Japanese and International Student Interaction in Group Based Classroom Activities

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Abstract

The birthrate in Japan is in decline, yet, in spite of this, the number of universities and technical colleges has continued to increase. To maintain current enrollment levels, Japanese universities have been looking to encourage students from other countries to undertake full degree programs in Japan, in English. However, little research has been conducted in relation to how Japanese students and international students interact when taking the same classes. This report will highlight the findings of a research project in which Japanese and international students were surveyed on their classroom interactions, including their perceptions of group dynamics and leadership roles. In addition, participants watched videos of their own and their classmates' course related presentations and provided feedback on these performances. The report will at first outline how international students took a leadership role in almost all of the presentation groups and why they did so. The report will then demonstrate the unique differences between Japanese and international students in relation to giving feedback to their own and their classmates presentations via the use of video recordings, using the university course management system forum page. Results of this research suggested that Japanese students were more likely than international students to give only positive feedback about their classmates' presentations, but also accounted for a greater percentage of the negative comments made regarding their own presentations.

Keywords: study abroad, video feedback, Japan, presentations

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Introduction

The birthrate in Japan is in a continual state of decline (Japan Times, 2019) with current predictions estimating that the population will fall from 127.09 million in 2015 to 88.08 million in 2053 (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, 2016). In addition, the aging population of Japan means that number of university aged young adults will fall. To further add to this issue, the number of universities and higher education institutions continue to increase with over 4000 in total in 2013 (Niad-UE, 2014) meaning an oversupply of institutions in a decreasing market. To counter this issue some institutions are beginning to look abroad to increase their enrollments, and increasingly offering courses in English. Adding international students may seem like an easy solution, however, many issues such as the cultural differences between studying in the international student's home country and in Japan have not been addressed. This study followed the interactions of 34 Japanese and international students in relation to how they viewed participating in a mixed group presentation. This survey was divided into three areas, brainstorming and planning, presenting, and feedback, and aimed to get an understanding of the unique differences between how international students and domestic students think and conduct themselves in these areas. The results of this research demonstrated that international students entering university have more experience in giving presentations. In addition to this, they are more frequently designated as the leader of group presentations, they have less problems when giving presentations even when their native language is not English, and that they give more detailed feedback on presentations in both a positive and negative manner.

Literature Review

Japanese students. Students in Japan and many other parts of Asia have a reputation for being silent, and passive learners in the classroom (Cheng, 2000). The cause of this passiveness is often traced back to cultural attributes, which could have a negative impact when required to make and deliver presentations with international students. Japanese students, when studying in Western countries have been found to lack confidence and to be fearful of negative evaluations from peers and teachers a like (Ohata 2005). Although the current study is based in Japan, the fact that the classroom is mixed between international and Japanese students may mean that these issues could become prevalent in the classroom. Further to this, Banks (2016) found that Japanese students were fearful to show their English level to the teacher and would therefore remain quiet rather than try to communicate. This was due to the fact that the teacher was a native speaker, thus the same pattern may occur with other English-speaking students.

Feedback. Peer review is the process in which students give formative feedback on the work of other students. This is an alternative to teacher-based feedback and draws from the work of Vygotsky's (1978) social-constructive learning theory. In Japan, peer review has been used in many different contexts, however, a constant theme is the reluctance of Japanese students to give constructive criticism and to give authority to the feedback received from their peers (Morgan, Fuisting, and White, 2014). Using videos to give feedback on oral presentations has been used as far back as the early 1990s (Quigley & Nyquist 1992) as an alternative way for feedback to come not only from other students, but self-assessment. Self assessment is theorized that the student

will be able to be more critical and be open to learn from it. In addition, if peers provide the same or similar feedback, then this may give some authority to them as well.

Methodology

This study was conducted in a lecture class involving students from several faculties within a private university in Western Japan. Of the 43 students in the class, 20 would be classified as international or as a Japanese returnee. Returnee meaning that the students is a Japanese citizen, however they have spent a significant proportion of time receiving their education outside of Japan. A 36-statement survey was developed by the researcher, checked and edited by a senior researcher, and translated into Japanese for the purpose of this study. For the presentation, the students were required to make a Japanese/international student pairing to prepare and present a three-minute oral presentation on one of the lecture topics. The presentations were recorded by the instructor and posted on the learning management system (LMS) used by the university via unlisted YouTube videos. The students were requested to watch their own presentation and those of other groups and give written feedback via the LMS forum section of their class page. The survey was put into a Google Form and administered to the students in either Japanese or English after the conclusion of their mid semester group presentation. Students were instructed that participation in the survey was a voluntary activity and would have no bearing on their grade. Students were also advised that no identifying information would be collected beyond their nationality. Of the 43 students in the class, 34 students, 18 Japanese nationals and 16 international students, fully completed the survey. The results of the survey were analyzed using descriptive statistics in Microsoft Excel. In addition to the quantitative survey data, qualitative data was collected via open-ended questions in the survey.

Results and Discussion

The results of this research are divided into three sections: brainstorming and planning, presenting, and reviewing.

Demographics. Of the 34 students who took part in the survey 18 were Japanese nationals, four Chinese, four Indonesian, one Canadian, one Dutch, one Thai, one Korean, one Namibian, one Nepalese, and one Sir Lankan. Of the Japanese participants, 14 were male and four female, while nine of the international students were male and seven were female.

Brainstorming and Planning. As can be seen in table one, the majority of the leaders of the groups were international. The researcher hypothesizes from observations of the class during in-class discussion activities and general participation over the semester that the international students in general were more extroverted. Due to this, the international students quickly established themselves as more willing to undertake a leadership role within the group.

Table 1

Was the leader of your group a Japanese student or an international student?	
Japanese	11
International	23

In table two there is an interesting observation between the experiences of the domestic and international students. Almost all of the Japanese students (16) had experience giving individual class-fronted presentations, however, less than half (6) had experience with group class-fronted presentations. All but one of the international students (17) had experience with individual presentations and all (18) had group presentation experience. This gave further evidence as to why the international student in the group took more of a leadership role.

Table 2

	JPN		INT	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
I have made an individual class-fronted presentation in English before	16	2	17	1
I have made a group class-fronted presentation in English before	6	10	18	0

Table three contains 13 statements related to the planning and brainstorming stage of developing a presentation based on a five-point Likert scale from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5). Statements one to six focus on the difficulty of developing individual or group presentations in either English or Japanese. The goal of these six questions was to get a better understanding of where, if any, the difference between the international and Japanese students were. The results of these questions show that were differences in each of the nine statements between the groups, and that in some cases the differences were significant. For example, statement three *It is difficult to plan and develop an individual class-fronted presentation in English* and statement four *It is difficult to plan and develop a group class-fronted presentation in English,* saw a significant difference between the two groups in both statements. In both statements the international students slightly disagreed with the statement ($m = 3.54$ and $m = 3.4$) more than there were neutral about it. Whereas the Japanese students agreed more than they were neutral ($m = 2.22$ and $m = 2$). Furthermore, we can see that the Japanese students believed making an individual presentation was slightly more difficult than making a group presentation. The result for the international students indicated that they did not have difficulty with either method of presentation, with a marginal favoritism towards individual presentations. The fact that both the international and Japanese students found making an individual presentation less difficult than a group presentation suggests that working in a group is perceived as more difficult by both groups regardless of who the group members are. Reasons for this were not investigated in this survey. However, the researcher theorized that these difficulties could have included having to make a presentation with individuals who do not know each other, differences in work ethic outside of the classroom, the fact that they may have different preparation standards, and possibly social interaction insecurities.

Statements six to nine enquired about the stress of making an individual and group presentation in English and Japanese. As can be seen in the table, the majority of the statements saw both Japanese and international participants indicate between being neutral and disagreeing. The exception to this was the statement *It is stressful to plan and develop a group class-fronted presentation in Japanese* in which both the Japanese ($m = 2.89$) were on the agree side of neutral and the international students ($m = 1.83$) indicated between agree to strongly agree. This result could be expected from the international students, as many of them have limited Japanese ability. However, for the Japanese students the result suggests the stress lies not as a language issue, but with the need to communicate with other students to plan and develop a presentation.

Statements ten to thirteen asked specifically about the difficulty and stress experienced when brainstorming and preparing a presentation with students of different nationalities. In these statements the answers for both the Japanese and international students were mainly neutral. However, statement thirteen *The international student in my group made most of the slides in my group* identified a difference in which the Japanese students ($m = 3.39$) were between neutral to disagree, and the international students ($m = 2.87$) were between neutral to agree. This suggests that the Japanese participants believed the division of labor to make the slide for the presentation was either equal or they were doing slightly more than their international partner, where the international students believed they did slightly more than their Japanese partner. The presentation itself required an even division of slides between the two participants, thus the difference may come down to such factors as who put the presentation together, the design, and who the leader was.

Table 3

	JPN				INT			
	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Mean	Median	Mode	SD
1. It is difficult to plan and develop an individual class-fronted presentation in Japanese	2.78	2.5	4	1.26	2.4	3	3	1.06
2. It is difficult to plan and develop a group class-fronted presentation in Japanese	2.5	2	2	1.2	2.6	2	2	1.2
3. It is difficult to plan and develop an individual class-fronted presentation in English	2.22	2	2	1.22	3.53	4	4	1.06
4. It is difficult to plan and develop a group class-fronted presentation in English	2	2	2	1.03	3.4	3	3	1.12
5. It is difficult to plan and develop a class-fronted presentation with students from other nationalities in Japanese	2	2	2	1.14	2.8	3	2	1.21
6. It is stressful to plan and develop an individual class-fronted presentation in Japanese.	3.39	4	4	1.29	2.67	3	2	0.9
7. It is stressful to plan and develop an individual class-fronted presentation in English	3.22	4	4	1.26	3.47	3	3	0.92
8. It is stressful to plan and develop a group class-fronted presentation in English	3.11	3	4	1.28	3	3	2	1.2
9. It is stressful to plan and develop a group class-fronted presentation in Japanese	2.89	3	4	1.23	2.27	3	3	0.88
10. It is stressful to plan and develop a class-fronted presentation with students from other nationalities in English	2.94	3	4	1.16	2.73	3	2	1.16
11. It is stressful to plan and develop a class-fronted presentation with students from other	3.17	3	4	1.1	2.33	2	3	0.71

nationalities in Japanese							
12. The international student in my group was responsible for most of the ideas in my group	3	3	4	1.19	2.87	3	3	0.86
13. The international student in my group made most of the slides in my group	3.39	3.5	4	1.14	2.87	3	3	1.25

Presenting. Table four shows 12 statement that refer to presenting. In this section, the greatest number of differences between Japanese and international students can be observed. Statement one to six enquired about the difficulty of presenting a class-fronted presentation in English and Japanese, individually or as part of a group. As can be seen in the table, in all six statements the Japanese participants were between neutral and agreeing. This suggests that the Japanese participants found slight difficulties in giving presentations regardless of the format of the presentation. In contrast, the international participants produced a variety of responses. For individual presentations in English, the participants were between neutral to disagreeing (3.4), however for both individual ($m = 2.47$) and group presentations ($m = 2.33$) in Japanese the international students were between neutral and agreeing with the statement. As previously stated, such results are not surprising given the variety of Japanese proficiency within the international student cohort.

Statements seven to twelve related to stress when presenting a class-fronted presentation in English and Japanese, individually or as part of a group. Here again we can see some differences between the perceived stress level of the Japanese and international students. When the statement referred to presenting in English the Japanese participants ($m = 2.83$ and $m = 2.89$) were between neutral and agreeing with the statement while the international students ($m = 3.13$ and $m = 3.2$) were between neutral to disagreeing. In contrast, when the statement referred to presenting in Japanese the international participants ($m = 2.53$ and $m = 2.27$) were between neutral to agree and the Japanese students ($m = 3.28$ and $m = 3.22$) were between neutral to disagreeing. This again demonstrates a simple division between the two based on language spoken.

Table 4

	JPN Mean	Median	Mode	SD	INT Mean	Median	Mode	SD
1. It is difficult to present an individual class-fronted presentation in English.	2.67	2	2	1.2	3.4	3	3	0.91
2. It is difficult to present an individual class-fronted presentation in Japanese.	2.78	2	2	1.4	2.47	3	3	0.84
3. It is difficult to present a group class-fronted presentation in English.	2.44	2	2	1	3.07	3	32	1.16
4. It is difficult to present a group class-fronted presentation in Japanese	2.83	3	2	1.2	2.33	2	3	0.9
5. It is difficult to present a group class-fronted presentation in English with students from other countries	2.39	2	3	1.1	3.13	3	3	0.92
6. It is difficult to present a group class-fronted presentation in Japanese with students from other countries.	2.5	2	2	1.2	2.47	3	3	0.99
7. It is stressful to present an individual class-fronted presentation in English	2.83	2.5	2	1.3	3.27	3	3	1.03
8. It is stressful to present an individual class-fronted presentation in Japanese	3.28	3.5	4	1.2	2.53	2	2	0.99
9. It is stressful to present a group class-fronted presentation in English.	2.89	3	4	1.2	3.13	3	2	1.06
10. It is stressful to present a group class-fronted presentation in Japanese	3.22	3	4	1.2	2.27	2	2	0.8
11. It is stressful to present a group class-fronted presentation in	2.72	2.5	4	1.3	3.2	3	2	1.15

English with students from other countries.								
12. It is stressful to present a group class-fronted presentation in Japanese with students from other countries.	2.83	3	4	1.3	2.2	2	2	0.86

Feedback. Table five presents the results of the feedback section of the survey. This section shows that there is little difference Japanese and international student perception of feedback. This suggests that once the language aspect of conducting a presentation between Japanese and international students is removed that students have a similar way of thinking. In relation to feedback, it is clear that the process of students re-watching their presentation again via YouTube was a worthwhile experience for both the international and Japanese students. For example, for the statements *I noticed many presentation issues by watching my presentation again on my device* and *By watching my presentation again on my device my future presentation performances will improve* both the Japanese ($m = 1.83$ and $m = 2.11$) and international students ($m = 2.13$ and $m = 2.07$) were in agreement that this was a beneficial activity. In addition, both groups were between neutral to disagree when asked if they *enjoyed watching my presentation on YouTube.* These results suggest that by the instructor recording the presentations of students and publishing to enable them to review and give feedback, that there is a benefit for students' future presentations.

Table 5

	JPN Mean	Median	Mode	SD	INT Mean	Median	Mode	SD
1. A class-fronted PowerPoint presentation in English can help me improve my English communication skills.	2	2	2	0.69	2.13	2	2	1.06
2. I noticed many presentation issues by watching my presentation again on my device.	1.83	2	2	0.79	2.13	2	2	0.99
3. By watching my presentation again on my device my future presentation performances will improve	2.11	2	2	0.68	2.07	2	2	0.96
4. I enjoyed watching my presentation on YouTube.	3.28	3	4	0.96	3.13	3	3	0.99
5. I was nervous to let my group members watch my presentation video.	3.33	3	3	1.08	2.87	3	2	1.3

6. It was helpful to watch and to have my group members watch my presentation video.	2.44	2.5	3	0.62	2.73	3	3	0.8
7. My group members gave me helpful oral feedback after watching the presentation video	3.06	3	3	0.78	2.93	3	2	1.1
8. My group members gave me helpful written feedback on Manaba+R after watching the presentation video.	2.72	3	3	0.75	2.93	3	2	1.1
9. Other class members not in my group gave me helpful oral feedback after watching my groups presentation video.	3.28	3	3	1.02	3.07	3	3	0.96
10. Other class members gave me helpful written feedback on Manaba+R after watching my groups presentation video	3.44	3	3	0.92	3.27	3	3	1.03
11. I was comfortable with the teacher posting my presentation video on Manaba+R	2.28	2	3	0.89	2.87	3	4	1.06
12. I was comfortable with the teacher posting my presentation video on YouTube	2.33	2	2	0.69	2.93	3	3	0.88

Tables six and seven illustrate how Japanese and international students complete the statements: *The advantages of using video recordings for feedback in a presentation are*, and *The disadvantages of using video recordings for feedback in a presentation are*. Both the Japanese and international students generally completed these statements in a positive way when talking about the advantages for their own presentations. The most beneficial aspect to this video review for Japanese students was being able to discover their own mistakes through repeated viewings. However, there was no mention of the advantages of having other class members watch and give feedback to their presentation. This could suggest that the students did not receive adequate feedback from other group members, or that they do not take into consideration the feedback received from class members. A deeper understanding of this lies in the responses to the disadvantages statement. Here, several students' responses related to being embarrassed, and not wanting others to watch their presentation online.

Table 6

Japanese

The advantages of using video recordings for feedback in a presentation are …	The disadvantages of using video recordings for feedback in a presentation are …
I can review it again	Nothing
I can see my good and bad things	I was embarrassed
I can see it many times later	It was nervousness.
You actually see what happens	Awkward
Easy to understand	There may be privacy issues
I can check it again later	I was embarrassed
I could see my presentation objectively	Some people find it embarrassing to watch their videos
I can see feedback	I'm worried about my personal information
	It is uncomfortable to watch my own bad presentation.
We can see it many times.	Many people can see the video even though some people do not want anyone to see it
Can find the things that I should improve while presenting	
We can notice both good points and bad points by ourselves	My presentation was worse and more embarrassing than I thought.
You can find exactly where you need to correct your presentation	I cannot prevent my presentation from being watched by other people
I can see my presentation objectively	
I can see my presentation later	
I can find problems of my own presentation	
That enables me to see my presentation objectively	

The international students answered in a similar way to the Japanese students in relation to the advantages. The majority of the responses referred to being able to improve their presentation skills though watching their presentations again. Like the Japanese students, the international students also did not mention any advantages of peers being able to give feedback on presentations. In relation to the disadvantages there were some similar responses regarding being shy and embarrassed with other students watching their presentations. In addition to this, the international students demonstrated more concerns about privacy of their videos. This could indicate that international students have more knowledge of privacy issues than Japanese students or a greater willingness to challenge something within the class that they do not like. It also gives the researcher something to consider when conducting similar feedback activities in the future.

Table 7

International

The advantages of using video recordings for feedback in a presentation are …	The disadvantages of using video recordings for feedback in a presentation are …
We are able to find the points to improve	As long as the video is public, some people might find it and make fun of it
We can grow up	It must be shyly
Nothing	Nothing
Can see any timeline	No
I can know my bad points after watching videos.	I am shy to watch own face.
Able to self-reflect	Embarrassing and hard to watch
Can watch our mistakes	I don't know
Realizing my mistake when doing presentation	Nothing in my opinion
I can know how I perform	It is awkward to watch my own presentation.
To improve	Hmmm not sure
That the student could tell for themselves why they got the marks they got	In can be distrusting to the class
We can watch our presentation later and learn from mistakes	I don't think there are any
You can watch it later and improve what you missed during the presentation	Some students don't feel comfortable with it
It's helpful in a way since people can go back to look at their performances and look for points to improve	Some people might get nervous when it comes to video taking
You can improve your presentation skills	Some may feel nervous

Conclusion

With the inclusion of more international students in Japanese higher education there is a need to understand how Japanese and international students interact together. This research has shown that when doing presentations there are some differences between the two groups. The results of this research suggest that the differences could be related to the educational upbringing of the students. As expected, the international students are more comfortable doing presentations in English, whereas the Japanese students are more comfortable in Japanese. The Japanese group, possibly with less exposure to other nationalities, find it more stressful and difficult to do a group presentation with someone from a different country than an international student does, which is something that may change as more international students enter the Japanese education sector. For giving feedback, both groups can see the benefits of recording the presentations to watch them again. In addition, the Japanese students are more concerned with showing their presentation to others than the international students. Whereas the international students are more concerned about privacy issues. It is clear that teachers need to invest time in creating meaningful ways Japanese students and

international students can engage within the class to reduce the stress and difficulty experienced and to make interactions between the norm in Japanese institutions.

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