The Effectiveness of a Letter Exchange Program Between the U.S. and Japan: Fostering Students' Global Mind and Integrative Motivation in Junior High School

アメリカ合衆国と日本における英文手紙プログラムの効果

—中学生のグローバルマインドと統合的学習動機の育成に焦点を当てて—

Keywords: cross-cultural understanding, global mind, integrative motivation,

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1. Introduction

To participate in the international community, English skills are a valuable asset. In a Benesse questionnaire (2009), 71.1 percent of the students indicated, “Japanese people will need to speak English by the time they grow up.” 64.7 percent agreed, “I would like to go abroad.” However, in the same survey 61.8 percent agreed, “I am poor at English”, while another 35 percent indicated “It will not be a problem in the future if I cannot speak English.”

Compared to other non-English speaking countries like the Philippines or India, people in Japan don't have many chances to use English. However it is an English teacher's duty to provide students with a lot of opportunities to attain a global viewpoint, while providing a practical English education. Based on my study, it was verified by the questionnaire of the students of Japan and the USA, what kind of influences were found through the exchanging of letters in English.

2. Rationale

After reviewing the literature, the author found the following key points to be a useful guide in planning and preparing the research project: (1) raise students' global mind through an education focused on international understanding, (2) foster motivation for English learning, (3) create Globally Networked Learning Environments (GNLEs), and (4) improve English writing skills.

2.1 Fostering Global Mind Through International Understanding

Tada (1997) defines that a global mind is “the awareness as an earth·citizen”. He believes that education for international understanding is effective for the acquiring of knowledge as a global citizen. It is unfeasible to measure to what extent students can broaden their cross-cultural perspectives, however, Suzuki et al. (2000) proposes an “international understanding measurement scale” based on the objectives of the 1982 National Federation of UNESCO Associations in Japan. In this research, we consider that these objectives including human rights, cultural diversity, international solidarity and foreign languages are applicable to the English education in Japanese junior high schools. The main statements of the scales are shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Concrete aims</th>
<th>Reflection items</th>
<th>Opposite items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Human rights</td>
<td>Raising understanding</td>
<td>Want to be friends with people of other</td>
<td>Resistant attitude towards getting along with people of other ethnicities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>for other</td>
<td>ethnicities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 International Understanding Measurement Scale
2.2 Motivation for English Learning

The points in Suzuki's International Understanding Measurement Scale correspond with this research in which fostering students' motivation to learn will result in integrative motivation. That is the reason why the objectives are aiming students to become more integrated into society. Gardner (1983) distinguishes between two main types of motivation namely, integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. Gardner (1983: 203) defines integrative motivation as "learning a language because the learner wishes to identify himself with or become integrated into the society". On the other hand, he defines instrumental motivation as "learning a language because of someone or less clearly perceived utility it might have for the learner". Tahaineh&Daana (2013) argue, "With instrumental motivation the purpose of language acquisition is utilitarian, such as meeting the requirements for school or university graduation, or when applying for a job".

As stated by Tahaineh&Daana, students may keep producing serious efforts to study English in order to pass entrance exams. However, would they stay motivated even after the exams? Instrumental motivation cannot answer this question. The researcher recognizes the importance of developing students' integrative motivation as students will become more interested in English speaking people and develop a desire to communicate with them.

2.3 Learning Globally Networked Learning Environments (GNLEs)

Starked-Meyerring&Wilson(2008) point out that Globally Networked Learning Environments (GNLEs) are becoming more important these days. Similarly, the use of internet in schools is also essential in this Information Age. Starked-Meyerring&Wilson claimed that students can "learn
about language barriers, cultural and religious differences, and the importance of community” through learning English in the classrooms. They also state that students can get past local cultural boundaries and begin to think from a global standpoint. However, GNLEs do not only mean utilizing Information and Communication Technology (ICT) such as social networking service (SNS), but also developing and maintaining a close relationship with each other across the world. In this sense, it is expected that exchanging letters with pen pals overseas is also invaluable for creating and nurturing a close network between two parties. In addition, a remarkable point of exchanging letters is that students can keep the letters and refer back to them whenever they want. Therefore, we can use exchanging letters as a cultural exchange in which students are able to focus on writing English.

2.4 Improving English Writing

In letters and emails, students can write, in English, about their daily lives, what they are doing and how they are feeling. It is also possible to foster and improve students’ voluntary writing. In addition, peer response is significant for developing English writing skills. Peer response is defined as “an activity method that completes original composition while reading between friends, where learners can make their compositions better, by performing an exchange of opinions and reporting” (Ikeda, 2004). Furthermore, through peer response, students can deepen their knowledge of self-expressive skills.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (2008) states, “Students should be able to write what they feel or think using English.” The objective is for students to develop the ability to write about things or events that they experience in everyday life.

3. Purpose of This Study

The purpose of this study is as follows: (1) To examine how the exchanging of letters between the U.S. and Japanese students influences their cross-cultural understanding. (2) To examine how Japanese students' integrative motivation and their attitude toward English learning can be improved through the exchanging of letters.

4. Participants

The participants of this investigation consist of 61 junior high school students in Japan and 62 elementary and junior high school students in the U.S. They have exchanged English letters four times in two years. Each student has a pen-pal in the project. Pre and post questionnaires were conducted.

5. Method

The following is a summary of the methodology used for the letter exchange program. First, the students exchanged letters in the project. Then the author travelled to America, where she observed the students and participated in classroom events. The results were documented in the author's journal. Second, in order to examine how the students’ cross-cultural understanding changed, we conducted questionnaires to Japanese students using a four point Likert scale: 4. strongly agree, 3. agree, 2. disagree, 1. strongly disagree, (pre and post) (Comparison I, figure 2). Third, in the U.S. only a post- investigation questionnaire was used when the author visited (Comparison II). Finally, descriptive questions were included in both countries' questionnaires and analyzed qualitatively with the KJ Method (Kawakita, 1970) (Comparison III). The design of the study is shown in Figure 1.
Comparison I   Japanese pre-post (a four point Likert scale) Shown in Figure 2.
Comparison II  Japan-U.S. post (a four point Likert scale) Shown in Figure 2.
Comparison III  Japan-U.S. post (descriptive) Shown in Figure 3.

![Figure 1. Design of This Study](image)

**Note:** J = Japan, A = America, T = teacher, St = students

**Figure 2. Quantitative Analysis**

**Quantitative analyses**
- J-St1..St61
- A-St1..St61

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparison</th>
<th>J-St1..St61</th>
<th>A-St1..St61</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Descriptive</td>
<td>KJ</td>
<td>KJ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 3. Qualitative Analysis**

6. **Lesson Procedures**

6.1 **Lesson Procedures in Japan**

The lesson procedures over 2 years are planned to deepen students' cross-cultural understanding. Students learn about America and Kansas, and write English letters with their pen pals (See Table 2).

**Table 2  Lesson procedures in Japan**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Stu·JP (Age14)</th>
<th>Stu·US (Age9-14)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase1</td>
<td>T: Presentation to introduce the state of Kansas in the U.S. S: Write first letters of introduction.</td>
<td>Pre-questionnaire N=61</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase2</td>
<td>T: Presentation to introduce the school in Kansas and pen-pals. Presentation to introduce the school in Kansas and pen pals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase3</td>
<td>S: Collaboration with Home Economics class to cook a meal using a recipe written in English S: Make a school video letter. S: Write second letters.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Chubu English Language Education Society

6.2 International Exchange in the U.S.

Four activities were used by the researcher to help the students understand international exchange: (1) Class lessons, (2) Presentation, (3) Post questionnaire, (4) Observation of the students and participation in class.

(1) Introduced Japanese culture, and school life to each class. Students were interested that Japanese students cleaning their classrooms and bringing “bento” every day. They enjoyed hearing that McDonalds and Pizza Hut are also popular in Japan.

(2) Showed a video letter of the Japanese students, calligraphy, judo and dressed in kimonos at a school assembly. Students got the chance to try these out and felt a part of Japanese culture.

(3) Post questionnaire in each class.

(4) The researcher participated with the American students in their phonics, music, and P.E. classes.

7. Qualitative/quantitative Data Analyses

7.1 Quantitative Analysis

Table 3, figure 4 below show the responses from Japanese students’ pre and post questionnaires. This data is analyzed with the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test. From the data, Q2 in post questions (Am interested in getting in touch with a different culture) (z=3.92, p<.01**), Q4 would like to write in English (z=4.27, p<.01**), Q5 in post questions (Would like to answer in English) (z=4.20, p<.01**) are significantly different. It is clear that students in Japan would like to write and speak in English more. They are also interested in getting in touch with a different culture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q</th>
<th>Questions (pre)</th>
<th>Questions (post)</th>
<th>pre</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>post</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>z value</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Would like to go to Kansas</td>
<td>Would like to experience American lifestyle</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>p&lt;.05*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Am interested in the culture of Kansas</td>
<td>Am interested in getting in touch with a different culture</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>p&lt;.01**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Interested in English lessons</td>
<td>Enjoy English lessons</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>p&gt;.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Would like to write in English</td>
<td>Would like to write in English</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>p&lt;.01**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Would like to answer in English</td>
<td>Would like to answer in English</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>p&lt;.01**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 below shows the responses from students' in both countries. It is identified that both Japanese and American students clearly had a positive influence through the exchanging of letters. This data is analyzed with the Mann-Whitney U Test.

### Table 4  Comparison II Japan-U.S. post

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q</th>
<th>questions(JPN)</th>
<th>questions(U.S.A.)</th>
<th>JP</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>U.S.</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>z value</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Would like to experience American lifestyle.</td>
<td>Would like to experience Japanese lifestyle.</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>p&gt;.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Am interested in getting in touch with a different culture.</td>
<td>Am interested in getting in touch with a different culture.</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>p&gt;.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 7.2 Qualitative Analysis

We included the descriptive questions in the post questionnaires and compared Japanese and American students' opinions after having exchanged letters four times (See figure 5).

Q. What do you think about the U.S.A./Japan now after exchanging letters?

[Diagram showing qualitative analysis with categories A, B, and C: A - Haven't changed (play same games, make spelling mistakes, same as Japan), B - People (kind, fun, open-hearted, cheerful, friendly, cute), C - School life (long summer vacation, different events, school start, end, number of grades, enjoy sports, eat a lot, have guns).]
From the figure 5, both sides felt that the country of their pen-pal is wonderful, has nice people and might not be so bad to live in. Students in Japan are happy to know American students like the same games and characters. They also feel relieved that native speakers of English also make spelling mistakes in English. They enjoy exchanging English letters. For the students in the U.S., it's fun to exchange nice accessories. They enjoy talking about TV stars in letters. They got to know that Japan has nice people, places and new technology. One negative answer of a Japanese student was that Americans have guns. He read a letter that his pen-pal wrote about hunting with his father. Such differences in culture and lifestyle may surprise students. For American students, Japanese students seem to have fewer choices than Americans. Life seemed restrictive for them.

Some of the descriptive answers are concerned with the purpose of the research which is to foster students' global mind and Integrative Motivation. From the viewpoint of the global mind, both groups of students wrote "I would like to visit my pen-pals' countries." From the view point of Integrative Motivation, students feel their English skills improved, and some students answered, "it became easier to use English words and sentences" (See figure 6).

Figure 5 Comparison III Japan-U.S. post (descriptive)

- Cross-cultural understanding
  - Japan
    - Improve English skills
      - glad to communicate
    - became easier to read letters
  - USA
    - acquired confidence in English
    - became easier to use English words and sentences

- Integrative Motivation
  - Admire, Interest
    - want to go to the USA
    - seems fun to go there
  - Admire, Interest
    - want to go to Japan
    - want to meet penpals

Figure 6 Diagram of Students' Integrative Motivation & Cross-cultural Understanding
8. Results and Discussion

To summarize, with regards to purpose (1) to examine how the exchanging of letters influences students’ cross-cultural understanding, it is obvious that three changes are noteworthy: Students feel that their pen-pals’ countries are nicer than they previously thought, both sides of students want to go to their pen-pal’s countries, and their negative preconceptions were reduced.

Concerning purpose (2) to examine how the students’ integrative motivation and their attitude towards English learning improved through exchanging letters, it can be said that two changes are noteworthy: Students in Japan would like to write and speak in English more, and students in Japan got more confidence in using English.

The students became interested in foreign cultures and desired to know more. Students did not know about their pen-pal’s country before the project, however, they started to develop positive impressions. It means their cross-cultural understanding have matured through the exchanging of letters, and their negative preconceptions have been reduced.

This change gave good influences on Japanese students’ Integrative Motivation for English study. Their learning awareness towards studying English was improved. Previously they did not have confidence in English writing and speaking. However, they think it became easier to write in English than before and they would like to study harder in order to visit America someday.

It is made clear through the study that students not only got to know the pen-pals’ culture, which led to develop their global mind, but also their own culture through writing letters. In addition to this fact, this project is effective for both groups of students. Japan and the U.S.A. are very far apart, but they can be connected with global networked learning environments. It is important to continue developing new teaching material to support and improve future cultural exchange programs. The author believes this project must continue so that more students can learn different cultures, broaden their global mind, and experience international friendship.

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