Impact of Cultural Exchange Programs in Asia

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Abstract
This study was conducted with Japanese participants of cultural exchange programs in Asia in order to explore the effects on intercultural communication competence of the participants. The effects of this program were assessed using the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI; Kelley & Meyers, 1995), open-ended pre- and post- questionnaires, and a group interview. The increase in the participants’ CCAI scores suggested that the intercultural communicative competence of the Japanese participants improved. Qualitative analysis of the pre-and post- questionnaires and the group interview explain reasons in detail for any change. Findings from this study imply the necessity of intentional pedagogy such as meaningful interactions and ample opportunities for self-reflection.

Introduction
In the globalizing world, it is inevitable that people will be interacting with people from other Asian countries. This is no exception in Japan. As markets in developing Asian countries expand rapidly, cooperating with other Asian countries is now crucial for Japan’s prosperity and safety. The Japanese government, that is aware of the importance of globalization in Asia, promotes the concept of the East Asian Community, however, young
people in Japan continue to define “intercultural communication” as contact with white native speakers of English and exhibit indifferent attitudes in learning about our Asian neighbors.

In order to promote intercultural understandings among Asian youth, several cultural exchange programs have been implemented by local governments and Japanese high schools, and their outcomes were investigated in some studies. Studies on the outcomes of study trips to Asian countries (Aikawa, 2007) reveal that short visits to Korea or Singapore raised high school students’ interest in those countries and positively changed their image of people in those countries. Koike (2002) found that high school-aged participants recognized cultural differences and experienced positive attitudes about local people as a result of a homestay program.

Studies about the impact of study trips abroad for university students are more limited. Most of them concentrate on the outcomes of study trips to English speaking countries since the main purpose of those trips organized by universities is improving English rather than promoting intercultural understanding. Edwards (2009) and Nakagawa (2009) investigated intercultural competence of Japanese university students who participated in short language program in English speaking countries and found that their intercultural competence increased.

In this study, the impact of short cultural exchange programs in Asian countries on Japanese university students will be investigated. The first research question is whether the participants in short-term cultural exchange programs in Asian countries (Korea and Indonesia) will exhibit development in intercultural communication competence.

Intercultural communication competence has been defined in varied ways. The traits identified by researchers include flexibility, cultural empathy, self-efficacy, international concern, interpersonal communication skills and
many more. According to Chen and Starosta, intercultural communication competence is “the ability to negotiate cultural meanings and to execute appropriately effective communication behaviors that recognize the interactants’ multiple identities in a specific environment” (1996, p.358).

In this study, intercultural communication competence will be viewed in terms of four aspects of one measurement: emotional resilience (ER), flexibility and openness (FO), perceptual acuity (PAC), and personal autonomy (PA). This study also explores whether different programs had different impacts on changes in intercultural communication competence.

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants in the research included 15 students majoring in English at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies. 10 of them (two males and eight females) participated in the Korean program in the spring of 2011. They were in their second, third or fourth year. All the participants, except for two, had previous intercultural experience and two of them had lived in an English-speaking country for a year.

Another group of five students (one male and four females) participated in the Indonesian program in the spring of 2012. They were in their third or fourth year. All of them had stayed overseas for more than three weeks and three of them had lived in an English–speaking country from three months to a year.

**Procedure**

On the way to their destination, a pre-questionnaire was distributed to participants. They were filled out by the participants in a day and returned to the researcher. A post-questionnaire was given on the way back to Japan,
and collected a few weeks later when the group interview was administered in the researcher’s office.

**Instrumentation**

The Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI: Kelly & Mayers, 1995), a training instrument designed to provide information to an individual about his or her potential for cross-cultural effectiveness was employed in this study. Among several measuring instruments, the CCAI was chosen because it was used in other similar studies on the impact of study abroad (Edwards, 2009; Williams, 2005). The CCAI contains 50 Likert scale, 6-point items to measure four dimensions of cross-cultural adaptability: Emotional Resilience (ER), Flexibility and Openness (FO), Perceptual Acuity (PAC), and Personal Autonomy (PA). For each dimension, 7 to 15 questions were asked, such as ER: I feel confident in my ability to cope with life, no matter where I am, FO: When I meet people who are different from me, I am interested in learning more about them, PAC: In talking with people from other cultures, I pay attention to body language. PA: I feel free to maintain my personal values, even among those who do not share them. The CCAI was originally written in English, but it was translated by the bilingual researcher and administered in Japanese.

Qualitative data was collected from the participants in the form of pre- and post- questionnaires and a group interview. Questions in the pre-questionnaire were written in Japanese and they included items related to age, gender and previous study or travel abroad. The post-questionnaire was written in English and asked participants to list three changes they had noticed after the international volunteer project. In the group interview conducted in Japanese, the participants were asked to elaborate on three changes they mentioned in the post-questionnaire. The questionnaire comments, written
in Japanese, were translated into English, and the group interview was transcribed for open coding and axial coding.

**The description of the programs**

Both programs took place in Asia during the spring vacation and lasted for less than a week. They were co-organized by a local NPO and all the program details were arranged by them. One of the main purposes of these programs was interaction with local youth and learning each other’s culture.

Both programs provided ample opportunities to interact with local youth. In Korea, Japanese participants were paired up with Korean university students and engaged in many collaborative projects such as giving hand massages to elderly residents at a senior center, culture learning, group excursions, etc. In Indonesia, they visited a local high school and universities and had meaningful interactions through group discussion, singing, dancing, cooking and presentations about Japanese university life.

Both programs included a homestay. In Korea, Japanese participants stayed overnight at the homes of their Korean partner. In Indonesia, they stayed with former Japanese language students of the NPO leader for three days.

There were also opportunities for Japanese participants to learn local culture. In Korea, four Korean drum lessons and three modern K-pop dancing lessons were offered. On the last day of the class, Korean and Japanese participants enjoyed performing together. In Indonesia, one afternoon was spared for a batik lesson, and Japanese participants dyed handkerchiefs and brought them back as souvenirs.

The culture festival was a valuable chance for Japanese participants to introduce their traditional culture. In Korea, the Japanese participants performed *Yosakoi* dance and encouraged Korean visitors to try calligraphy, *Yukata* and *Origami* at the local youth center. In Indonesia, Japanese par-
Participants cooked a festival food and introduced a festival game in addition to dancing to J-pop with local students at the university.

**Results**

**CCAI**

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations for the pre-test and post-test CCAI scale scores and differences between each pre-test and post-test score computed by subtracting the pre-test score from the post-test score.

The total CCAI scored in both Korean and Indonesian programs increased. However, subscales which contributed to it are different between programs. The participants in the Korean program revealed the highest increase on ER (M=8.1), followed by FO (M=6.9), PAC (M=2.6) and PA (M=2.3) with the smallest increase. The participants in the Indonesian program showed, on the other hand, the highest increase on FO (M=5.8), followed by ER (M=1.4) and PAC (M=0.6). Unexpectedly, their score on PA (M=-0.2) decreased.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations of CCAI scores by program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-test scores</th>
<th>Post-test scores</th>
<th>Differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional resilience</td>
<td>69.3 (15.8)</td>
<td>78.2 (11.4)</td>
<td>77.4 (9.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.1 (11.3)</td>
<td>1.4 (4.6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility/openness</td>
<td>65.7 (11.3)</td>
<td>71.4 (6.6)</td>
<td>72.6 (7.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.9 (10.8)</td>
<td>5.8 (10.0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptual acuity</td>
<td>43.6 (6.8)</td>
<td>45.6 (4.6)</td>
<td>46.2 (6.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.6 (5.6)</td>
<td>0.6 (5.5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal autonomy</td>
<td>25.7 (4.0)</td>
<td>27 (1.8)</td>
<td>28 (4.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.3 (6.0)</td>
<td>-0.2 (1.6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total score</td>
<td>204.3 (30.7)</td>
<td>222.2 (19.7)</td>
<td>224.2 (19.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19.9 (27.5)</td>
<td>5.8 (10.0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Qualitative data

Data analysis illustrates how the four dimensions of the CCAI are evident in the participants’ responses to the post-questionnaire. A total of 44 (Korea: 29, Indonesia: 15) instances of intercultural competence fall into the four aspects of the CCAI—emotional resilience (ER), flexibility and openness (FO), perceptual acuity (PAC), and personal autonomy (PA). Table 2 exhibits the number of coding references and text coverage per aspect identified in the post-questionnaire. Some coding references were coded at more than one aspect. Therefore, the percentages for coverage in the text total more than 100%.

Table 2. Number of instances and percentages of categories found in the post-questionnaire about personal changes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Instances</th>
<th>Korea</th>
<th>Indonesia</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>ER</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>62.0% 47.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>FO</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>37.9% 34.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>PAC</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.4% 18.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.8% 6.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ER (21)

Almost half of all the comments (21) fall within the category ER. However, the number of comments reported by participants in the Indonesia program is much less. The possible reason for this will be discussed in the Discussion section. Comments related to ER include “trying new things and experiences”, “having a positive attitude without being overly concerned about making mistakes”, and “interacting with people in new situations”. New challenges participants experienced included cultural lessons and local food. One female participant in the Indonesian program was glad that she had a chance to try Durian even though she ended up disliking it.
I’m glad that I had a chance to try Durian. ... All the good tasting food I had tried in Bali encouraged me to try it. I’m a type of a person who never tries anything new unless I knew it would be tasty. I used to avoid food that I was not sure about at the restaurant, but now I feel like at least trying it, because I learned that trying many different kinds of food would broaden my experiences. (Sakie)

Interestingly, many participants mentioned “becoming positive” as one of the three changes. A male participant in the Korean program explained “being positive” meant using affirmative sentences such as “not half empty but half full” (Satoshi). A female participant in the Indonesian program reported what facilitated her to become positive.

*I’m impressed with Indonesian people who welcomed and appreciated us so much. I learned that we were worthwhile. I used to be very negative. ... But now I think downgrading is a great waste. I’m not sure how this experience would contribute to my future, but I would like to remember this feeling.* (Sakie)

**FO (15)**

The second most frequent changes (15) fall within the category FO, “being interested in unfamiliar people and cultures”. A male participant in the Indonesian program found himself to become more open in another country. He further said:

*I feel more excited when I interact with people in another country. I was more inquisitive in Indonesia than I was in Japan. The unfamiliar scenery inspired me to ask many questions. For example, I wonder why there are so many mosques* (Koji)

Another female participant in the Indonesian program said that her curiosity made her visit a mosque on campus and pray with locals.
All the host families I had before in other countries were Christian. I have never stayed with Muslim people. … I have never entered a mosque. … So praying in a mosque was a shocking experience. It was my very first time to put on a veil and pray using my whole body. (Ikumi)

As a result of being open toward local people and culture, the participants discovered the stereotypes they had were not so accurate. For example, a female participant in the Indonesian program who thought Muslim women were conservative in fashion discovered that they actually had a choice of which scarf or trousers to put on and young girls enjoyed wearing cute types of pins for scarves. A female participant in the Korean program who had an image of older Korean people disliking Japanese commented in the post-questionnaire: “My fixed idea changed. I thought that most elderly Korean people don’t like Japanese, but it isn’t correct”. (Kanako)

Many participants had very positive interactions with their friendly local people, and it raised their motivation to learn not only English but also local languages. One of the female participants in the Indonesian program had very little interest in learning foreign languages before, but this visit changed her perspective. She said:

*I was not interested in learning languages such as Chinese or English. I was only interested in culture. But this visit made realize the importance of language. … By learning bad words from my new Indonesian friends, I’m now more interested in how this would be said in Indonesian. … I though it would be nice that I could speak a local language. From now on, I’m going to learn a foreign language more seriously.* (Ikumi)

Some interactions with the elderly at the senior center in Korea were not very positive, but it didn’t discourage Japanese participants to learn about
Korean people. When Yumi entered the room to give a hand massage, one female resident who noticed the Japanese name on her name tag asked, “Are you Japanese?” with cold eyes. In the follow-up interview, Yumi expressed how she felt at that time: “I felt I wasn’t welcomed.” Eventually, Yumi’s Korean partner persuaded the resident to receive a massage from them. This shocking experience didn’t discourage her but motivated her to learn more about the history of Korea and Japan.

PAC (8)

The third highest ranked category by number of coding references in the questionnaire is PAC (8). The number of comments from the participants in the Indonesian program contributed to raising its rank. Since participants spent the three whole days in an environment of having no common language with some host family members, they made an effort to pay attention to both verbal and nonverbal cues to understand their feelings. Many participants in the Indonesia program showed strong sensitivity to the feelings of local people through paying attention to their non-verbal cues. One female participant stayed with a host sister who didn’t understand either English or Japanese, so she made an effort to understand her host sister’s feeling by observing her non-verbal behaviors. She reported:

> My host sister was the same age as me, so I really wanted to make a friend with her. When I was observing her talking to her brother in Java, I noticed that she always looked happy. So I imitated her way of communication and listened to their conversation nodding my head with a big smile. One day she started to speak to me using gestures. (Kayo)

The participants in the Korean program also recognized non-verbal behav-
iors such as smiles and touching to reduce interpersonal distance. Tamiko, for instance, was shocked at being hugged or touched on her arms by her Korean partner when they first met because Japanese people don’t practice frequent touching even among close friends, but towards the end of her stay, she got used to it and started to practice it with her Korean friends.

One male participant in the Indonesian program showed receptivity to some cultural differences. Koji said he first felt puzzled with a different way of using a bathroom, but found himself adapting to it on the third day.

PA (3)

The category PA (3) is the lowest ranked category. One female participant in the Korean program, Sakura expressed an instance related to PA, being able to maintain a sense of self. Sakura used to be reluctant to express her opinions hoping that others would understand her by observing her behavior, but her interactions with Korean participants encouraged her to express herself more directly. She explained in the final interview: “In Korea, I learned that they would never understand me unless I say it”. She is now aware of the importance of expressing herself explicitly.

In Sakura’s case, she felt the change in PA after returning to Japan, but one female participant in the Indonesian program found her change on the way back from Indonesia. Sakie commented in the final interview:

> When we stopped by Bali on our way to Malang, I was approached by a taxi driver who was looking for a customer. At that time, I was not sure what to do, but when we stopped by Bali again on the way back, I could firmly say, “No, thank you”. I learned that it would be important to say “no”. (Sakie)
Discussion

**Overall discussion of findings**

The high increase in emotional resilience has been observed in other studies on impacts of study and residence abroad on Japanese participants (Edwards, 2009; Yashima, 2010). The high gain in ER for the Korean program may be related to the initial difficulties in communication with Korean participants due to language and cultural differences. As they overcame the initial numerous challenges, the participants might have become more confident about themselves.

One possible reason why the participants in the Indonesian group showed lower gain on ER could be how the program was conducted. As Ikumi stated, the local people adapted their daily life for them by heating up the shower water or changing their time to pray to show the Japanese participants around the city. She said that the Japanese participants should have adapted themselves to the life of their host family, not vice versa.

Even though the contents of the programs were slightly different, participants in both programs revealed in the post-group interview that they successfully applied their new skills in their part-time jobs or job hunting. Sakura, a third-year female participant in the Korean program, reported that she was not the kind of person who speaks to strangers, but after the work-camp she started talking to another applicant she had just met at a company information session.

It was unexpected that an increase on PA was the lowest in both programs. This result was consistent with the smallest number of references in the post-questionnaire. The lowest gain on PA may be because acquiring personal autonomy takes more time (Edwards, 2009). In the initial stage of interactions with new friends, they tend to stay flexible to accept another perspective. If the duration of the programs had been longer, the participants
might have experienced a gain in PA.

Overall, the amount of increase on all four aspects is much smaller among the participants in the Indonesia program than among the ones in the Korean program. This could be related to the ceiling effect. The participants in the Indonesia program had higher pre-test scores, probably because all the participants in this group had overseas experiences for more than three weeks. Therefore they may have had less room to increase.

**Implication for education**

According to Pedersen (2010), it is not enough to send students to study abroad without intentional pedagogy focused on outcomes of intercultural effectiveness. This study may imply what organizers should do in order to develop students’ intercultural communication skills.

One of the necessary interventions is providing participants with enough opportunities to interact with host members. Participants may sometimes need to be taken out of their comfort zone to have learning take place (Pedersen, 2010). In the group interview, Sakura, a female participant in the Korean program, pointed out the effectiveness of pair formation: “It was good to be paired up with a Korean participant. I was more willing to have myself understood with words in a one-on-one situation”. Pairing guest students with host students has been found to improve cross-cultural relationships in several studies (Pritchard & Skinner, 2002; Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

Secondly, cross-cultural interactions should be meaningful. In the Korean program, culturally mixed groups engaged in activities such as hand massages and cultural excursions. As Allport (1954) states in his contact hypothesis, sharing a common goal through working collaboratively promotes favorable effects of cross-cultural contact.
Thirdly, developing common ground facilitates intercultural interactions and relationship development (Sakurai, McCall-Wolf, & Kashima, 2010). In intercultural encounters, interactants usually share a low level of common ground and it discourages social interactions. In the Indonesian program, the Japanese participants shared Japanese-pop culture which was well-known by the local youth and singing and dancing to it together instantly reduced the initial distance in intercultural interactions. In many cultural events, participants tend to share their traditional culture, but pop-culture could take a greater role in increasing social interactions.

Lastly, numerous opportunities for participants to share reflection could be helpful. The participants of this study had a chance to reflect on themselves at the end of each day. They were encouraged to share their feelings with the help of facilitators. Providing the opportunity for shared reflection is incorporated in effective intercultural training (Hamel, Chikamori, Ono & Williams, 2010; Pedersen, 2010), since the participants benefit not just from reflecting on their experiences but also from hearing other people’s experiences.

**Limitations and recommendations for further research**

Before concluding, the limitations of this study should be mentioned. First of all, the number of participants was very small. It was beneficial to be able to hear their voices, but a larger number of participants would be necessary to run a statistical analysis to generate generalizable findings. If there are more participants with varied backgrounds, relations between outcomes and other factors such as gender, overseas experience and language proficiency could be examined.

Secondly, this study focuses only on changes in intercultural communication skills of the Japanese participants. The lack of participation in the
study by the local people will never be able to capture the full picture of the development of intercultural communication skills. This will need to be taken into account in future research.

Thirdly, long-term effects were not investigated. A group interview took place a week after their coming back. Many participants were still talking about how the project had an impact on their life at that time, but it would be worth exploring how much they retain intercultural effectiveness one year later.

Despite these limitations, this study suggests that such short cultural exchange programs in Asia had a large impact on the Japanese participants. The outcomes of such projects need to be further investigated in a longitudinal design from multiple perspectives using a larger number of participants, which will enable the exploration of intertwined factors related to participants’ development. I believe future research would shed light on this new way of improving students’ intercultural competence in a globalizing Asia.

References
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