

Are All *Sogo Daigaku* the Same: Japanese Students' Interest in Europe

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Introduction

The EU and Japan each form two of the main pillars of the world economy next to the U.S. (Sonoda, A. 2004, p. 7).

Our overall aim is to investigate to what degree Japanese students have an interest in Europe. In this regard, we look at several areas, for example, favorite country as well as for highest ranked country for travel. Furthermore, we ask students, whether they want to go to Europe for studying, for internship or for later work. In addition, we investigate if it is attractive for students to work in European companies located in Japan.

We administered a questionnaire to 154 students from two different universities in Kansai area (Western Japan). One university, Osaka University of Economics is a highly specialized institution but not internationalized and the other university is Christian related and with ties to many other countries. We would like to know what our learners think about the EU, and more specifically, if there are differences in opinion between students at the two different kinds of universities participating in this study.

Method

Participants. 154 Japanese college students took part in this survey, 90 from Osaka University of Economics and 64 from Kwansai Gakuin University. The former came from a mid ranked college with localized rather than international programs and faculty. These participants attended a voluntary lecture on the EU, conducted by the junior researcher. The later group came from an elite mission school, with a history of international relations and for Japan at least a rather international faculty. These participants in the senior researcher's faculty of business administration elective English classes.

Survey. The survey, administered in Japanese, was designed by the junior researcher to elicit information about Japanese college students interest in and knowledge about the EU, related to future study and employment plans. Eleven items from the original fifteen item survey were chosen as appropriate for analysis in this paper. The survey itself was a forced choice Lykert

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type survey, with possible responses ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (4).

Administration. The survey was administered during the spring semester, 2006. Participants attending the EU lecture were given the survey at the end of the lecture. Participants attending English classes were given the survey in class in July 2006.

Analysis. The survey was hand recorded and tabulated. Frequency data was recorded, both for the total group and by institution. Loglikelihood was used to determine statistically significant results by institution, using the JMP Statistical Package for the Macintosh computer. The alpha for significance was set at the customary .05 level.

Research question. Would there be differences in opinion regarding the EU between participants from a mid ranked, 'localized' university and those from a higher ranked, 'internationalized university? Put another way, are student attitudes regarding the EU uniform across populations or do they differ according to either/or university rank or degree in 'internationalization?'

Results

1. I attend EU lectures because I would like to know more about EU.

Count, Row %	s. agree	agree	disagree	s. disagree
KGU	14 22.58	44 70.97	3 4.84	1 1.61
OUE	9 10.00	68 75.56	11 12.22	2 2.22
total	15.13	73.68	9.21	1.97

These students show a strong interest in learning more about the EU in an academic setting, 89% agreeing with the statement, with only 11% disagreeing. There were no statistically significant differences between the two university groups on this item. What is interesting about this item is that only the OUE group actually attended a lecture on the EU.

2. My favored EU-country is:

Con.	n a	Eng	Fin	Fra	Ger	Hol	Ita	Por	Spa	Swe	Swi
KGU	0 0.00	16 26.67	1 1.67	13 21.67	6 10.00	0 0.00	11 18.33	1 1.67	9 15.00	2 3.33	1 1.67
OUE	22 24.44	14 15.56	0 0.00	19 21.11	15 16.67	1 1.11	11 12.22	0 0.00	5 5.56	1 1.11	2 2.22
total	14.67	20.00	0.67	21.33	14.00	0.67	14.67	0.67	9.33	2.00	2.00

Prob>ChiSq 0.0026

France was the first choice as favorite EU country, garnering 21% of the vote, followed by

England (20%), Italy (14.67%), Germany (14%), and Spain (9.33%). England was rated highest by the KGU group, France by the OUE group. 14.67% of the participants did not respond, presumably because they do not know enough about Europe even to have a favorite country. The differences were statistically significant.

3. *If given a chance, I would like to go to EU for study.*

Count, Row %	s. agree	agree	disagree	s. disagree
KGU	30 46.88	30 46.88	2 3.12	2 3.12
OUE	18 20.00	53 58.89	17 18.89	2 2.22
total	31.17	53.90	12.34	2.60

Prob>ChiSq 0.0006

85% of the participants show a desire to study in the EU, with 15% of the students expressing no such desire. KGU students are more interested in EU study than OUE students, with 47% of the them strongly agreeing with the statement, as opposed of only 20% of the OUE students. The differences on this item were statistically significant.

4. *If given a chance, I would like to go to EU for internship.*

Count, Row %	n a	s. agree	agree	disagree	s. disagree
KGU	0 0.00	16 25.00	37 57.81	9 14.06	2 3.12
OUE	2 2.22	10 11.11	48 53.33	28 31.11	2 2.22
total	2 1.30	26 16.88	85 55.19	37 24.03	4 2.60

Prob>ChiSq 0.0332

72% of the respondents expressed a desire to intern in the EU, with 27% seemingly uninterested. Again, as in the previous item, the KGU group are more interested than the OUE group, 83% agreeing the the statement, as opposed to 64%. This item also met our alpha for statistical significance.

5. *If given the chance, I would like to go to EU for work after graduation.*

Count, Row %	n a	s. agree	agree	disagree	s. disagree
KGU	0 0.00	16 25.00	33 51.56	13 20.31	2 3.12
OUE	1	15	46	26	2

	1.11	16.67	51.11	28.89	2.22
total	0.65	20.13	51.30	25.32	2.60

Item five mirrors items three and four. 71% of the participants expressed a desire to work in the EU, with 28% opposed. Although the KGU participants showed more interest, 77% versus 67%, the results are not statistically significant.

6. *To which EU country would you like to go?*

Con.	n a	Aus	Den	Eng	Fra	Ger	Gre	Hol	Ita	Lux	Spa	Swe	Swi
KGU	0 0.00	0 00.00	1 1.69	13 22.03	18 30.51	4 6.78	1 1.69	0 0.00	10 16.95	0 0.00	9 15.25	1 1.69	2 3.39
OUE	15 16.67	1 1.11	0 0.00	15 16.67	12 13.33	13 14.44	0 0.00	1 1.11	19 21.11	1 1.11	10 11.11	0 0.00	3 3.33
total	10.07	0.67	0.67	18.79	20.13	11.41	0.67	0.67	19.46	0.67	12.75	0.67	3.36

Prob>ChiSq 0.0159

France once again, as in item two, comes out on top as favorite destination in the EU, with 20.13%, followed by Italy with 19.46%, England with 18.79%, Spain, changing places with Germany, with 12.75%, and Germany with 11.41%. The OUE rated Italy number one on this item, with the KGU group picking France. This time only 15 participants did not choose a county. The differences were statistically significant.

7. *I think EU companies in Kansai could be interesting to work for.*

Count, Row %	n a	s. agree	agree	disagree	s. disagree
KGU	0 0.00	14 22.22	38 60.32	10 6.54	1 0.65
OUE	1 1.11	9 10.00	73 81.11	7 7.78	0 0.00
total	0.65	15.03	72.55	11.11	0.65

Prob>ChiSq 0.0371

These college students, overwhelmingly, show a desire to work for an EU company in their home area. 88% of the respondents agreed with the statement, 12 disagreeing. With 22% of the KGU group strongly agreeing (as opposed to 10% of the OUE group), the inter college differences on this item were statistically significant.

8. *I think payment at EU companies is better than in Japanese companies.*

Count, Row %	n a	s. agree	agree	disagree	s. disagree
KGU	0	2	21	35	3

	0.00	3.28	34.43	57.38	4.92
OUE	10 11.11	0 0.00	25 27.78	55 61.11	0 0.00
total	6.62	1.32	30.46	59.60	1.99

Prob>ChiSq 0.0052

So far in the survey, the participants were quite positive towards the EU. However, they do feel that Japanese company salaries would be superior to those offered at EU companies (61% disagreeing with the statement, 33% agreeing, 7% not responding). The differences between groups was once again significant. What is interesting about this item is the fact that these students probably have no actual facts to go on, and are therefore expressing a general, cultural feeling.

9. *I think a career at EU companies would be easier than at Japanese companies.*

Count, Row %	n a	s. agree	agree	disagree	s. disagree
KGU	0 0.00	0 0.00	13 20.97	47 75.81	2 3.23
OUE	8 8.89	1 1.11	22 24.44	59 65.56	0 0.00
total	5.26	0.66	23.03	69.74	1.32

Prob>ChiSq 0.0430

Most (72%) feel it would be easier to work for a Japanese, rather than a EU company. This item parallels item eight. There were again statistically significant differences between the groups on this item. The learners at the christian mission school, surprisingly, were more adamant in their rejection of the statement than the OUE learners.

10. *It is important to know about EU for finding a good job.*

Count, Row %	n a	s. agree	agree	disagree
KGU	0 0.00	11 17.46	39 61.90	13 20.63
OUE	2 2.22	12 13.33	64 71.11	12 13.33
total	1.31	15.03	67.32	16.34

As far as finding a job is concerned, 82% of the respondents agree that it is important to know more about the EU. 16% disagreed, but there were no strongly disagrees on this item. There were also no statistically significant differences between groups.

11. *Listening lectures about the EU is a waste of my time.*

Count, Row %	n a	agree	disagree	s. disagree
KGU	0 0.00	5 7.81	42 65.62	17 26.56
OUE	2 2.22	10 11.11	64 71.11	14 15.56
total	1.30	9.74	68.83	20.13

Only 10% of the participants agreed that listening to lectures about the EU is a waste of time, with 89% disagreeing, with no students strongly agreeing. Once again, as in the previous item, the KGU participants were more adamant in their views (with a higher percentage strongly disagreeing), although again the differences did not reach statistical significance. The KGU students were taking English classes and did not listen to the EU lecture, yet they still feel such lectures have value. Were they perhaps trying to be polite here, or were they expressing an desire to attend such lectures were they to be offered?

Discussion

In general, these Japanese college students are very positive towards the EU. A large majority of them would like to study, intern, and/or work in the EU. They would like to know more about the EU, and feel that such knowledge would be helpful in finding employment. In addition, many of them would like to work at EU companies locally. Nevertheless, they do feel that Japanese companies offer them better career opportunities, and higher financial reimbursement.

There were statistically significant differences found between the students at OUE and KGU on seven of the items. The KGU students expressed a stronger desire to study, intern and work in the EU. They also thought it might be more interesting to work at a EU company than the OUE students did. However, the OUE groups was less negative about EU company pay and working conditions, although both groups clearly felt Japanese companies were superior in these areas.

As far as interest in specific countries go, these students picked France first, followed by Italy, England, German, and Spain (in various orders in the two countries items). Switzerland even garnered some support, even though it is not in the EU! The two student groups had statistically significant differences on both country items, however. The OUE group liked France best (closely followed by England) but would rather travel to Italy. The KGU group like England best, but would rather travel to France!

To answer our research question, students at private Japanese universities are not from the exact same pool when it comes to their thinking about Europe. Both groups tended to support or reject the items in the same direction, however the strength of that support was clearly (and on seven of the items, significantly) different.

Conclusion

154 Japanese college students from two universities were administered an eleven item survey designed to measure their interest in the EU. Topics covered were interest in study, internship, and work in the EU, perceptions of career possibilities and salaries in EU companies, interest in lectures on the EU, and favorite EU countries. The results indicate a strong interest in the EU (with France being the most favored country and destination) but also the opinion that Japanese companies would be better for career and financial purposes. There were statistically significant differences between learners at a more locally oriented university and one with a more international orientation on seven of the eleven items. These results indicate that there are indeed differences between student attitudes regarding the EU and private coeducational colleges in the same geographical location.

Problems with the study.

The survey items were written in Japanese by a non native speaker, and when reviewed both during the administration (by the KGU students) and after the administration (by educated native speakers of Japanese), several items were found to be ambiguous and in certain cases downright hilarious. Even the translations for 'strongly agree' and 'strongly disagree' were faulty, as the same translation for 'strongly' was not used. Participants had questions about meaning of several of the items as well. Finally, the survey was designed for those attending lectures on the EU, and not for students attending EFL classes. All of the above criticism in item construction could potentially lead to the introduction of error into the survey, and therefore to a lack of faith in the results.

Nevertheless, we are publishing the study, for three reasons. One, despite doubts about the validity of several of the items, the fact that tightly grouped items were used leads us to believe that the results are at least in the general ballpark. Two, because there is little or no data of this kind available. And three, as a warning to others who might want to make their own surveys. There is a science to the making of surveys, one that it is perilous to ignore.

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