Evaluating the Impact of 4-H Japanese Exchange Program

Rama B. Radhakrishna  
Patreese D. Ingram  
Department of Agricultural and Extension Education  
323 Agricultural Administration Building  
The Pennsylvania State University  
University Park, PA 16802  
Tel: (814) 863-7069/Fax: (814)-863-4753  
E-mail: brr100@psu.edu/pdi1@psu.edu

Abstract

The overall purpose of this study was to assess the impact of 4-H high school Japanese Exchange program on participants and host families. Specifically, this study assessed the Japanese exchange program in terms of arrival and departure orientation programs, 4-H program expectations, host family expectations, program coordination, and school and community experience. Descriptive research methodology was employed to conduct the study. A total of 52 2002-03 program participants responded to a 50 item questionnaire administered at the end of the program. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data. Overall, findings indicated that participants were pleased with the arrival and departure orientation program. A substantial majority of participants indicated that the 4-H exchange program met their expectations relative to host family (78.4%), school (72.5%), and local coordinator (60.8%). Ninety-eight percent of the exchange students indicated that they liked the high school. Classes were difficult for nearly 61% of the students, while 55% of the students needed some extra help. Most students (77%) reported that they enjoyed school and community service and were able to make friends and participate in various community activities and events (92%).

Sixty-seven percent of the participants reported that their overall 4-H experience as “excellent,” while 29% said “good.” The service received from 4-H, friendliness and professionalism was also rated high by participants (35% excellent, 48% good). Seventy-one percent indicated that they would recommend the 4-H exchange program to others in their home country. As a result of participating in 4-H Exchange program participants agreed that they better understand intercultural sensitivity and global perspectives. Recommendations from the study included: 1) development of an assessment tool to document exchange program outcomes and 2) a follow-up study of all program participants to determine the programs’ impact on later life experiences.
Introduction

The National 4-H Japanese Exchange Program has existed since 1972 and currently involves 35 states. Since 1972, more than 30,000 families in the United States have hosted Japanese teenagers and more than 6,000 4-hers have made visits to Japan through this unique program. The program has grown and expanded over the years to include a variety of opportunities. The 4-H Japanese Exchange program is operated by the Cooperative Extension Service nationally, and through the 4-H Youth Development Departments of Cooperative Extension of the land grant university in each state. The overall mission of the 4-H International Exchange Programs is to provide age appropriate experiential educational and development opportunities for youth.

The National 4-H International Programs Committee (IPC) formulates overall guidelines to promote uniformity and continuity in the management of the exchanges in the United States. The IPC works with three Japanese organizations on the high school program—Labo, Lex and Uterk. These Japanese organizations promote the program in Japan, select and prepare delegates according to guidelines mutually agreed upon by 4-H and the Japanese Organizations. This program is in compliance with the rules and regulations of the Council for Standards on International Education (CSIET).

A number of studies have documented the impact of international exchange programs on participants, host families, and the host institutions (Tritz and Martin, 1997; Opper, Teichler and Carlson, 1990; and Hansel and Grove, 1986). Tritz and Martin (1997) suggest that exposure to a country, its people and culture, will have an impact on anyone who has studied abroad. As a result of the exposure, perceptions are changed, thoughts challenged, and most important, a worldly perspective is garnered. Similarly, Opper, Teichler and Carlson (1990) indicated that participation or involvement in international activities provides cultural awareness, improves communication abilities, and increases foreign language skills, and ultimately will have an amazing effect on students’ overall development.

Other researchers have examined the influence of Study Abroad Programs (SAPs) on college students (Ayers, 1996, Hutchins, 1996, and Zhai and Scheer, 2002). Findings from these studies suggest that SAPs have provided a variety of opportunities for students to increase their awareness and appreciation of cultural diversity, personal growth, and develop skills and attitudes that will allow them to function successfully in an interdependent world. In addition, exchange programs have helped participants to acquire foreign language skills, and an understanding of different people and cultures.

Sowa (2002) reported three models of student exchange programs: total immersion, protective studies and tour models. In addition to improving the language and communication skills with foreigners, the US programs also tend to focus on individual development and international understanding. According to Sowa, benefits derived from student exchange programs have been stated to include cross-cultural interactions, increase in knowledge and language skills and changes in attitudes and career goals. She compared her study benefits to Holman (2001) who classified benefits of student exchange into...
educational, focusing on personal development, increased language proficiency and the
cultivation of a comparative perspective and cross-cultural understanding of participants.

Abel (2002) addressed the situation that international students pass through when
introduced to a new culture. She cited Brink and Saunders (1976) classification—the
honeymoon, disenchantment, beginning resolution and the effective function phases.
Bennett (1986) also identifies and discusses six levels of adjustments which the author cites as
denial, defensive, merging of the two cultures, respect for both, being adept to switching
from one culture to the other, and finally moving comfortably between both cultures.
According to Abel, understanding and anticipating these sequential stages in culture
adjustment can ameliorate many of them. She suggests that educational resources be
designed for coping with culture shocks to help international exchange students to become
acclimatized to the United States.

Hansel and Grove (1986) found that adolescents traveling abroad showed greater
improvement than those who did not have the opportunity to travel abroad in 10 of the 17
personal characteristics (adaptability, appreciation of own family, awareness and
appreciation of host country and culture, awareness of opportunities, communication with
others, critical thinking, exchange of ideas, foreign language appreciation and ability, high
standards for personal relationships, independence-responsibility for self, international
awareness, non-materialism, open mindedness, personal growth and maturity, self-
confidence and understanding other cultures) Students who traveled abroad seem to have
learned more about other cultures and have a greater appreciation of their own culture. In
addition, they found that travel abroad students gained skills that enabled them to deal more
effectively with demands of later life experiences and have increase concern for spiritual
values rather than material things. Hansel and Grove also found that students who went
abroad only for a summer tended to show greater adaptability than those who went abroad
for a whole year (p. 86). Overall, they concluded that intercultural homestay has a positive
effect on adolescents.

Arnold (2003) reported that host youth had a number of experiences that contributed
to their personal growth. Prominent among these were making new friends, learning to
communicate with others from a different culture, being a good representative of the United
States, site seeing with their international student, and having someone from a different
culture live with them. Host youth also reported worries and difficulties in hosting exchange
students which included the exchange student getting homesick, making mistakes,
communication, language, not getting along with the student, and not making a good
impression.

In a recent evaluation study on host families, Radhakrishna and Ingram (2004)
found that “language, communication, and apprehension” were the greatest challenges to
hosting exchange students. For some host families, the food choices, diet, tastes and
preferences appeared to be a challenge. Eighty-one percent of the host families indicated
that their families have changed as a result of hosting an exchange student. Key words
used by host families included: cultural awareness and appreciation, wonderful memories,
patience and tolerance when dealing with other people. Some of the comments made by
host families support this conclusion. “Yes, we have learned much about Japan and Japanese people/culture, gained a good friend.” Other comments include: “Yes, having a total stranger become part of the family in such a short time.” ‘Yes, it was a step outside of our comfort zone.” ‘But a worthwhile experience!’ The four host families that said “no change” indicated that they were previously involved in exchange programs and traveled frequently to Japan, and as such nothing changed for them.

Host families suggested several strategies for potential host families: get a Japanese book and learn Japanese before they arrive; be patient with language difficulty and don’t use slang; play family games; introduce the exchange student to Japanese people you know; and be patient and tolerant.

This study attempted to evaluate both the process and outcome of the 4-H Japanese Exchange program. The following purpose and objectives guided the investigation.

Purpose and Objectives

The overall purpose of this study was to assess the impact of the 4-H Japanese High School Exchange Program on participants and host families. Specific objectives were to:

1) describe the demographic profile of exchange program participants;

2) assess the Japanese exchange program in terms of:
   - arrival and departure orientation programs,
   - 4-H program expectations
   - host family expectations,
   - program coordination, and
   - school and community experience; and

3) suggest strategies for improvement.

Methodology

The Japanese students were all high school students (N=52) who ranged in age from 16 to 19 years. Students spent a full school year (2002-2003) attending high school and living with host families in 22 different states. Each student was selected for participation in this program by one of the three Japanese youth-serving organizations: Labo, Lex, and Utrek.

Based on a review of literature and experiences of authors, a 50 item questionnaire was developed by the International Program Committee (IPC) consisting of faculty, specialists from youth development, diversity, and international programs, and two Japanese youth exchange professionals. Forced-choice and Likert-type scale items asked
youth to rate their experiences related to and expectations of the host family, program coordination, school and community experience, and the value of the arrival and departure orientation programs and demographic characteristics. The questionnaire was administered by one of the IPC members during a departure orientation meeting. A Japanese interpreter was present to clarify any items that were unclear to students. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Results

Demographic Profile

Most exchange students (96%) were in the age group of 16-18 years. The state of Utah hosted more than seven students, followed by the states of Michigan and Ohio (5 students each). Forty-five percent of the students represented Lex organization in Japan, followed by Labo (41%), and Utrek (14%).

Arrival and Departure Orientation

Prior to coming to the United States, 92% of the students indicated that they were interviewed by their home country youth organizations, 98% attended orientation before leaving the home country. Similarly, 98% received orientation about high school in the U.S., and 88% indicated that the orientation was very useful. However, only one-half of the students reported they were well prepared for the program.

4-H Exchange Program Expectation

A substantial majority of exchange students indicated that the 4-H exchange program met their expectations relative to host family (78.4%), school (72.5%), and local coordinator (60.8%). Results are shown in Table 1. However, exchange students were somewhat skeptical about their expectations relative to social and community activities (54.9%) and program support (49.0%).

Table 1: Students’ Expectations of the 4-H Exchange Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Component</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Host family</td>
<td>40 (78.4%)</td>
<td>11 (21.6%)</td>
<td>51 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>37 (72.5%)</td>
<td>14 (27.5%)</td>
<td>51 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local coordinator</td>
<td>31 (60.8%)</td>
<td>20 (39.2%)</td>
<td>51 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and community activities</td>
<td>28 (54.9%)</td>
<td>23 (45.1%)</td>
<td>51 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program support</td>
<td>25 (49.0%)</td>
<td>26 (51.0%)</td>
<td>51 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Host Family Expectations

Host families welcome the Japanese youth into their homes “as a family member,” encouraging youth to participate in the daily activities and lives of the host family and community.

Students reported very positive experiences with the host families. Only five students (10.0%) reported that they have to change host families, while 90% stayed with the same host family throughout the program. On a three-point scale (1=never to 3=always), they indicated that they “always” had good relationships with host families (M=2.69), they received support from host families in adjusting to the new environment (M=2.72), and communicating with host families (M=2.74). Ninety-four percent of the students were aware that host families did not receive any monetary benefit to host them.

Table 2: Students’ Expectations of Host Families

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Component</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Mean*</th>
<th>Sd</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good relationship with host family</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Host family helped in adjusting to the new surroundings</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to communicate with host family</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Scale: 1=never, 2=sometimes, and 3=always

Program Coordinators

The Program Coordinator manages the exchange program at the state level. Responsibilities include matching host families to Japanese youth; arranging for enrollment in the area public school system; providing arrival and debriefing orientations for Japanese youth and host families; visiting the Japanese youth, host family, and schools; negotiating concerns between the youth and United States participants; and communicating any problems to the appropriate persons at the national level.

Students indicated that program coordinators were very helpful to the exchange students. Program coordinators maintained regular contacts with exchange students through a variety of channels. Examples include frequent contacts via telephone (67%), home visits (49%), group travel (37%), social settings (29%) and schools (27%). Exchange students were very positive regarding help and assistance provided by the program coordinators. As shown in Table 3, 67% of exchange students indicated that coordinators were there for them when they needed help, were friendly and approachable (87%), were fair-minded and objective (77%), and were able to see the student’s point of view (72.3%).
Table 3: Program Coordinator Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Coordinator</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understood roles and responsibilities</td>
<td>33 (63.5%)</td>
<td>14 (26.9%)</td>
<td>5 (9.6%)</td>
<td>52 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available when needed help and advice</td>
<td>35 (67.3%)</td>
<td>12 (23.1%)</td>
<td>5 (9.6%)</td>
<td>52 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly and approachable</td>
<td>45 (86.5%)</td>
<td>6 (11.5%)</td>
<td>5 (9.6%)</td>
<td>52 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair-minded and objective</td>
<td>34 (77.3%)</td>
<td>6 (13.6%)</td>
<td>4 (9.1%)</td>
<td>44 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped me to see my host family point of view</td>
<td>34 (72.3%)</td>
<td>8 (17.0%)</td>
<td>5 (10.6%)</td>
<td>47 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

School and Community Service

Ninety-eight percent of the exchange students indicated that they liked the high school. Classes were difficult for nearly 61% of the students, while 55% of the students needed some extra help. Most students (77%) reported that they enjoyed school and community service and were able to make friends and participate in various community activities and events (92%).

Overall 4-H Exchange Experience

Sixty-seven percent of the students reported that their overall 4-H experience as “excellent,” while 29% said “good.” The service received from 4-H, friendliness and professionalism was also rated high by students (35% excellent, 48% good). Seventy-one percent indicated that they would recommend 4-H exchange to others in their home country, while 27% said, maybe. As a result of participating in 4-H Exchange program, exchange students agreed that they understand 1) intercultural sensitivity (M=4.08), and 2) global perspectives (4.42).

Conclusions

Overall, the 4-H Japanese Exchange program had a positive experience on students. Students gave high ratings for arrival and departure orientations. Students also indicated that the 4-H exchange program met their expectations relative to host family, school, and local coordinator.

Almost all students liked the high school. However, quite a number of students (a little over one-half) indicated that classes were difficult and they needed extra help. Students enjoyed school and community service and were able to make friends and participate in various community activities and events.

Finally, an overwhelming majority of students indicated that they would recommend 4-H exchange program to others in their home country.
Educational Importance

During these times when war between and among countries has become an on-going event, exchange programs provide positive opportunities for young people to make friends with those in other parts of the world. Additionally, our increasingly global economy will require that more and more workers of the future have the skills to relate effectively with those from other cultures.

As our world becomes more globally conscious, a greater number of exchange programs may be pursued. There is a paucity of research literature that focuses on organized exchange programs and its impact. A need exists to systematically document outcomes of exchange programs. Further, the results of this study may be useful to other organizations that deal with foreign student exchanges with high school students.

The 17 personal characteristics examined by Hansel and Grove should be used as a framework to develop an assessment tool for evaluating the impact of exchange programs. In addition, contemporary research relative to impact of exchange programs should be reviewed to select outcome measures.

Finally, a follow-up survey of all 4-H Japanese Exchange program participants should be conducted. Results from such a survey will be of immense value in assessing the impact of 4-H Japanese Exchange program on later life experiences and on global awareness and understanding.

References


