same length as a semester. With regards to staffing, it could be argued that the personnel required for various parts of the recommendations above already exist within the university, so further staff recruitment would not be required.

5.6 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has used the seven themes identified in chapter 4 to address the three research questions designed for this thesis. It has also attempted to describe the interplay between expectations, experiences and outcomes, as suggested in the conclusion to chapter 2, the literature review, and has provided some suggestions as to how an institution could manage participant expectations and maximise the experience of participation in a study abroad programme.

The following, and final, chapter will discuss how these insights can be turned into practical advice for my own institution. Suggestions will be made on how the recommendations from this chapter can be implemented into a 15-week programme using the existing resources from my institution.

6.0 Conclusions

This final chapter of the thesis consists of three sections. The first will attempt to apply, then reflect upon transformative learning as a conceptual metaphor and offer reflections on how it could be subsequently used in further study abroad research. The second part addresses the limitations of the exploratory interview study presented in this thesis, before concluding with a third section which offers practical suggestions on how this exploratory interview study can be implemented. The third section will also detail possibilities to disseminate the findings in this thesis, as well as ways in which this thesis is already having an impact in my own institution, and how further research can be built upon the findings presented.

6.1 Transformative Learning in Study Abroad Research

This part of the conclusions chapter will discuss the use of Transformative Learning Theory as a conceptual metaphor in study abroad research. Due to the limitations outlined in chapter 3.9, the data from this study is only used here for the purposes of testing transformative learning as a conceptual metaphor.

6.1.1 Transformative Learning as Conceptual Metaphor

One of the main criticisms of transformative learning identified in the literature review was that it is, at best, fragmented pieces of a theory and that it is better thought of as a conceptual metaphor than a theory (Collard & Law, 1989; Howie & Bagnall, 2013). Proponents of transformative learning recognised this, and countered the criticisms by claiming it as a theory in progress that can be flexible and interpreted differently across many fields (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009; Savicki & Brewer, 2015; Taylor, 2008).

Applying transformative learning as a *theory* raises some concerns that are beyond the bounds of qualitative research such as the one presented here. While valid criticisms, it is beyond the scope of this exploratory interview study to address issues related to ensuring the *theory's* predictability, quantifiability, and validity (Howie & Bagnall, 2013), which are concepts related to quantitative research (Cohen et al., 2013; Jackson, 2018; Scotland, 2012; Vanson, 2014). Therefore, transformative learning will be applied as a *conceptual metaphor*, since it has been suggested that it may be more fruitful when describing and *explaining* the learning experience (Howie & Bagnall, 2013; Newman, 2012a).

Referencing Lakoff and Johnson (1980a), Howie and Bagnall (2013) define conceptual metaphor as a tool to understand one thing by using the terms of another and is possibly "the only way to organize and make coherent certain aspects of our experience" (p.14). Furthermore, Howie and Bagnall suggest that treating transformative learning as a conceptual metaphor would free researchers from "The need to be emphatic about trying to establish the theory as 'real', 'true' or 'valid'" (p.29) and stimulate more discussion and dialogue.

In other words, the use of transformative learning as a conceptual metaphor allows a qualitative researcher to use the terms of *transformation* to give a coherent description of the experience of study abroad programmes, without the need to establish the *theory* as true, real or valid, something which is beyond the scope of qualitative research. In order to do this, the discussion focussed on the three core components of transformative learning to explain the participant experience of study abroad, which were identified as disorienting dilemmas, critical reflection, and critical dialogue (Mezirow, 2000; Mezirow & Taylor, 2009).

6.1.2 Applying Transformative Learning as Conceptual Metaphor

As outlined in section 2.3.1, conceptual metaphors contain two parts, the thing which is being described, and the domain which provides the language to describe it (Lakoff &

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Johnson, 1980a, 1980b). As suggested in section 2.3.1, transformative learning will provide the language, using the three core components of disorienting dilemmas, critical reflection, and critical dialogue (Mezirow, 2000; Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). The thing which is being described in this context is the study abroad experience. Therefore, the proposed metaphor in this context would be STUDY ABROAD IS TRANSFORMATION. What follows is an attempt to apply this metaphor and selected language to explain the study abroad experience.

Disorienting dilemmas are defined as a crisis point in one's experience either personally or socially, with feelings of stress or pain which make you question certain assumptions and beliefs that contributed towards said crisis. They are the starting point of the transformative learning process, which begins the process of reflection and consideration of alternative perspectives, which is why this discussion will begin with a look at disorienting dilemmas (Cagney, 2014; Mezirow, 2000; Taylor, 2008).

Using examples from the data discussed in chapter 4, the study abroad experience can be described as one full of opportunity for participants to experience disorienting dilemmas on a study abroad programme. Generally speaking, it seems that these dilemmas generally occur *outside* the classroom and the core curriculum, through either interacting with *people* from the host culture, though interacting with other *international students,* or through individual *experiences* of the host culture.

With regards to interacting with people from the host culture, the stress and pain of disorienting dilemmas can be observed in participant narratives relating to communication with people from the host culture, particularly with regards to the language barrier. This can be seen in theme 4, where one participant expressed feeling "depressed" at their inability to communicate with domestic students on campus. Furthermore, the language barrier also

resulted in more open conflict, such as conflicts with host families and teachers (theme 4, *Maturation*).

Interestingly, another type of disorienting dilemma described by participants in the study does not come from open conflict or issues related to the language barrier. Theme 5, *Growth in Understanding of Japanese Culture*, identified two examples where participants reported moments when they were asked about aspects of Japanese culture which they did not know anything about. In the case of one participant, they reported that this moment was "really shocking to me because that's *my* culture…but I couldn't explain".

With regards to interactions with *international* students, the emotions connected with a disorienting dilemma occurred when participants were forced to confront their own stereotypes of other cultures, both positive and negative, and realising how misinformed they were (theme 2, *Breaking Stereotypes*). A quotation from the data for theme 2 shows one participant feeling pain upon this realisation:

> I felt like I wasn't a good person, because I had judged them before I really understood them. So, I just felt really bad (S13).

Experiences of the host culture describes situations in which the participant has an *experience* which may cause them to reflect on themselves or their culture. Though the definition of disorienting dilemma above describes feelings of stress or pain, in this case the *experience* doesn't necessarily have to be a negative one such as a moment of conflict. Rather, it may be an outwardly positive experience which may reveal perceived deficits in their own culture, causing the feelings of stress and sadness to emerge as the deficit is noticed.

An interesting example of this comes from the participant who spoke of their experience on a train in the host country, an anecdote which was discussed in both theme 3

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(*Having a Good Time*) and theme 5 (*Growth in Understanding of Japanese Culture)*. The full

anecdote is reproduced below.

> I went sightseeing by train and the woman next to me was from the local
> area. She was so friendly and we spoke for around one or two hours… I
> could learn a lot from her and she was so kind. It felt good because in Japan
> it never happens. In Japan, a lot of foreigners don't talk to Japanese people
> on the bus and trains. Before I studied abroad, if I made eye contact with a
> foreigner, I would only smile. When I came back to Japan I felt sad and
> lonely on the bus or the train because there were strangers, but I could not
> talk to them. Everyone was using their phone and listening to music, so I
> was very sad (S15).

Though the experience was a pleasant one for the participant, having conversations

with other passengers in English, the feelings of stress or pain came when they realised that

this is not something that happens in Japan, which in the participant's mind was seen as a

deficit in Japanese culture. This was further reinforced upon their return to Japan and they

experienced the difference once more, causing them to feel "sadness" at the different

approaches to manners on public transport.

In summary, these examples of disorienting dilemmas found within the themes

identified in chapter 4 show the study abroad experience as one full of opportunity for the

first key component of transformative learning. These can happen from interactions between

the participant and local people, the participant and other international students, or

experiences had when engaging with various aspects of the host culture. However, they don't

necessarily need to be an outwardly negative experience or interaction. Rather, it could be a

positive interaction from which negative emotions can emerge from within the participant.

The final two components key components of transformative learning are related to

reflection. The first is critical reflection and the second is critical dialogue. Critical reflection is

an internal process when a person considers alternative perspectives to the one which is

identified as being a factor or cause of the disorienting dilemma (Howie & Bagnall, 2013; Mezirow, 2000; Mezirow & Taylor, 2009; Seel, 2012). Critical dialogue, on the other hand, is very similar in concept to that of critical reflection but involves a third party to converse with as part of the reflective process (Howie & Bagnall, 2013; Mezirow, 2000; Mezirow & Taylor, 2009; Seel, 2012).

In addition, with regards to the use of data from this study, the application of the conceptual metaphor for a discussion on reflection is somewhat limited. As described in previous chapters, the data does not contain information with regards to the provision of guided critical reflection within the study abroad programme. Instead, only instances of self-motivated critical reflection can be found in the data and will be used to test the application of the conceptual metaphor.

With regards to the examples of conflict with teachers and host families, the data provides examples of participants reflecting on, and reframing their approach to the conflict, such as one participant who recognised that "…I recognised it was my life, so I should do something…it was fun" with a result of an outcome of *Confidence,* a part of theme 4 (*Maturation*). Theme 2, *Breaking Stereotypes*, also included some moments of reflection after a disorienting dilemma. Examples show participants reflecting on their own stereotypes, the nature of stereotypes, the causes for these stereotypes, and how the stereotype can be adjusted, or in one case rejected entirely.

Another way in which critical reflection can be found in the data is with regards to the participants understanding of themselves and their own identities. For most of the participants in this exploratory interview study, not only was this the first experience of living away from home, but it was also their first experience of living in a foreign country. To this

extent, the experience caused them to reflect upon their own understanding of their character strengths and weaknesses, and their plans for the future.

An important observation to note from the examples of critical reflection above is that this reflective process is what connects the disorienting dilemma to the potential transformations identified in both the themes and the outcomes identified in research question two. Take, for example, the case of *Breaking Stereotypes* (theme 2). After the disorienting dilemma of being confronted with their own misunderstanding of international students based on their cultural stereotypes, the critical reflection is what prompts the participants to adjust these stereotypes and result in alternate viewpoints on stereotyping and stereotypes.

Critical dialogue, the third component of transformative learning, can be found in one example from the raw data. The example follows on from a disorienting dilemma discussed in theme 3, *Having a Good Time.* The disorienting dilemma was an incident in a local shopping mall where the participant felt they had been attacked for racially motivated purposes. Potentially due to the strength of the negative emotions the participant felt, in chapter 4 they reported still feeling "angry" about the incident, they were unable to critically reflect on this experience. Instead, they engaged in critical dialogue with a person they referred to as their "listener".

The "listener" was a friend and member of the host community who was pivotal in helping the participant make sense of their experiences. Through critical dialogue, this person helped the participant to begin seeing members of the host community, and their study abroad experience, in a more positive way. This is an important piece of data to include because in this case, the participant was unable to make sense of their disorienting dilemma

alone through critical reflection but was still able to result in a perspective change due to the critical dialogue with their "listener".

In conclusion, using the three core components of transformative learning as a conceptual metaphor, the study abroad experience can be explained as one which is ripe with opportunity for exposure to disorienting dilemmas *through* social interaction, the importance of which has been identified in both the literature, and research question 2 (Howie & Bagnall, 2013; Mezirow, 2000; Mezirow & Taylor, 2009; Seel, 2012). In order to achieve the outcomes identified in chapter 5.2, participants need to engage with one or both of the final two components of transformative learning, critical reflection and critical dialogue.

As a conceptual metaphor, STUDY ABROAD IS TRANSFORMATION offers a valuable way to explain the study abroad experience and guide policy and curriculum design. Through this conceptual metaphor, social interaction, both positive and negative, is highlighted as being the first stage in outcomes related to personal transformation. In terms of curriculum design, this means training study abroad participants prior to departure to embrace both positive and negative experiences as potential learning opportunities. For the main study abroad programme, it encourages curriculum designers to ensure there are opportunities in place for participants to be exposed to social interaction.

Although it is not known how much guided reflection was included in the programmes for the participants of this exploratory interview study, some important curriculum design considerations also come from this discussion. Reflection is also a recommendation made by other scholars for promoting outcomes related to intercultural competency development (Deardorff, 2006, 2009, 2015; Jackson, 2018; Moak, 2020). This is particularly with regards to structured and supported critical reflection built into the study abroad programme, and a period of guided reflection after the process ends (Jackson, 2008). Therefore, in the

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preparation prior to departure, as discussed in chapter 5.3, it would benefit study abroad participants to be given training in how to conduct critical reflection after a disorienting dilemma prior to studying abroad through activities aimed at the skills of listening, observing, analysing, interpreting, and relating (Deardorff, 2006, 2009, 2015).

6.1.3 Reflections on Transformative Learning as Conceptual Metaphor

Upon reflection, Transformative Learning Theory proved to be useful in describing the study abroad experience for participants, though it still does not necessarily address some of the criticisms outlined in the literature review. This is particularly evident with regards to the vagueness of the terms within transformative learning (Howie & Bagnall, 2013). Considering the fact that conceptual metaphors guide language choice (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980a, 1980b), it becomes important that the language is properly defined. Furthermore, since transformative learning can be applied as a conceptual metaphor across a variety of contexts, it would seem to follow that the definition of the terms would also vary across the contexts.

An illustrative example would be the term 'disorienting dilemma'. The literature on transformative learning offers the definition that a disorienting dilemma is a crisis point in one's experience either personally or socially, with feelings of stress or pain which make you question certain assumptions and beliefs that contributed towards said crisis (Cagney, 2014; Mezirow, 2000; Taylor, 2008). This is suitably vague as a definition to make it applicable in many contexts, however as a definition for use as a conceptual metaphor it may be too vague. Considering that the purpose of conceptual metaphors is to use the language of the metaphor to *describe* and *explain* a learning experience in a fruitful way (Howie & Bagnall, 2013; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980a, 1980b), the language of the metaphor needs to have a clear definition to make it suitable for use.

The exploratory interview study presented in this thesis has given some proposals as to what defines a disorienting dilemma in the context of the study abroad experience. Research question 3 identified a handful of potential areas which could be used to suggest a definition for disorienting dilemmas in the context of a study abroad experience. The suggested definition would be "disorienting dilemmas on study abroad programmes are moments of emotional stress caused by culture shock, breakdowns in cross-cultural communication, conflict, or in moments of confrontation with stereotypes". Since this definition is only based on a single study, it is needs further discussion and refining. However, the implications of a more well-defined conceptual metaphor like this can also prove useful not only in research, but in practice.

A further benefit of conceptual metaphors is not only that it guides our language use, but also our behaviour and action (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980a, 1980b). The example given in the literature review is the example of ARGUMENT IS WAR, guiding the way in which we act in a combative way during the course of an argument, and view it as something to win or lose. In the case of the definition of disorienting dilemmas above, things which could be framed as sources of anxiety prior to departure, can be reconceptualised as opportunities for deep, transformative learning.

By way of conclusion, I would like to first take note of my initial thoughts on the use of transformative learning as a conceptual metaphor. I was originally concerned that using transformative learning as a conceptual metaphor may only be an academic exercise or a linguistic game. However, far from being a "plaything of the mind" (Newman, 2012a, p. 40), I have now come to the belief that it may offer researchers not only a fruitful way to *describe* and *explain* the study abroad experience, but it also has potential to guide practice in the

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preparation of participants for study abroad programmes, as well as helping reframe

potential sources of anxiety into potential sources of learning for study abroad participants.

6.3 Recommendations

This final section of the conclusion will be split into four sections, the first dealing with

practical recommendations for a support programme aimed at students who are taking part

in a study abroad programme. This will be followed by a brief discussion on the potential

impact that this thesis has on practice within my own department and my career as a

practitioner-researcher. Part three will cover ways in which this thesis has contributed to the

area of study abroad research and recommendations for further research. The chapter will

finish will by discussing the possibilities towards dissemination of the findings presented in

this exploratory interview study.

6.3.1 Study Abroad Support Programme

The previous chapter concluded with a series of recommended objectives for how an

institution can manage expectations and maximise experiences of students taking part in a

study abroad programme. These objectives were:

- Combat unrealistic expectations for outcomes by…
  - …providing opportunities for study abroad participants to identify realistic, achievable goals prior to departure.
  - …helping study abroad participants identify concrete steps on how to achieve their goals.
- Combat unrealistic expectations on the experience by…
  - …including information specifically tailored to the institution the participant will visit.
  - …clearly articulating the content of the programme.
  - …providing an opportunity for participants to hear advice from students who took part in their study abroad programme previously.
- Promote social interaction and reducing pre-departure anxiety by…
  - …highlighting the importance of social interaction on a study abroad experience.
  - …combatting pre-departure anxiety through advice on how to get social interaction in a safe way.

- o …helping participants identify places and activities where they can interact socially with domestic students.
    - o …providing training in cross-cultural interaction skills including sociolinguistic awareness raising activities.
    - o …providing training in language skills needed to interact socially with domestic students and local people.
- Maximise participant outcomes by…
    - o …providing awareness raising and training for the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed for the development of intercultural competency prior to departure.
    - o …providing opportunities for reflection after the programme.

Chapter 5.3 identified that meeting these objectives could present a challenge for some institutions due to the various skills that would be needed. Language teachers, student supervisors or counsellors, and previous study abroad students would be needed to contribute to such a programme. Larger institutions offering study abroad programmes would likely have the personnel readily available, though it must be noted that for some smaller institutions it would require hiring further staff members to fulfil the roles required.

In addition, these objectives would also require a variety of modes of delivery. Wherever possible, an institution could minimise the burden of implementing some of the objectives above by holding preparation sessions as large-scale lectures with all study abroad students in attendance, though in some cases this would not be possible. For example, helping participants set goals would need more one-to-one interaction between staff and student than is possible in a lecture setting. Similarly, the language education aspect of the programme would also need to be done in smaller groups, as is common with language classes.

An additional way that an institution could ease the burden is through the use of free online materials such as the Global Scholar Programme (Global Scholar, 2021). The course offered is split into three sections for students to complete before, during, and after their study abroad programme. It also covers many of the objectives outlined above including goal

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setting and awareness raising for intercultural competence prior to departure as well as providing training and activities to aid in reflection both during and after the study abroad programme ends. Finally, in addition to being a self-study programme, the site does offer tools for teachers to create groups and monitor student progress should study abroad administrators require more oversight on student learning progress.

A final point to consider with regards to implementation of these objectives is with regards to responsibility. For example, in my institution some aspects of the study abroad process from application to departure are handled by the international office, while some parts are handled independently within each department. A similar approach could be taken with these objectives, sharing them between the larger international office and each individual department for implementation.

In addition to the objectives above, it must also be remembered that there is one objective not included in the list. An institution also has due diligence with regards to the preparation of students to study abroad, including giving information on insurance, personal safety, healthcare, visa applications, purchasing travel tickets, and completing necessary paperwork for the host institution. As reported in the literature review (Jackson, 2008), this is something which current preparation programmes often concentrate on, and should be maintained alongside the implementation of the other objectives.

To that extent, the next page contains a recommended four-strand curriculum for implementing the recommended objectives above. The curriculum takes into account the required staff members for each strand, and also attempts to streamline the mode of delivery wherever possible.

Figure 6 - Study Abroad Preparation Curriculum

Strand One
Due Diligence

Aims

- To cover all required due diligence for the institution. Insurance, safety, visa, paperwork, etc.

Delivered by: members of the study abroad/international office

Delivery style: can be done lecture-based

Strand Two
Language Preparation

Aims

- To highlight the importance of social interaction on a study abroad programme
- To provide training in cross-cultural interaction skills
- To provide foreign language skills needed to interact with members of the host community and students on campus
- To raise awareness of sociolinguistics and intercultural communication
- To raise awareness of the skills of listening, observing, evaluating, analysing, interpreting, and relating.

Delivered by: foreign language teachers within each department as a special class for study abroad candidates. Some of these objectives can also be supported by the Global Scholar course.

Delivery style: smaller classes of 10-20 students

Strand Three
Goal Setting and Reflection

Aims

- To help students identify realistic goals for their study abroad programme
- To help students identify concrete steps on how to achieve stated goals
- To guide students in post-programme reflection on what they have achieved

Delivered by: Personal tutors, supervisors, or teachers within each department. These objectives can also be supported by the Global Scholar course.

Delivery style: one-to-one meetings with personal tutors, or small group tutorial sessions

Strand Four
Managing Expectations

Aims

- To clearly articulate the content of the programme
- To deliver information about the specific institution and location the students will visit
- To provide advice on how to get social interaction in a safe manner on campus and in the surrounding locale

Delivered by: The international office, or teachers with knowledge of the host institution and programme. Also, students who previously took part in the same programme.

Delivery style: Lectures with presentations from staff and students familiar with the programme. Also, the creation of a buddy system, where students can meet previous participants in their study abroad programme.

With regards to my institution specifically, there is already the infrastructure in place to deliver each of the four strands to students embarking on study abroad programmes. As discussed in the findings and discussion chapters, strand one is already covered by the existing preparation programme. For strand two, my institution employs a high number of tenured, contracted, and part-time language teachers who would be able to prepare and deliver a language programme to fulfil the aims of this strand. For strand four, since my institution sends a large number of students abroad each year, there are certainly enough students available to give presentations on their experience or take part in a buddy system.

In addition, the study abroad programmes are also run as exchange programmes, so there are usually domestic students from the host institution on campus at my institution for a period of time. These foreign students could also be recruited for presentations on their home institution and would add even more value to a buddy system. Were these foreign students to be recruited as buddies, not only would they be able to provide advice about social interaction and personal safety in the host institution, but they would also provide an opportunity for the future study abroad participants to practice the language they are learning in strand two.

The biggest challenge in implementing the suggested curriculum in my institution would be with regards to strand three. Though the students are assigned personal tutors, known as class advisors, they only meet their class advisor once a year. There is also the fact that not *all* of a class advisor's students will be studying abroad, meaning some class advisors may have more of a work load in terms of strand three than others. A more realistic way of implementing strand three may be to set up small tutorial groups, even split among the staff members who will manage the sessions. To that extent, recruiting staff for these tutorial sessions will prove challenging, since there isn't already a large group of staff trained to

provide this kind of class, unlike the language teachers. Therefore, a recommendation would be for each individual department to organise these sessions using members of their own teaching staff, and handling students from their department only.

6.3.2 Potential for Impact

The exploratory interview study presented in this thesis has already had impact on practice in my institution. First of all, a colleague in the English teaching team took inspiration from this exploratory interview study for the final module of his Diploma of English Language Teaching to Adults (DELTA). For that module he had to design an English language education curriculum in an area of his own choice, which he chose to model on strand two of my suggested study abroad support programme.

Also, during the second semester of 2019, my department began recruitment for the first study abroad programmes of 2020. During the process of conducting the interviews, several staff members expressed concerns about the process, wondering on its effectiveness as a recruitment tool and as a tool to get students thinking about their goals. A meeting was held where alternative options were discussed, and I had an opportunity to present my ideas for a four-strand curriculum. After further meetings with the Chairperson and Dean of the department, it was agreed that I would be allowed to implement my ideas from semester two, 2020.

Another way in which this thesis has potential for impact within my institution is through a new committee which has been organised, known as The International Cooperation Committee. The committee is currently looking into study abroad at my institution, measuring its effects on students, and working out how to improve the outcomes. A colleague from my department is also a member of the committee and has recommended that I be invited to

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speak with the committee with regards to my exploratory interview study and how it could be of use to the committee's activities more broadly across the institution.

Finally, a colleague from a different university in another part of Japan is also aware of my exploratory interview study, since he used to work in my institution a few years ago. He recently contacted me to ask me for help with an application for a government research grant for a project he is a member of. This project is also looking into study abroad and measuring outcomes as a result of participation, particularly with regards to language outcomes. It is a much larger scale project than the one in this thesis, and due to my help with the application, they have also asked me to join the project as a co-researcher, should the funding be secured. In April, 2020, it was confirmed that we had secured the funding for this project.

6.3.3 Contribution to Research and Recommendations for Future Research

This exploratory study has suggested some connections between expectations, experiences, and outcomes of participation in study abroad. However due to limitations with regard to the amount of data, the reliance on self-reported data, and no additional data for triangulation of results, further research is needed. Further research on this area should continue investigating the connection between expectations, experiences, and outcomes for other potential outcomes outside of personal growth and change, such as language attainment or future career paths. It should also focus on a larger data set, including more participants and additional forms of data collection in order to triangulate any results.

Finally, by fusing together the experiences of the research participants, and existing findings from study abroad research, this thesis has contributed both a set of objectives, and a suggested curriculum to better prepare students for study abroad programmes. The curriculum aims at managing expectations and maximising outcomes by preparing students

for social interaction. Further research, which I will be conducting upon completion of this doctoral degree, should investigate how these recommendations can be implemented and measuring their impact in comparison to the findings presented in this thesis.

6.3.4 Dissemination of Knowledge

In terms of disseminating knowledge, there are many potential opportunities available to me. In terms of conference presentations, the largest local conference in my area would be the Japan Association of Language Teachers (JALT) which holds an annual conference where I could present my thesis findings. Furthermore, JALT has a special interest group for study abroad researchers, who also have annual conferences where my findings could be presented.

For publishing my findings in written media, there are two main options I am considering. Firstly, is the online journal *Frontiers*, which is an interdisciplinary journal focussed on research into study abroad, and one which I read a lot during the preparation I went through for this thesis. There is also the JALT journal, which is broader in scope with regards to content, but has a history of publishing work related to study abroad research.

6.4 Chapter Conclusion

The conclusion chapter has presented ways in which this exploratory interview study has contributed to research in the area of study abroad programmes. Furthermore, it has resulted in a recommended preparation programme aimed at managing participant expectations and maximising outcomes of participation in a study abroad programme. In my own practice, I now have the opportunity to implement these ideas on a small scale within my own department.

As a result, this thesis does not present the end of my interest in study abroad research. In the short term, I plan to disseminate the findings presented in this thesis through the avenues mentioned above. From there, I will build on this by initially implementing my ideas in my department and using this as a springboard for further publications as the programme is tested and refined in the coming years. In the long-term I intend for this programme to be embraced my department, and potentially even across the university as a way to ensure all of our students have the best opportunity for a rewarding study abroad experience.

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Appendix – Interview Protocols

Pre-Departure Interview Protocol

Part One – Basic Information

Themes to Cover

- Basic information about the student's study abroad programme

Questions

- Where are you studying?
- For how long will you be there?
- What will you be studying there?
- Where will you be staying? (Home stay or dormitory)
- For what reasons did you decide to participate in this programme?

Part Two – Questions Targeting RQ1

RQ1

How far do students view the study abroad programme as an opportunity for personal growth and change *before* departure?

Themes to Cover

- General outcomes hoped for by the students
- Specific outcomes related to personal growth and change
- How students expect these changes will happen
- What students hope to do in order to facilitate changes

Questions

- In general, what do you hope to achieve/learn through participation in this programme?
  - Tell me more about…..
- In what ways do you think the study abroad experience might affect you personally?
  - Tell me more about *(insert an answer which needs more description)*.
  - How do you think *(insert answer)* will change?
  - How do you think a change in *(insert answer)* will happen?
  - How will you try to make these changes happen?
- What might you do to help you achieve your goals?

Part Three – Global Human Resources

Themes to Cover

- Perceptions on Global Human Resources
- Interest in developing as a Global Human Resource
- Perceptions on the link between study abroad and development of self as a Global Human Resource

Questions

On institutional goals

- The president of the university says that he wants NUFS graduates to be people with "a global perspective". What do you think he means?
- In your opinion, how important is it to have a 'global perspective'?
- In what ways will the study abroad experience help you to develop a 'global perspective'?
- How far do you think you have a 'global perspective' *now*?
- In what ways might the study abroad experience help you develop a 'global perspective'?

On personal goals (if participant does not have an understanding of institutional goals)
- How do you think the experience will give you the opportunity to change or develop your understanding of the world?
- What situations can you imagine that will challenge your point of view?
    - How will you deal with these situations?

Part Four – Questions Targeting RQ5

RQ5

How can a Japanese institution manage student expectations and maximise student experiences on study abroad programmes?

Themes to Cover

- How the university helped students to prepare in general
- How far the students were given an opportunity to express or develop their desired outcomes
- What advice the students received in order to help them achieve their desired outcomes
- Student perceptions on the quality of the pre-departure preparation they have undergone
- Student suggestions on how the pre-departure preparation could be improved (if at all)

Questions

- What advice have you received in order to prepare you for the study abroad programme? How useful did you find it?
- To what extent have you had an opportunity to discuss your goals on this programme?
- How can the university improve the preparation stage of the study abroad programme?

Part Five – Misc

Themes to Cover
 	
    •   Any final thoughts from the student
 	
Questions
 	
    •   Thinking about the topics we have discussed, is there anything else you would like to say?

Post-Study Abroad Interview Protocol

Part One – General Information

Themes to Cover

- General impressions of the study abroad programme

Questions

- How was the programme?
- What were the highlights of your time there?

Part Two – Questions Targeting RQ2

RQ2

After the programme, how do students perceive their actual growth and change?

Themes to Cover

- Student perceptions on what they have achieved
- How they compare to what they expected prior to departure
- Examples of personal growth and change

Questions

- What were your goals before you left for the study abroad programme?
    - How far do you feel you have achieved them?
- What other things have you achieved which you did not expect?
- In what ways has this experience changed you?

Part Three – Questions Targeting RQ3

RQ3

How can the student experience be explained from the perspective of transformative learning?

Themes to Cover

- Examples of transformative learning
    - Disorienting situations
    - Detail on how these situations were disorienting
    - How students dealt with the problem
    - How their perspectives were reinforced, or changed as a result

Questions

- Thinking about your study abroad experience, did you have any positive surprises/any situations which were more positive than you first imagined?
    - How did you deal with *(insert answer from one of the above questions)*?
    - What effect did this have on you?
- Thinking about your study abroad experience, describe any situations where you felt angry/confused/stressed.
    - How did you deal with *(insert answer from one of the above questions)*?
    - What effect did this have on you?

• Thinking about your study abroad experience, describe any situations where your opinion/point of view was challenged.
    o How did you deal with *(insert answer from one of the above questions)*?
    o What effect did this have on you?

Part Four – Questions Targeting RQ5
RQ5 How can a Japanese institution manage student expectations and maximise student experiences on study abroad programmes? *Themes to Cover* • Student reflections on the preparation they went through before the programme began • Student opinions on how the host institution supported them • Student opinions on how the host institution could support them better *Questions* • How prepared do you think you were for the experience? • Thinking back to your preparation before you left, how useful was the information you received?   o What extra information could the university have given you? • What advice would you give to students in order to prepare them for difficult situations like you faced on the programme?

Part Five – Misc
Themes to Cover • Any final thoughts from the student *Questions* • Thinking about the topics we have discussed, is there anything else you would like to say?