

Article

Fostering Intercultural Competence of Japanese and Cambodian Students Through International Exchange Programs

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< Abstract >

This study is to examine tools for assessing intercultural competence of university students in Japan and Cambodia and the impact of intercultural exchange programs. It is the view of the authors that through those programs university students in both countries can enhance their intercultural competence, which is becoming crucial for university graduates in this globalized society. This article (1) reviews the current literature on intercultural competence, (2) introduces definitions of intercultural competence, (3) explores the theoretical background of assessing intercultural competence and introduces the Intercultural Knowledge and Competence (IKC) VALUE Rubric used by the Association of American Colleges and Universities, and (4) introduces international exchange programs for university students in Japan and Cambodia, and describes the results and limitations of assessing their intercultural competence with the IKC Rubric. Finally, (5) the need for intercultural exchange programs is explained and requirements for exchange programs to foster intercultural competence are suggested.

Keywords: intercultural competence, international exchange program, assessment, rubric, globalization

I. Introduction

It is an urgent issue in Japan to develop human resources in order to participate actively in our global society because globalization has spread in many areas, such as society and the economy (MEXT, 2020). Globalization has changed people's lives and it is one of the most important socio-economic characteristics of the modern world (Vandenbroucke, 2016). Intercultural competence is, therefore, one of the competencies university education should foster within students all over the world (Fantini, 2000).

The Department of English at Seinan Jo Gakuin University provides the students many different kinds of international programs such as 3-week homestay programs, 6-month study abroad programs, 12-month study abroad programs, and some short-term study tours. They are not

compulsory programs, but many of the students participate in one of them and some do more than one. Often students take a TOEIC test once or more a year to see if their English proficiency has improved after participating in an international program. Indeed, many students see an improvement in their English proficiency after such programs. It is sometimes anecdotally noted that their attitude towards different cultures or new experiences has improved, however, this has not been officially assessed. It is necessary to evaluate the improvement in their intercultural competence as well as their English proficiency.

Nowadays, each educational institution is required to be accountable for its educational activities. In these circumstances, we should evaluate our international programs by assessing our students' intercultural competence. In order

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to assess it, it is crucial to define intercultural competence and examine the link between international competence and assessment. There are not many studies on assessing intercultural competence, but formative assessment can be one of the ways of assessing it. The authors have implemented exchange programs for Japanese and Cambodian students for several years and have heard that both groups of students say they learned a lot through the programs. However, it is clear that the programs should be improved and in order to do that it is crucial to assess the students' intercultural competence appropriately.

This study examines the definition and assessment of intercultural competence. Then the learning outcomes of Japanese and Cambodian university students who participated in the short-term exchange program in 2019 are investigated and requirements for exchange programs to foster intercultural competence are stated.

II. Intercultural Competence

1. Definition of Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence is a complex set of abilities which is necessary for communication with people of different cultures (Igawa & Tsukamoto, 2019). Deardorff (2016) states "intercultural competence is, broadly speaking, about communication and behavior that is both effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions, with effectiveness referring to the degree to which the individual's goals were achieved while appropriateness refers to the manner and context in which those goals were achieved" (p.121). Bennett (2008) defines intercultural competence as "a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts" (p.97). An appropriate definition of intercultural competence is necessary in order to assess intercultural competence and implement effective intercultural exchange programs.

Heinzmann et al. (2015) state "it is necessary to have skills in several foreign languages in

our society which is multicultural, mobile and connected and it is important for language learners to develop communicative competence in order to communicate appropriately with people from different cultures" (p.187). Therefore, foreign language learning should foster intercultural competence. Interestingly, some of the competencies of intercultural competence can be found in the fields of SLA and TESOL; "cultural self-awareness", "appropriate information", "perceive accurately", "risk taking", and "tolerance of ambiguity" (Ellis, 1994; Richards & Schmidt, 2002). However, there are layers of complexity in the relationship between language fluency and intercultural competence (Savicki et al., 2013).

While it might be difficult to define intercultural competence in brief terms, it might be possible to summarize it as follows: Intercultural competence is a complex, broad, learning goal and must be broken down into more discrete, measurable, learning objectives representing specific knowledge, attitude or skill areas and is a lifelong developmental process (Deardorff, 2016). Deardorff (2016) also states language fluency is necessary for intercultural competence but is in itself insufficient. Faculty need a clearer understanding of intercultural competence in order to guide students in developing it.

2. Benefits of Intercultural Competence

It is crucial for all graduates to be professional and global citizens, whether they seek a career in their communities of origin or elsewhere because in their future lives and careers they will face issues which have wide reaching regional and international dimensions (Gregersen-Hermans, 2017). Students who study abroad receive more job offers because studying abroad is associated with greater empathy, patience, self-confidence, and other positive personal characteristics, including self-efficacy (Maddux et al., 2014) and these competencies can be said to overlap with intercultural competence.

Intercultural competence involves critical awareness of self and others in intercultural encounters while paying appropriate attention to relationship building, monitoring and managing

emotions, and empathy (Holmes and O'Neill, 2012). Even in situations other than studying abroad, people who have better self-efficacy tend to have better self-regulation, better well-being, better health behaviors, and better coping skills (Luszczynska, et al., 2005). It could be said that these abilities are also essential for leading a better life.

3. Assessing Intercultural Competence

(1) Need for Assessing Intercultural Competence

It is becoming important for universities all over the world to assess learning outcomes. However, most research has focused on the educational programs rather than on students' learning outcomes (King, Perez, & Shim, 2013). Deardorff (2011) states "assessing intercultural competence as a learning outcome is not only possible but also necessary as postsecondary institutions seek to graduate global-ready students" (p.76). However, some research shows that the intercultural goals of study abroad programs are not defined well and there are not enough studies that have measured the outcomes of these programs appropriately (Strange & Gibson, 2017). Assessment and learning are crucial for student development and it is necessary for educators to use the assessment data in order to guide students in their development and to check the impact institutions have on student learning (Deardorff, 2011).

(2) How to Assess Intercultural Competence

Current research suggests that "intercultural competence assessment begins with a clear definition and framework derived from the literature, which translates into concrete, specific goals and measurable student learning outcomes" (Deardorff, 2011, p.77). Deardorff (2017) suggests the following principles of intercultural competence assessment:

- Define intercultural competence within a programmatic or institutional context, based on the literature.

- Prioritize specific elements of intercultural competence within the learning context (i.e. course or program).
- Align learning outcomes to the goals, learning activities / interventions with the learning outcomes, and assessment measures to the stated learning outcomes.
- Identify both direct and indirect evidence of changes in the learner and that the stated learning outcomes are achieved to some degree (pp.124 – 125).

Time must be taken to define intercultural competence and develop clear learning outcome statements which prioritize specific aspects of intercultural competence because these statements determine the assessment methods (Deardorff, 2011). These prioritized learning outcomes are then assessed through both direct and indirect measures (Deardorff, 2011). Direct evidence can be learning contracts, e-portfolios, critical reflection and performance while indirect evidence can be surveys of inventories from the learner-perspective (Deardorff, 2011).

There are many different ways to assess the development of intercultural competence. Deardorff (2011) cites Georgia Tech's use of a self-perspective inventory, a portfolio, and a capstone course to assess intercultural learning and Duke University's use of self-perspective inventories, combined with self-reflection assignments, observations, and embedded course assessments. It is crucial for each institute to have its own assessment method which fits its own goals and context.

(3) AAC & U's Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE Rubric

The use of rubrics is one of the effective ways to assess intercultural competence. An example of a rubric for intercultural competence is the Intercultural Knowledge and Competence (IKC) VALUE Rubric developed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) (Gregersen-Hermans, 2017) and it is one of the most popularly used tools, especially in American

universities, to assess the development of intercultural competence. The IKC VALUE Rubric mainly consists of six areas: cultural self-awareness, knowledge of cultural worldview frameworks, empathy, verbal and nonverbal communication, curiosity and openness. This rubric seems reasonable for assessing the intercultural competence development of Japanese university students (Igawa & Tsukamoto, 2019).

Table 1. Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE Rubric

| Area | |
|-----------|--|
| Knowledge | Cultural self-awareness |
| | Knowledge of cultural worldview frameworks |
| Skills | Empathy |
| | Verbal and nonverbal communication |
| Attitudes | Curiosity |
| | Openness |

Arranged from AAC&U's Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE Rubric (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2009)

III. Intercultural Competence for Japanese and Cambodian University Students

1. Intercultural Exchange Programs for Japanese and Cambodian University Students

Igawa and Tsukamoto (2020) investigated the learning outcomes of Japanese and Cambodian university students who participated in short-term international sojourn and exchange programs. Japanese students visited a middle school in Cambodia and introduced Japanese culture such as Japanese calligraphy and paper craft to the middle school students. They also visited Cambodian university students' homes and local museums to learn about Cambodian culture. Cambodian students visited middle schools and a university in Japan and made presentations of Cambodian culture to Japanese students. They too visited museums and stayed at Japanese students' houses to learn

about Japanese culture. During the programs they communicated with each other in English, which is a foreign language for both of them. After these programs, many of the students said that they had learned a lot from the programs and that it had been a great experience for them. This might show they had learned many things through the programs however, it is not sufficient to accurately judge their learning outcomes. Questionnaires and interviews were conducted to explore how they perceived their experience, encompassing culture, society and language, and individual growth and learning. The results were analyzed and compared with reference to the AAC&U's Intercultural Knowledge & Competence VALUE Rubric.

2. The Participants and Their Responses to the Exchange Program

The participants of the study were nine Japanese university students and seven Cambodian university

students. Seven of the Japanese students were female and two of them were male. All of the Cambodian students were female. Both the Japanese and Cambodian students were around 20 years old and participated in the program during 2019. From the results of the questionnaires and interviews, some of the characteristic responses are introduced here.

Many of the Japanese students showed in their answers they felt some changes in themselves through the programs. One of the Japanese students stated, “Exposure to other cultures has given me a chance to find a new self, to understand their money system, and above all, to learn history. Therefore, I came to want to go to various countries and regions in the future” (Igawa & Tsukamoto, 2020: p.30). Another Japanese student stated “There is a national character that I know by actually visiting and interacting with the locals. I want to visit various countries from now on and see for myself” (Igawa & Tsukamoto, 2020: p.30). Some of the Japanese students stated that they felt their language improvement through the programs. One Japanese student said, “Until now, I was not good at actively talking to people in both Japanese and English, but I realized the joy when I knew that I was understood and that the other person was trying to communicate. Thanks to that, I started to talk in my poor English, and in the latter half of the program, I was able to speak more and more, although I sometimes used Japanese” (Igawa & Tsukamoto, 2020: p.30). This shows that she found herself enjoying communicating with other people and her willingness to communicate improved through the program.

Many of the Cambodian students mentioned their language improvement through the program. One of the Cambodian students stated, “My English proficiency is improving thanks to the exchange program” (Igawa & Tsukamoto, 2020: p.30). To the question what is a good part of this program, another Cambodian student said, “It was my first time giving a presentation and was questioned by foreigners (Igawa & Tsukamoto, 2020: p.30). Some of them mentioned about changes as an individual. One of them stated, “I got inspired a lot. I found

myself useful, so feel encourage that I can do more. If aim for high, so try more” (Igawa & Tsukamoto, 2020: p.30). Another Cambodian student expressed changes in herself and her language improvement through the program saying:

Communication could help me to improve my confident by showing all of my knowledges that I have learnt from school and general knowledge about my country to showed other people. It could improve my evaluating and analyzing the difference between Cambodia and Japan about some points I mentioned above. On the other hand, I learnt how to observe people follow their speech and face. Communication will bring me good cooperation and built network with other citizens (Igawa & Tsukamoto, 2020: p.30).

Another Cambodian student referred to her intercultural understanding and said, “To be honest, I was really happy that I had a good opportunity to be there for two weeks. I have gotten a lot of experiences which help me to see more about the world outside my country” (Igawa & Tsukamoto, 2020: p.30).

Both the Japanese and Cambodian students mentioned they felt their language improved after the program but it might be said that Japanese students focus more on their enjoyment of speaking English or willingness to communicate while Cambodian students focus more on their language improvement itself. It is often said by teachers who teach English inside and outside Japan that Japanese students speak less in class (Igawa & Tsukamoto, 2019). A Japanese student said that she spoke less before the program but she spoke more after she found the joy of speaking. It could be said that her willingness to communicate was improved by her experience in the program. Some research on Cambodian students and English language learning shows that they have a great enthusiasm for learning English as a means for improving their quality of life, gaining better positions, and advancing their salary and social status (Hashim et al., 2014; Chan, 2018).

3. Intercultural Competence in Different Contexts

The current authors found that AAC&U's

Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE Rubric was helpful for assessing Japanese and Cambodian students' intercultural competence, while some aspects of their intercultural competence might not be able to be assessed appropriately by the rubric, which was made for American university students, as they come from different backgrounds. In this small-scale research both Japanese and Cambodian students referred to their language improvement, but Japanese students tended to focus more on their courage to speak out or their willingness to communicate. It may be necessary to adjust the rubric for Japanese and Cambodian students.

Deardorff (2006) states that a tool to assess intercultural competence is context-dependent and the tool should be selected after clarifying the purpose of the assessment. Deardorff (2016) also states that the starting point should be to clarify what specifically is to be assessed. We need to modify the rubric according to the context after clarifying the purpose and items of assessment.

IV. Intercultural Exchange Programs for Fostering Intercultural Competence

1. Need for Intercultural Exchange Programs

There are many reasons for students to join exchange programs. Chapman (2013) lists some of the reasons as personal growth, expanding attitudes and cultural awareness, development of specific skills, and the chance to increase job opportunities. Chapman and Clenton (2016) state that one goal of all international programs is increasing students' communicative competence, a concept functionally synonymous with intercultural competence. They note that improving learners' openness and appreciation of a new culture as well as their ability to accept it are favorable outcomes for such programs. Simply visiting a foreign country is not enough to provide a real impact on learners (Strange & Gibson, 2017). Therefore an appropriately designed intervention, such as an exchange program, that focuses on the mindset of the student can support the development of intercultural competence

(Griffith, et al., 2016).

2. Requirements for Acquiring Intercultural Competence

The design of an exchange program is key to promoting the acquisition of intercultural competence. As Jackson (2011) has noted, it is naive to believe that intercultural competency will develop naturally along with foreign language competency and it is our job as educators to design appropriate programs that will foster global citizens. Deardorff (2011) explains that intercultural learning is transformational learning and requires students to have experiences, often outside the classroom, that lead to this transformation. Programs, such as the exchange between Cambodia and Japan discussed here, are an excellent way to offer students the experiences they need to transform themselves into more interculturally competent individuals. By introducing their own cultures to each other, students become more aware of themselves and their place within a worldwide framework. Visits to local homes and museums expand their knowledge of another culture and allow firsthand interactions that permit them to test and refine their understanding of this new knowledge. Such exposure to non-pedagogical social interactive practices is needed by Japanese students in order to build intercultural skills (Kinginger, 2015).

3. Forms of Intercultural Exchange Programs

The students focused on in this study traveled abroad to participate in a traditional type of exchange program. Unfortunately the number of students able to do so are limited by resources such as time and money. Indeed, in the last several years the global pandemic has also been a limiting factor for traditional types of exchanges. Going forward, local exchange programs, termed "internationalization at home" or IaH, are likely to play an important role in building students' intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2011). Such programs utilize international students, foreign faculty, and visiting scholars to create exchanges with similar opportunities for transformational

growth experiences at the local level. Certainly the students in this study created such opportunities in the communities they visited.

V. Conclusion

In this globalizing world, intercultural competence is one of the competences universities seek to foster within their students. Many universities provide their students with opportunities to join different kinds of international programs, however, how to access the gains these programs offer in terms of intercultural competence has not been sufficiently studied. In order to improve those programs, the outcome should be assessed appropriately.

It is necessary for each educational institute to clarify what knowledge, skills and attitudes are required for their students to foster their intercultural competence, and to develop an original tool to assess it with reference to assessment tools, such as AAC&U's rubric, because such tools are dependent on the individual context.

Foreign language competence is necessary for intercultural competence, although language skills alone are not enough to develop it. Students might be able to improve their intercultural competence through learning a foreign language but it is just a part of intercultural competence. Intercultural competence can also be fostered outside classroom settings. We need to examine how intercultural competence could be fostered both within and outside the curriculum. It is crucial to develop a tool to assess intercultural competence at the same time as developing international programs.

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国際交流プログラムを通じた日本とカンボジアの大学生の 異文化間能力の育成について

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<要 旨>

本稿は、日本とカンボジアの大学生が、グローバル化が進む現代社会で必要不可欠なものとなりつつある異文化間能力を高めることができるように、異文化間能力を評価するためのツールを検討し、効果的な国際交流プログラムについて考察することを目的としている。最初に(1)異文化間能力についての最新の文献を紹介し、(2)異文化間能力の定義について述べる。そして、(3)異文化間能力を測定することについての理論的背景と全米大学協会による「異文化知識と能力ルーブリック」(IKC VALUE Rubric)について述べ、(4)日本とカンボジアの大学生の国際交流プログラムについて紹介しつつ、それらに参加した大学生の異文化間能力についてIKC VALUE Rubricを参照して分析した結果とその限界について述べる。最後に、(5)異文化間能力を高めるための国際交流プログラムについて考察する。

キーワード：異文化間能力、国際交流プログラム、評価、ルーブリック、国際化

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