

Internationalization & the Impact of International Students in the Japanese Classroom

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Abstract

One of the immediate measures adopted by the Japanese government in response to the needs of internationalization was to increase the number of incoming foreign students to Japan (Ikeguchi, 2016). As a result, the number of foreign students as of May 1, 2017 was reported at 267,042, according to the Annual Survey of International Students in Japan conducted by JASSO. This showed an increase of (11.6%) 27,755 students more compared to that of the previous year. Research on the internationalization of Japanese higher education (Lie, 2001; Yoshizawa, 2009) has reminded us that the presence of international students alone does not mean that the institution or students are reaping the benefits of internationalization. This study assumes that the presence of non-Japanese learners have far-reaching benefits (as well as issues) that both teachers and administration have usually overlooked. The purpose of this paper is to discuss intercultural learning as a consequence of internationalization of higher education in Japan. It shows how the presence of foreign students can be utilized to promote intercultural learning in the classroom. At the same time, it discusses three fundamental considerations and related concepts such as peer learning, cooperative learning and active learning.

Keywords: internationalization, active learning, cooperative learning

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Introduction

One of the immediate measures adopted by the Japanese government in response to the needs of internationalization was to increase the number of incoming foreign students to Japan (Ikeguchi, 2016). As a result, the number of international students as of May 1, 2017 was reported at 267,042, according to the Annual Survey of International Students in Japan conducted by JASSO. This showed an increase of (11.6%) 27,755 students more compared to that of the previous year. As to classification, a total of 188,384 students (an increase of 17,262 %) were in higher institutions, out of 78,658 students (an increase of 10,493 persons(15.4%) who were in Japanese language institutes.

Research on the internationalization of Japanese higher education (Lie, 2001; Yoshizawa, 2009) has reminded us that the presence of international students alone does not mean that the institution or the students are reaping the benefits of internationalization. Since the number of foreign students is readily measurable, many have focused on increasing the number of foreign students and overlooked other less quantifiable aspects, such as intercultural interaction, which is beneficial for both domestic (Japanese) students and the foreign students. This paper discusses the impact of foreign students in the context of Japanese internationalization. Specifically, it will demonstrate a teaching method that is based on the fundamental issues of active and cooperative learning. Assuming that the classroom is a microcosm of the larger social context, lessons of this design are meant to train students to deal with situations of intercultural differences meaningfully and effectively.

Japanese Internationalization and Foreign Students in Japan

What does it really mean to have foreign students attending your class? This study assumes that the presence of non-Japanese learners have far-reaching benefits (as well as issues) that both teachers and administration have usually overlooked. The purpose of this paper is to discuss intercultural learning as a consequence of internationalization of higher education in Japan. Specifically, it presents a sample lesson that demonstrates how the presence of foreign students can be utilized to promote intercultural learning in the classroom. At the same time, this study discusses three fundamental considerations and related concepts such as peer learning, cooperative learning and active learning.

The presence of international students alone, even in large numbers, is insufficient in itself to promote intercultural interaction, develop intercultural friendships and to result in international understanding. Situations must be structured to foster these processes. It behooves the schools, and the classroom teacher to increase and enhance intercultural interaction. Coleen Ward (2006) extensively describes the impact of foreign students have on three levels: interpersonal level, institutional, and to society at large. This study focuses on the impact of foreign students in the classroom. What does it really mean to have foreign students attending classes with domestic, Japanese students? The presence of non-Japanese learners have far-reaching benefits (as well as issues) that both teachers and administration have usually overlooked.

When we say foreign students in the classroom, we often think, first of all, about foreign language use in the classroom. This paper, however will explore specific ways

in which the principle of peer-learning and teaching in a culturally mixed class can make both teaching and learning more meaningful.

As a consequence of rapid internationalization in education, intercultural learning has become a vital 21st century learning tool for school communities. Schools, parents and teachers face such situations more and more frequently and they must be ready to provide answers and take actions to address several challenging issues. It behooves the schools, and the classroom teacher to increase and enhance intercultural interaction. Schools have a key role in developing intercultural and global competences of both the domestic as well as foreign students. These competencies are “the targeted knowledge, skills and attitudes that lead to visible behavior and communication that are both effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions (Dearoff, 2006).

Some related concepts

The idea of domestic (Japanese) and foreign students learning together calls for some theoretical consideration to maximize its results. The following section describes this briefly.

1. The concept of intercultural learning

Intercultural learning establishes, first of all, a more creative and healthy learning environment where students learn to accept and respect differences. They work with and support classmates who are different. In these classes, students learn and come to know more about themselves and their culture as a first step to comprehend cultural complexity. Thus, intercultural learning allows students first of all, to develop their own global competencies by first understanding their culture and themselves as a product of that culture. Beyond knowledge competencies, intercultural learning helps foster skills necessary outside of the classroom. These skills first and foremost include empathy and flexibility. Empathy allows students to understand others and see the world from their perspective, as well as to be sensitive to their needs. Flexibility, in thinking and feeling trains them to behave in changing environments and adapt using appropriate behavior.

Broadly, the challenge has become increasingly urgent for schools to adapt curriculums that are more globally-minded to adequately help students develop a global worldview and master intercultural skills. Several strategies have been proposed to cope with the demands of increased intercultural learning but three strategies have been used, evaluated and proven to foster specific positive intercultural perceptions and relations on the personal level. These include ① peer-pairing, ② cooperative learning and ③ residential programs. The focus of this paper relates to the first and second issues.

The intercultural classroom can be a rich source of learning when students are highly engaged in the own learning. The sample lesson provided, here based on the three principles peer learning, peer learning and teaching, and cooperative learning, produce enthusiastic, intense involvement among students. A sample lesson like this provides structures, which unlike activities, don't get used up. The teacher does not have to worry about how to teach abstract concepts. For instance, “it is hard to train cooperative learning, but it is easy to train one structure” (Kagan, 1994). Practical lesson plans help teachers nudge critical thinking, suspend judgement and foster

curiosity, all considered crucial for global and intercultural competence

2. Peer learning and Peer teaching in an intercultural classroom

Peer learning is not a single, undifferentiated educational strategy. It encompasses a broad sweep of activities. Several research has been done, both qualitatively and quantitatively, on strategies of this technique. Researchers from the University of Ulster identified 10 different models of peer learning (Boud, 2000) that are both useful and relevant to this paper.

Cooperative learning ranged from the traditional proctor model, in which senior students tutor junior students. To the more innovative learning cells, in which students in the same year form partnerships to assist each other with both course content and personal concerns. Other models involved discussion seminars, private study groups, pairing (a buddy system) or counseling, peer-assessment schemes. It encompasses both collaborative project and laboratory work, projects in different sized (cascading) groups, workplace mentoring and community activities.

3. Cooperative Learning in an intercultural classroom

Ikeguchi suggests several techniques in the application of cooperative learning both in the teaching of English to second language learners (2016) but the application of cooperative learning in this context extends beyond language learning. The sample lesson attached in a latter part will show its application; a short summary of its effectiveness is given below.

The class is divided into small heterogeneous groups which constitute the learning units. Heterogeneous in this sense refers to culturally mixed groups. Students interact directly with one another in different forms: sharing insights, asking questions, teaching (Japanese) language difficulties, summarizing, and all sorts.

Interaction includes mutual cooperation, assistance and exchange of ideas in pursuit of a common goal, since there are tasks each group has to accomplish. In a sense, cooperative learning in an intercultural class encourages competition because the groups are encouraged to present a discussion summary towards the end of each session. Unlike the traditional lecture method where learning tasks are not routing and imposed, students are empowered to explore, ask questions, interview and make choices regarding the smaller themes they wish to focus on within the umbrella of the class theme. It goes without saying that meaningful learning involves student participation. Cooperative learning in an intercultural classroom not only engages students in their own learning; it also involves the self and others in pursuit of the classroom goal.

4. Active Learning in an intercultural classroom

Like peer learning and cooperative learning active learning has been discussed in so many several ways and in different learning environments. Summed up, active learning is an approach to instruction that involves actively engaging students with the course material through several methods like discussions, problem solving, case studies, role plays and other methods. It involves both the concepts described above. Active learning is not possible without peer involvement in learning and student cooperation in their learning.

Active learning approaches place a greater degree of responsibility on the learner than passive approaches such as lectures, but instructor guidance is still crucial in the active learning classroom. Active learning activities may range in length from a couple of minutes to whole class sessions or may take place over multiple class sessions. Within the group, students share responsibility to participate and collaborate, take advantage of each participant's strengths, and rely on each other for good project management and effective learning.

The application of active learning in an intercultural classroom can be more challenging than its usual implementation in other learning tasks. The students are responsible for their own learning. Contrary to passive learning, students are challenged to think about the intercultural issues and tasks presented in the classroom. Active learning tries to get students to continually explore in the process of learning with opportunities to talk and work together, perceptions change. And this is the goal of active learning in an intercultural classroom: a change in perception and a change in behavior.

The section below presents a sample lesson plan on the actual implementation of these concepts in teaching culture to a culturally mixed group of students. This lesson is a part of a series of lesson in a Course called International Communication, focusing on Intercultural Communication. The challenges of teaching, making students learn culture, means effecting a change in students' thinking, attitude and behavior based on a true awareness of themselves and others. It is the hope of this paper that a series of lesson plans with focus on each aspect of culture and communication can truly cause an effect on students' learning.

TOPIC: Noises in Intercultural Communication
- Explorations on Intercultural Common Sense –
-

PROCEDURES:

Warm-up:

1. Ask students to read once again the handouts given the previous week as assignment. (3-5 minutes)
2. A class leader for the day (previously assigned) reads the handout in parts, as guided by the teacher, aloud in class.
3. Everybody answers the Self-check exercises. Items include for example:
Q1: Which of the following items are common sense for you?
Q2: If someone does this • says this to you how would you feel?
① You're late for an appointment with a friend.
② You received a gift from a friend. What is your initial reaction?
③ You feel you're catching a cold. What would you do?
④ Your friend gives you a piece of his/her food using their chopstick. How would you feel?

Group work No ①:

4. The class is split into 4-5 groups (depending on class size) of intercultural mix, with 1-2 Japanese students in each group. (15~20 minutes)
5. The groups are to accomplish the following tasks in order:
 - ① Spend some time for the foreign students to ask questions to Japanese students about meaning of words and expressions.
 - ② Share each member's answers with the whole group.
 - ③ Uncovering differences. Discuss why members feel differently in each situation. Discussion can be done in either English or Japanese, whichever is more convenient.
 - ④ Every member takes note of differences, while the group secretary records the main points and the group leader makes sure each member of the group is given a fair chance to talk.
 - ⑤ Each group is to give a definition of common sense, and explain why CS is a noise in intercultural communication.

Feedback:

1. The Japanese student leader reports to the whole class a summary of the group discussion.
2. Any member of the group can freely add ideas to support or strengthen the group report.
3. The teacher summarizes main ideas from each group on reports on the board.

Expansion of Basic Concept:

4. Based on the items reported by each group, the teacher DRAWS students' attention to the PYRAMIDICAL SCOPE of common sense (Yashiro, et al, 2001).
 - ① Behavior level: varied concepts of cleanliness – taking off shoes before entering the room, taking a bath before sleep is a MUST in Japan.
 - ② social practices: bowing in everyday life in Japan (Ikeguchi, 2007)
 - ③ social rules and laws: returning a favor or a gift received
 - ④ social values: keeping low profile in conversations
 - ⑤ beliefs: following group harmony and the decisions of authority
 - ⑥ Religion: going to shrines on New Year's Eve
5. The teacher asks students to think and list up examples of the common sense in their own country according to each of the six levels. (5~10 minutes)

Group Work No. ②

6. Students go back to their group to share and discuss (15-20 minutes)
7. Students are given time to write their personal reflections for the day's lesson on their class diary.

Summary and synthesis:

8. Teacher asks random feedback and makes notations on board: common sense across cultures
 9. Students may seek to express the core values underlying their stances.
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CAVEATS and ISSUES :

1. The Japanese language ability of international students is the first concern. Since the materials and the lessons are conducted in Japanese, there is a need to make sure every foreign student understands to get maximum results.
2. Student personality is a crucial factor in the discussions. A high level of motivation is necessary especially for the shy, both the domestic and international, students to engage in insightful sharing.
3. Besides personality, culture background and learning styles influence and determine to a large extent the success of the discussions. Culture dimensions has been found to be one of them (Ladeira, 1995). The classroom is a microcosm of the educational institutions, which are in turn a microcosm of the larger society and reflects its values, traditions and practices. Two dimensions that exert strong influence on classroom communication and interactions are individualism-collectivism (IC) and power distance (PD). Students from individualistic cultures tend to stand out and speak out, and draw attention. Those from collectivist cultures (most Asian countries), are more strongly nonverbal, unexpressive and unwilling to draw people's attention to themselves. Closely related to IC is power distance, and those students from high PD are less likely to argue, question or debate. These students are more strongly motivated to show respect to teachers and maintain formal relationships with them.
4. Differences in teacher-learning roles vary across culture and have strong influence on classroom approach. Extensive discussions of Smith, Miller and Crassini (1998) and Barnhardt (2000) include individualistic and competitive learning, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and even concepts of intelligence. Some of these of interest to this paper are learning styles and preference for cooperative learning. For instance, overseas students generally favor acceptance of authority, and more likely to agree rather than question or negate teacher ideas. Both qualitative (Lieberman, 1994) as well as quantitative research reveal international students from African and Asian countries were often critical of informality in the classroom interactions.

MERITS

Be that as it may, to date, students express positive attitudes about discussions in culturally mixed groups. Another point of concern pointed out earlier is that the presence of international students in the classroom or at an institution rarely prompts faculty members to internationalize what they teach. A result is domestic students becoming uninterested in international education in a serious way (Burke, 1990) (p5). This study has proven that the teacher can change the content and approach of the curricula to enhance its potential for internationalization

To date, Japanese students' comments largely reflect a willingness and a strong interest in the insights of international students. The same is true with the reflections of international students. Some comments include the following. "It is a good idea to have group work where people mix. It gives you perspectives and ideas about how people think and behave. It is a valuable experience, a substantial part of learning.

Conclusions

The class of this design provides some form of DIVE training in its microscopic form in the classroom, when confronted with unfamiliar intercultural situations or ambiguous circumstances (Bennett, 2015). DIVE (Describe, Interpret, Verify, and Evaluate) is a tool designed to help individuals:

1. Learn to temporarily suspend judgement and verify insights before making a final assessment or taking action.
2. Help them navigate situations where they encounter something or someone different in everyday life to have more effective, appropriate and meaningful interaction with others.

As students listen to the sharing of international students, and vice versa, they are encouraged to ask themselves the following questions:

Describe: What do I see/hear in an objective, factual way?

Interpret: What do I think about what I have described?

Verify: What do others think? Is my interpretation accurate?

Evaluate: How do I judge what I think and others think?

The classroom is a microcosm of the educational institutions, which are in turn a microcosm of the larger society and reflects its values, traditions and practices.

“Education gives us the chance to understand that we are all tied together as citizens of the global community and that our challenges are interconnected.” (Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary General. 2017, March 22). The intercultural classroom has a large role to play.

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