ACTION RESEARCH ON ASYNCHRONOUS INTER-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION VIDEO EXCHANGES

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Abstract:

Japanese university students studying the sciences often lack opportunities to communicate globally with other students in English. In order to offer opportunities to such students, an asynchronous inter-cultural communication video exchange (ICVE) was included as a classroom activity as a part of the syllabus in the authors' classroom. The aim was to open the way for students to deepen inter-cultural understanding while practicing their English language skills. Students were put into groups, and during the semester each group recorded 4 videos. The videos were exchanged with a university in Finland and a high school in France. At the end of the semester in the first year of the ICVE, a questionnaire was distributed to uncover the students' perspectives about the ICVE. The results showed about 70 % of students felt that 4 videos during one 15-week-semester was too many. Nevertheless, all of the students said they would recommend the ICVE to a friend. The results also indicated the following three points, 1. more time is needed to practice before shooting videos, 2. the students enjoyed themselves, and 3. group members should have been changed for each video recording. From the results the following year's ICVE was planned resulting two main changes: the number of videos being reduced from four to three, and, the members of each group being different for each video recording. At the end of the semester a similar questionnaire was distributed. This research shares the results from the second year of the ICVE and discusses how the ICVE can be conducted concurrent with other activities in the syllabus. Also a comparison of the results of the two years of questionnaires feedback will also be highlighted.

Keywords:

English education, English pedagogy, culture, international universities, Japan

JEL Classification: I23, I29

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Introduction

Many Japanese companies struggle with global business development due to a lack of human resources with English skills. Koike and Terauchi (2010) and Terauchi and Naito (2015) showed that the human resources in Japanese companies fail to understand English as a Lingua Franca due to convey and understand subtle nuances, and they fail to carry out work logically based on genre in the sense of Swales (1990).   English education is crucial in society which is rapidly being globalized in a variety of areas. Responding to rapid globalization is inevitable.

In 2020, English will become a mandatory subject for fifth- and sixth-graders in Japanese elementary schools, instead of a being "foreign language activity" class where children have been expected to only experiment with English through speaking and listening activities.   This shift will double the annual number of English classroom hours to 70 from the current 35, and see reading and writing taught in elementary schools for the first time. This change needs to be conducted in a stepwise fashion with a smooth connection between what students learn in the individual educational stages of elementary, junior high and high schools.   Students will enter university with 8 years of reformed and improved English education.   Universities may need to offer those students more innovative English education in consideration of this background.

English education in universities used to be just repeating contents, which students learned at junior high school or high school.   However, due to the rapidly accelerated globalization and changes in mandatory English education in high school, universities have to offer students the chance to adopt an awareness of global citizenship in addition to further English education.

When Japan was enjoying a booming economy, most of companies in Japan including small-and mid-sized companies could afford in-house English training.   Compared to that time, companies have cut budgets for training, and therefore seek to hire personnel with a competent level of English.   In order to meet this need, universities are responsible to develop global human resources.

Background and the Transition of English Curriculum at HUS

Hokkaido University of Science (HUS) is a private university with 14 departments in five schools, including engineering and medical faculties and a junior college.   Its predecessor, Hokkaido Institute of Technology (HIT), became HUS when it established the Faculty of Health Sciences in 2014. In April 2018, Hokkaido Pharmaceutical University was integrated into HUS to form Hokkaido University of Science.   The Faculty of Engineering comprises of five departments and one graduate school: 1. the Department of Mechanical Engineering, 2. the Department of Information and Computer Science, 3. the Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering, 4. the Department of Architecture and 5. the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, as well as the Graduate School of Engineering.   The Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences consists of the Department of Pharmacy, which offers a six-year program, and the Graduate School of Pharmaceutical Sciences.   The Faculty of Health Sciences is comprised of five departments and one graduate school: 1. the Department of Nursing, 2. the Department of Physical Therapy, 3. the Department of Prosthetics and Orthotics, 4. the Department of Clinical Engineering and 5. the Department of Radiological Technology, as well as the Graduate School of Health Sciences.   The Faculty of Future

Design is composed of the Department of Media Arts and Design and the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences. Hokkaido University of Science Junior College has the Department of Automotive Engineering. In this way, HUS has one of the largest student bodies in Hokkaido with some 5,000 students studying on its campus.

Regarding English curriculum, all departments beside the Department of Pharmacy have the same compulsory English classes, English 1, English 2 and English 3, and some elective English classes. Before 2014, compulsory English classes were unstreamed, and students were divided by departments and students numbers. However, when HIT expanded to HUS and reorganized its faculties and departments, compulsory English classes were streamed and offered as classes to students from more than one departments.

Students majoring sciences are often mistaken and believe that they need to only build their expertise, but not English skills. Once students become seniors, they are usually assigned to particular professor for their graduating studies. At this point, it is necessary to read articles from international journals written in English and understand their research themes. The more they study about their fields, the more English ability is needed. If they aim to be engineers in the future, they need to have certain level of English to understand manuals.

New Era for English Education in HUS

HUS hired one full-time native English teacher for the first time in 2017 to provide students with English only environments, and new classes were opened. Two classes are called International Passport 1 which is offered in the spring semester and International Passport 2 offered in the fall semester. This class is team-taught by the authors, a Japanese English teacher and a native English teacher. International Passport classes are elective classes for students in all years and all departments. The aims of those classes include furthering language skills and understanding of customs, culture and life in other cultures in order to increase an international perspective. Course components of the International Passport 1 are 1. communication activities that simulate life in another country, 2. reading activities to increase vocabulary, reading speed, language skills and understanding of lifestyles in other parts of the world, 3. projects to help local companies meet the needs of tourists and people with low Japanese language skills, and 4. presentations and reports in English. Course components of the International Passport 2 are 1. communication activities, 2. reading activities, 3. an international video exchange to increase cross cultural understanding and communication, and 4. a poster presentation to provide an opportunity to develop team-work, project management, and organization skills through the task of preparing and presenting on their studies.

In 2017, 29 students enrolled in the IP 1 class, and 14 students enrolled in the IP 2. IN 2018, 30 students enrolled in the IP 1 class and 13 students in the IP 2. Those classes are scheduled once a week at the fifth period starting from 16:20 and ending at 17:50. Unfortunately there are some other classes at the same period in the fall semester, which are mandatory for students in some of the departments, therefore, the number of students registered IP 2 was less than the number enrolled in the IP 1.

Inter-Cultural Communication Video Exchange

The students in the IP 2 class in HUS started exchanging videos with Oulu University of

Applied Sciences in Finland and St. Jean de Germain Vedas in France in 2017.   As mentioned above, this approach enables students not only to write and speak English but also to learn about different cultures and to expand their vision.   HUS and Oulu University of Applied sciences used to have a student exchange program.   Each institution sent students to the other university for up to two for three months.   However, the program ended in 2015 due to conditions imposed by the Finnish government, which required students to study abroad from at least one semester to one year, and to get credits in their field of study.   After the end of this exchange between universities, the authors thought about how to give students global experiences.   Since the International Passport 1 and 2 classes were created, the class contents were planned, and then one of the authors suggested an inter-cultural communication video exchange (ICVE) as a part of syllabus.   This idea was proposed to one teacher who teaches Intercultural Competency in Oulu University of Applied Sciences, and a teacher in France at St. Jean de Germain Vedas who was interested in doing a cross-cultural exchange and whom one of the teachers knew.   All parties agreed with the suggestion, and the ICVE was established.

Table 1: Schedule of ICVE

	Send to Japan	Show in Class	Respond in class	Send response from Japan
Video 1: Introductions	25th- 29th Sept	3rd Oct	3rd Oct	4-6th Oct
Video 2: Lifestyle and Weather	by 10th Oct	17th Oct	17th Oct	18th/19th Oct
Video 3: Comparing Culture	by 10th Nov	14th Nov	14th Nov	by 17th Nov
Video 4: Cultural Tradition and Habit	30th Nov	5th Dec	5th Dec	by 8th Dec
	Note No Classes: 21st November - Japan: Mid-term tests 23rd - 30th October - Finland: Half-term 20th Oct - 4th Nov - France: Half-term			

Table 2: Syllabus of International Passport 2 in 2017

Week	Date	Day	In Class	Out of class
1	26/9	Tues	Orientation - course explanation / 1st Video: watch & plan for recording video 1	
2	3/10	〃	1st Video: watch and record (Introductions) & plan for recording video 2	Reading starts!
3	10/10	〃	Guest Speaker	reading week 2
4	17/10	〃	Video 1 write up for presentation / watch video 2 & record 2nd video (Something unfamiliar/new!) / Plan for recording video 3	reading week 3

Week	Date	Day	In Class	Out of class
5	24/10	〃	Communication Activity 1	reading week 4
6	31/10	〃	Video write up for presentation/ Post preparation 1 / Plan for recording video 3	reading week 5
7	7/11	〃	Communication Activity 2	reading week 6
8	14/11	〃	Video write up for presentation / watch video 3 & record 3rd video (Culture comparison) / Plan for recording video 4	reading week 7
	21/11	〃	No class - mid-term tests	
9	28/11	〃	Communication Activity 3	reading week 8
10	5/12	〃	Video write up for presentation / watch video 4 & record 4th video (last video) (cultural presentation/explanation)	reading week 9
11	12/12	〃	Communication Activity 4	reading week 10
12	19/12	〃	Poster Presentation Preparation & Practice	Presentation practice
13	26/12	〃	Poster Presentation Preparation & Practice/ Cultural Comparison - Holidays in different countries.	Presentation practice/ Book report due
14	9/1	〃	Guest Speaker	Presentation practice
15	16/1	〃	Poster Presentations + feedback	

Timing as when to start the exchange, the timing of the second semester in Japan was found to correspond the schedule in France and Finland. Thus the, ICVE was panned in the fall semester in IP 2. The second semester starts in HUS at the end of September and ends at the end of January, while in Europe the autumn semester or term is from mid-September to mid-December with a one-week vacation at the end of October. Taking both of these schedules into consideration, the 2017 timeline (below in Table 1) was agreed to. How the ICVE was embedded in the IP 2 semester flow is shown in Table 2.

Topics of ICVE

As mentioned previously, the aim of the ICVE was to deepen inter-cultural understanding. Based on this, the following topics were chosen.
Video One: Introductions
Video Two: Lifestyle and Weather
Video Three: Comparing Cultures – based on Hofstede's cultural dimension
        Video three was based on reflection activity based on Hofstede's cultural dimension,

e.g. individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance (strength of social hierarchy), and masculinity-femininity (task-orientation versus person-orientation).   The students were asked questions (examples below) to help them analyze their own culture.   Based on the results to their questions, the students chose a theme for their videos and made a video to illustrate the cultural trait as stated in the themes below.

Questions: How much do Japanese like taking risks?
How good, do you think, the Japanese are at planning long-term?
How much do Japanese respect people in authority?
How important are individual opinions in the Japanese culture?
How important is it for Japan to be successful as a nation?
How much is dictated by achievement?

Video Four: Cultural Traditions or Habits

In HUS, students were divided into three groups.   All four videos were made by the three groups.

The themes for each group for Video Two were as follows:
1. The vending machines, which serve both hot and cold items),
2. *Cairo* - a little pad you buy, that when you open it, it reacts with the oxygen in the air and heats up (chemical reaction).
3. *Washlets* - heated toilet seats with various functions (water to clean various parts with temperature and pressure gauges).

The themes for each group for Video Three were:
1. Uncertainty Avoidance & Masculinity/Femininity
2. Restraint and Short-Term Orientations
3. Power-Distance in Japanese Culture

The themes for each group for Video Four were:
1. Japanese festivals
2. Karate
3. Manga and anime

Technological Issues to Be Considered for ICVE

After themes and schedules for the ICVE were finalized, there were some technological facts to be discovered that might help to know:
1. Avoid using video taken on smartphones - They are too heavy.   In addition, when we uploaded them to put on our Moodle site for the students to see, they were turned upside-down. This created all kinds of problems.
2. A simple digital camera with a video function is sufficient and very good.
3. Exchanging the videos through dropbox has proven to be the most efficient way for us to exchange videos.
4. Students need to remember to speak clearly and moderately slowly.   With a difference in L1 sometimes the accent can be hard for other speakers of English to understand, especially if they are not accustomed to the accent.

Gathering Feedback from Students in 2017

At the end of the semester, a questionnaire was conducted with the 13 students registered IP2. The following are questions and answers. (Table 3)

Table 3: Results of Questionnaire in 2017

Question	Answer	Reason
1. What do you think about the number of videos (too many, too few) ?	Too many: 8 Just right: 5	-There was not enough time. -Getting together outside of classroom was difficult because in the class students are from various departments and years. -If we had fewer video shootings, maybe 2 or 3, we would not have the opportunity to learn as much as we did doing four videos.
2. Which video did you enjoy making the most? Why?	Group 1: *Sempai/Kohai*, Hokkaido, Japanese Things (Japanese Festivals)	-This was because of the content, and also the way the video was created. -Powerpoint was used, whereas previously the students had shot themselves talking. -It was fun to do a skit. I could find new things about Japan.
	Group 2: Vending machine, Anime/Manga	-It was fun to shoot the video outside of the classroom and went to visit shops to shoot a video.
	Group 3: *Washlet*, Japanese anime	-It was fun to demonstrate the *washlet*.
3. What other topics would you be interested in making videos on?	Group 1: Japanese customs in various areas, Japanese food, Japanese animals A: Group 2: Japanese food, movie A: Group 3: How to hang out with friends in Japan, nomikai	
4. Would you recommend this to a friend? Why/Why not?	Yes: 13	-It was fun and enjoyable. However, students in some departments (like radiological technology) struggle to spare time for video shooting.
5. How would you improve this activity?	-Time management: arrange more time to practice. Students should enjoy themselves.	

| | -Group: Members should have been shuffled every time we took videos. Wanted to talk to other students ⇒ more variety, more ideas, more stimulation.
-Group: Members should be the same for all video shootings. When discussing and planning for the first video momentum is slow. As time progresses, and each time the group makes a video, group work improves. | |

Suggestions for Improvement and Future Research

Looking back on ICVE in 2017 and reviewing results of the questionnaire, some issues were raised and should be resolved for carrying out ICVE continuously. Therefore, first, ICVE in 2018 was needed to be improved. In order to make ICVE in 2018 better, following suggestions were made.

1. Quantity of videos: Three to four videos were a good number, but should be adjusted the timetabling so as to give the students more time to prepare for each video shooting
2. Video topics: Set the topics for three of the videos, and let the students choose the fourth topic (as a showcase)
3. Types of video: Inspire the students to create videos in or through ways they would like explore (e.g. using powerpoint, *AR, skits, etc) (*HUS is a unique university where students have access to, and learn about cutting edge technology, therefore by creating a platform through which they can use their technological skills in this class, gives the students a way they can express and share what is unique to them and their studies in the university).
4. Teamwork: Teamwork plays a fundamental part of this project for the students. As shown in the data, the students are from all departments, and from all academic years. This means a student may join the class, possibly knowing no other student in the class. This can be quite intimidating. Furthermore, this is a class that requires students to speak in English. In the context of the culture, this can require considerable courage from a student. Therefore, there are already two hindrances to effective teamwork before the project begins.

To reduce hindrances to effective teamwork, the following suggestions are made:
1. Change the flow of the course curriculum.
2. Do more relationship building activities in the class in the first few weeks of the course.
3. Have the students consciously think about how to improve teamwork, what their responsibilities or roles might be, and what action, or initiative, they can take.

ICVE in 2018

Keeping the above results in mind, IP2 in 2018 was planned and carried out.   In that year, HUS and Oulu University of Applied Science in Finland exchanged videos.   Table 4 shows the syllabus for HUS only.

Table 4: Syllabus of International Passport in 2018

Week	Date	Day	In Class	Out of class
1	26/9	Wed	Orientation - course explanation 1st Video: plan for recording video 1 (watch example from last year)	Reading starts!
2	9/10	Tues	video 1: Practice & Record Video 1 reading week 2	reading week 2
3	10/15	Mon	Project 1 - grouping, topic choice, questionnaire	reading week 3
4	10/22	〃	Video 1 reflection / prepare for recording video 2	reading week 4
5	10/29	〃	Project 2 - complete the questionnaire	reading week 5
6	11/5	〃	video 2: Practice & Record Video 2/ Guy Fawkes	reading week 6
7	11/12	〃	Project 3 - data collection (out of class)	OUT OF CLASS
8	11/19	〃	Video 2 Reflection/ prepare for video 3	reading week 7
9	11/26	〃	Guest Speaker	reading week 8
10	12/3	〃	video 3: Practice & Record Video 3	reading week 9
11	12/10	〃	Project 4 - data analysis/ Video project reflection	reading week 10
12	12/17	〃	Project: Poster Presentation Preparation	Presentation practice
13	1/7	〃	Guest Speaker	Presentation practice/ Book report due
14	1/15	〃	Project: Poster Presentation Preparation & Practice	Presentation practice
15	1/21	〃	Project: Poster Presentations + feedback	

Since more than 60 % of students registered IP 2 in 2017 answered 4 videos were too many, the number of videos was reduced to 3.   The topics were as follows:
1. Introduction

2. Japanese Things
3. My Culture

Students were divided into three groups.   They were also regrouped each time they made a video.   Each group had 3 to 4 students.   Table 5 shows titles of Topic 2 for each group, and Table 6 shows titles of Topic 3.

Table 5: Titles of Topic 2

Group 1	Japanese Food talking about Indian Curry in Japan, sushi, ramen
Group 2	Japanese Festivals events in Japan throughout the year
Group 3	Sports and songs in Japan

Table 6: Titles of Topic 3

Group 1	A comparison between the Czech Republic and Japanese cultures
Group 2	Comparison between the Finnish culture and the Japanese culture
Group 3	Personalities of Japanese and Spanish

Both group 1 and 2 talked about food, on the other hand, group 3 talked about personalities of two nationalities.

Gathering Feedback from Students in 2018

In 2018, the same questionnaire in 2017 was given.   Seven students out of 13 answered the questionnaire.   Results are shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Results of Questionnaire in 2018

Question	Answer	Reason
1. What do you think about the number of videos (too many, too few) ?	Too many: 3 Just right: 3 Too few: 1	
2. Should you stay in the same group for all the videos, or change groups each time?	Yes: 7	
3. Which video did you enjoy making the most?	Video 2: 2	-It was fun to introduce our own culture.
	Video 3: 5	-I could find out about other culture. -I could make a better video compared with other two.
4. What other topics would you be interested in making videos on?	Festivals in the world, Poverty issue, Studying English, Life in foreign countries	
5. Would you recommend this to a friend? Why/Why	Yes: 6 Maybe: 1	-It was fun to talk to many students from different

not?		departments and different years. -The class was at the 5th period, so it's kind of late.
6. How would you improve this activity?	It would be better if it can take more time to make each video.	

Conclusion and Discussion

Over all students in both Japan and Finland enjoyed participating in the ICVE. They could get to know other students better through the ICVE. The exchange reaffirmed the importance of knowing their own culture and being able to explain it to people from other cultures. They can also learn about and to understand different cultures, thus broadening their outlooks.

The results of questionnaire conducted in 2017 showed that four videos were too many. In the comments of the 2017 questionnaire, a few students wrote to suggest that members should had been shuffled every time they took videos. Based on those results, contents of IP2 in 2018 was revised. The number of videos recording was reduced from four to three. Regarding grouping, members were changed for each video recording.

Comparing results of questionnaire in two semesters, there are two contradictory opinions about grouping. Students might think it's good to work with same members for all videos, because it's easy to work with same students, it's convenient to get together out of class since they already know each other's class schedule, or it's time consuming to start again with new members. They might also think it's good to change groups for each video, because it's refreshing to work with new members, it's possible to get new and different ideas, or it's just to fun to work with different people. The reason for this contradiction isn't clarified. However, the questionnaire needs to be conducted every year to find out students' thoughts and needs.

Regarding the number of videos to make, quite a few students still think three videos in a semester is too many. As seen in syllabus, there are reading activities and a project of poster presentation based on interview survey in addition to the ICVE. They seemed to feel too much work with only one-90-minute class hour a week for 15 weeks. As the authors felt, overall course content needs to be reviewed and balanced. Therefore, the authors decided to create a syllabus to redistribute course content. In the IP 2, the ICVE and the poster presentation project are two large portions of this course. Besides those two, students are responsible to do reading and communication activities. The authors decided to carry those two separately; the poster presentation project in the IP 1 in the spring semester, the ICVE in the IP 2 in the fall semester. Students will be monitored what they think about a new course content. The questionnaire will also be conducted every year in order to unearth students' thoughts, opinions, and preferences which will enable us to improve the course year-by-year.

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