



Study Abroad Perspectives: An Interview with Mr. Eiki Satori

by Karen Yabuno

Mr. Eiki Satori is the vice principal and admissions manager for the Tokyo-based Affinity English Academy (AEA) and a part-time lecturer at Toyo Eiwa Women's University. He has a M.S. in English education from Syracuse University and a M.Ed. degree from the College of New Jersey. He has produced educational materials for ALC and Agos, and since 2012 has worked for AEA. As a graduate admissions counselor there, he manages about thirty-five applicants annually, assisting them in advancing their careers through overseas graduate studies. This interview was conducted by email during October 2014 in English and Japanese.

How did you first become interested in study abroad?

I had a sense of discomfort about following the same path as my peers. The idea of studying abroad had interested me from a young age. Distinguishing myself from others was one of the core motivations behind my decision to study abroad.

Where did you study abroad? Could you tell us about your experience?

I studied at Syracuse University in New York and The College of New Jersey. Through these experiences, I eventually decided to specialize in global education. In my graduate studies, I conducted research on context-based literacy instruction in Japanese and US classrooms in secondary education. Further interactions with language education specialists in local and international communities encouraged me to compare and analyze different aspects of English and Japanese both culturally and linguistically.

Could you tell us more about the company you are working for now? How does it differ from other study abroad companies?

Affinity English Academy (AEA) was founded in Yokohama in 2007 and has since grown to a staff of ten. Since 2012, I've been working in the application preparation program jointly with the founder of AEA, Mr. Tetsuya Noguchi. The majority of our students are business people aiming to obtain graduate level M.B.A., L.L.M., M.A., M.S., M.Ed., or Ph.D. degrees overseas.

AEA's educational philosophy is not to impose the idea that study abroad is the best option for everyone. We offer a career counseling service known as the "Life Career Counseling Program." I'm a certified career consultant endorsed by the Japan Industrial Counselors Association (*Nihon Sangyō Kaunserā Kyōkai*). I serve as both an admissions counselor and career consultant in

this program. Since graduate school admissions essays (i.e., the Statement of Purpose or Personal Statement) usually require applicants to demonstrate a strong motivation to meet their personal and professional objectives, my key responsibility is to help our students recognize whether studying abroad would provide them with the best opportunity to achieve their objectives before starting to tackle standardized examinations such as the TOEFL, IELTS, GMAT, or GRE.

From your perspective, has there been a change in the way most Japanese approach study abroad since the collapse of Japan's economic bubble in 1991?

I noticed that ten years ago, Japanese applicants used to place priority on “just” studying abroad or living overseas. With the development of social networking services such as Facebook and Twitter, Japanese now spend more time looking for suitable programs for their academic needs. Most importantly, study abroad applicants anticipate receiving a very high quality education that will enhance their careers after graduate school. In particular, private-sponsored applicants to graduate school tend to apply to only the most highly rated programs. I call this an “all-or-nothing application strategy.”

What are some common misconceptions about study abroad among Japanese you have worked with?

While students are somewhat aware that study abroad is not the best way to solve all their problems, many still tend to rely on it as a panacea to change their lives. Many tend to seek quick tangible effects such as a high TOEIC or TOEFL scores to gain an edge on college entrance exams or job searches. Therefore, I constantly ask them to think of the intangible benefits that can be gained from a variety of study abroad environments. Based upon my personal and professional experiences, I strongly believe that such intangible elements are necessary elements for personal growth when learning in multi-cultural environments. Last of all, I have to remember that study abroad will enable my clients not only to achieve academic goals including language development, but also to encourage personal growth in diverse social contexts.



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