A Comparison of Japanese and Taiwanese students' Attitudes toward Cross-Cultural English-Learning Activities

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Technological advancement pushes greater expansion of information worldwide, without constraints of boundaries and time. This is made possible through the varieties of English used by a vast number of non-English speakers all over the world. Introducing intercultural language learning and facilitating a cross-cultural learning environment are the language teacher's new responsibilities; thus, continuing research in the relationship between language, technology, and students' learning perceptions is vital. This article reports on the cross-national research results stemming from an intercultural project between university students from a Taiwanese university and a Japanese university. A web-based communication board, Nicenet, was utilized for cross-cultural communication exchange activities. The research results compared the students' overall recognition and feelings toward English as a lingua franca between the control and experimental groups. The data analysis of this research revealed inconsistencies between students' attitudes toward participation in the cross-cultural exchange project and their interest in intercultural learning.

技術の進歩は、境界と時間の制約なしに、情報の世界の大きな展開を推進する。特に、世界中の非英語圏の膨大な数で使用される英語によって実現されている。言語、技術関係の研究を続け、学生の学習の認識は重要である;異文化間言語を導入し、学習と異文化学習環境を促進することが言語教師の新しい責任である。この記事では、台湾と日本の大学生の間で異文化プロジェクトの研究成果を報告する。インターネット上のプラットフォームで、二国が異文化コミュニケーションの交流活動をした。この研究は、学生の全体的な認識と対照群と実験群の間に共通語としての英語に向かって感情を比較した結果である。さらに、この研究のデータ分析では、異文化交流のプロジェクトへの参加に向けて学生の態度と異文化学習への関心との間の矛盾を明らかにする。

ENGLISH IS recognized as a lingua franca, rather than a privileged language restricted in use to certain groups, such as cultural insiders (Kachru & Nelson, 2001). In fact, nonnative speakers have outnumbered native speakers for some time (Power, 2005; Smith, 1992). This has resulted in English language learning developing on a foundation of multiculturalism, suggesting that regionalized English and cross-cultural issues are influential factors in English language learning. The purpose of English learning reflects this global trend and continues to move toward a communication-aimed, culture-based goal.

Background

Multinational enterprise, trade liberalization, and global competition characterize today's environment in many respects (Kupka et al., 2009). In order to prepare college students to meet the demands of the global market, teachers need to take an international perspective to address the current English language and cultural learning environment. In fact, cross-cultural research has supported the importance of intercultural competence in both global and domestic contexts (Hammer & Bennett, 2003). To reflect this need, in conjunction with advanced technologies, an abundance of cross-national collaborative English learning projects have emerged, which incorporate communication and information technologies for enhancing cultural exchange and language learning (e.g., Levy, 2009). These collaborative projects serve to raise students' intercultural awareness, broaden students' horizons, strengthen students' intercultural communicative competence, and prepare students to work internationally as part of the global market (e.g., Kupka et al., 2009).

The purpose of this study was to examine factors that influence college students' attitude toward an online, cross-cultural, English learning project implemented in both Taiwan and Japan, as well as to compare and discover differences between students from the two countries. The research employed a mixed method approach inclusive of quantitative factor analysis and correlation analysis using SPSS, as well as content analysis of online interaction, frequency of message interactions per student, and classroom discussion. Factors extracted in this study are discussed and compared with those that appear in prior intercultural English learning assessment models.

There are many assessment tools being developed to evaluate student motivation toward cross-cultural English and cultural learning projects. Among these assessment tools, the Intercultural Effectiveness Scale (IES; Hammer, Gudykunst, & Wiseman, 1978) was created as a means of measuring the behavioral aspect of intercultural communication competence. The concept of intercultural effectiveness is used to describe communication skills, including both verbal and nonverbal behaviors, which enable people to reach their communication goals in intercultural interaction through appropriate and effective means (Chen & Starosta, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2000).

The Intercultural Willingness to Communicate Scale (IWCS) was adapted from the Willingness to Communicate (WTC) scale and has been used to measure an individual's willingness to start communication with people of another culture, when free from any obligation to do so (Kassing, 1997). McCroskey (1991) developed the WTC model by applying the model to L2 communication. MacIntyre (1996) added L2 acquisition and communication into this revised model, creating the IWCS. The IWCS measures L2 students' anxiety, desire to learn English, communication skills, and willingness to communicate in an L2 context.

The Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS; Chen & Starosta, 2000) is used to evaluate a person's ability to sense and experience relevant cultural differences, and also to think and act in interculturally appropriate ways. Intercultural sensitivity is the dimension of intercultural communication competence that refers to the emotional desire of a person to acknowledge, appreciate, and accept cultural differences. Intercultural Communication Motivation (ICM; Kupka et al., 2009) is a model developed to assess an individual's motivation to pursue intercultural communication. Motivation has been recognized as a central factor of intercultural communication competence in communicative interactions (Kupka et al., 2009). Intercultural communication motivation measures three dimensions: intercultural anxiety, intercultural trust, and intercultural self-efficacy.

Research Method and Design

Our project employed a mixed-methodology. Qualitative analysis included a content analysis of student interviews and of online exchanges. Quantitative analysis included a factor analysis and a correlation analysis from data gathered from the questionnaires. Participants of this study were 181 college students from Taiwan and Japan. Among them, 60 students participated in the online cross-cultural English project, another 20 students were experienced in cross-cultural collaboration, and the rest had no experience with regard to cross-cultural collaboration.

We designed and implemented a method of content collaboration by uploading three collaborative projects for the Japanese and the Taiwanese students. The content of the projects included global and/or cross-cultural issues. The online discussion questions were as follows:

1. You are both ESL students in the summer intensive program of New York University. You are in the same class and became friends. You decided to take a trip to Miami and on the way there, your wallets were stolen. You have no money, no credit cards, and no cell phones. You both got your bags (you have your wallet and your cell phone in your bag) stolen and you are stranded on the streets.

2. You are both on the committee of the United Nations for the poor. Someone gave your organization a donation for one million dollars. The only requirement is to donate this money to one country and a particular group. Please research and propose where the money should go. Each student should propose one project and convince each other to select his/her choice. This conversation should have 20 entries, 10 entries each.

3. You are both foreign students at Harvard. You are both in the same class. Now, you are both assigned to host a party for the American students at the university. The purpose is for the American students to know more about East Asian cultures. Please discuss the food you will serve, the program (prepare six shows or performances reflecting your culture) and other entertainment for this party. After discussion, please make a program for your party.

We planned and assigned schedules of student interactions to maintain ongoing communication on the asynchronous web communication platform. In pairs (one Taiwanese and one Japanese), students had to collaboratively complete the tasks given in each project and to submit a written report of the result of their discussions.

The web platform communication tool used in this study was an online classroom established by Nicenet organization (www.nicenet.org), a formal Internet location that provides asynchronous computer-mediated communication. Teachers can register at Nicenet and input necessary information to create a virtual classroom. Students can register for the class after obtaining essential access information from their teachers. This process enables teachers to view students who register and to manage all their associated interactions. One drawback to using Nicenet, however, is the lack of rich visual options in its utilities. It does not provide space for showing photos or for embedding video clips; therefore, the content is not as rich as in other common networking utilities, such as Facebook or Twitter. However, this learning web-platform is nonetheless user friendly and instructionally transparent.

Teachers can monitor students and give instructions as necessary. The common language platform is English, which suits the purpose of cross-cultural learning for our project involving learners of English from two different countries. The communications are threaded so that each time a member logs on, all previous comments are shown on the computer, enabling participants to track their previous interactions.

In the initial phase of the study, we took statements made by students during interviews and formed a questionnaire, which was designed to predict the attitudes of EFL students with

regard to the English learning process through cross-cultural interactions. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's test of sphericity, which produce measures of sampling adequacy, were used to assess the appropriateness of the use of factor analysis.

Following the KMO and Bartlett's test, factor analysis using SPSS® was used to extract factors that influenced students' attitudes toward the cross-cultural English project. The factors were named and compared to prior literature in order to identify similarities in previous related studies. Data collected and analyzed also included students' reactions as well as behavior, including their online interaction, its content, and the number of times they logged in over the course of the entire project.

Results

In one phase of the study, 23 statements were drawn from interviews. We conducted a factor analysis using SPSS. Results showed that the KMO of this study was 0.902 ($p = 0.000$) as shown in Table 1. The value of KMO should be greater than 0.5 if the sample is adequate; therefore, this result indicated that the 23 statements drawn were suitable for factor analysis.

Table 1. Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.902
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	802.240
	Df	91
	Sig.*(p)*	.000

Principle component analysis was used to extract factors. Extracted factors included those for which the Eigenvalues were over 1. In total, four factors were extracted as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Factor Eigenvalues

Component (factor)	Eigenvalues
1	41
2	8
3	7
4	43

Note. Exaction method: principal component analysis.

Naming of Factors
Factor One

This factor had an Eigenvalue of 41. Eight items were clustered in this factor. Factor one included statements such as "Intercultural activities are helpful for English learning" and "The online English course is helpful for me to confront other cultures." These items included variables expressed in terms of the belief in and expectation of the benefits of cross-cultural relationships, particularly with regard to social relation, learning, broadening one's horizon, and future work. This factor was designated as *cross-cultural relationship expectation*.

Factor Two

This factor had an Eigenvalue of 8. Seven items were clustered in this factor. These items included wish for friendship development in another culture, cultural sensitivity relationship management, and flexibility in one's own behavior when interacting with a foreign friend. Factor two included statements such as "I want to have many chances to be in contact with people of different cultures" and "when I meet people of another culture, English will serve as the language for communication." These expressions are similar to items mentioned in Yashima's (2000)

investigation of Japanese learners' orientation and, therefore, we adopted Yashima's naming for this factor as *intercultural friendship orientation*.

Factor Three

This factor had an Eigenvalue of 7. Two items were clustered in this factor. Factor three included statements such as "Intercultural communicative competence helps me understand different people and their culture" and "Intercultural communicative competence will be helpful to my English ability." These expressions reflect the importance of intercultural communicative competence in global business. This category appears in many assessment tools for cross-culture ability and is, in fact, mentioned in the intercultural effectiveness and the CMC competence. This factor was therefore named *importance of communication skills*.

Factor Four

The fourth factor identified had an Eigenvalue of 43. Six items were clustered in this factor. They included various expressions suggesting that cross-cultural activity can contribute to English learning, and to cultural understanding of both the partner's culture and the student's home culture. Factor four included statements such as "Intercultural activities consolidate my confidence of English learning," "Intercultural communication activities increase my interest in English learning," and "Intercultural communicative activities make me understand the importance of English as an international language." These expressions were named under the factor *contribution to English and cultural learning*.

Correlation Analysis

The purpose of this current study was to gain an understanding of Japanese and Taiwanese student attitudes toward English learning via an online cultural exchange program. Therefore, among the four factors identified, we sought to determine the relationship between English learning and cross-cultural interaction. We conducted a correlation analysis with the four identified factors.

The elements of cross-cultural relationship expectation, intercultural friendship orientation, and importance of communication skills demonstrated a medium-level correlation (between 0.4-0.8) to the *contribution to English and cultural learning* factor (Table 3). As such, correlation is significant at the 0.01 level. The factor of contribution to English and cultural learning was found to be correlated with the element of cross-cultural relationship expectation at .562, which shows that the two factors demonstrate a medium-level of correlation. The factor of contribution to English and cultural learning was found to be correlated with intercultural friendship orientation at .658, which also shows that the two factors demonstrate a medium-level of correlation. The last factor, importance of communication skills, was found to be correlated with the factor of contribution to English and culture learning at .357, which shows a low-correlation level. Overall, results demonstrate that factors extracted show correlation with one another at significant levels.

Table 3. Correlation Among the Four Factors

	Cross-cultural relationship expectation	Intercultural friendship orientation	Importance of communication skills
Contribution to English & culture learning	.562**	.658**	.357**

Note. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Independent samples *t*-test results revealed significant differences between Japanese and Taiwanese participants with regard to the cross-cultural online English collaborative project (Table 4). For factor one, the significant difference is evident in the *t* value = 5.265 (*p* = .000). For factor two, the significant difference is shown in *t* value = 6.304 (*p* = .000). For factor three, the significant difference is shown in *t* value = 2.402 (*p* = 0.17). Finally, for factor four, the significant value is shown in *t* value = 5.722 (*p* = .000). Among the four factors, the Taiwanese and the Japanese participants were significantly different in their attitudes toward cross-cultural expectation, intercultural friendship orientation, and contribution to English and culture learning. The participants from the two countries were also slightly different with regard to their attitudes toward the importance of communication skills. Among all the factors, Taiwanese participants demonstrated more positive attitudes toward intercultural English interactions compared to their Japanese counterparts.

Table 4. Independent Sample *t*-Test Results on Factors Between Taiwanese and Japanese

	M		SD			
	Taiwan (*n* = 108)	Japan (*n* = 51)	Taiwan (*n* = 108)	Japan (*n* = 51)	*t*	*p*
Cross-cultural expectation	4.12	3.66	.53	.51	5.265	.000
Intercultural friendship	4.23	3.71	.47	.54	6.304	.000
Communication skills	4.18	3.91	.62	.74	2.402	.017
Contribution to English & cultural learning	4.17	3.64	.48	.68	5.722	.000

Note. Maximum score = 5

Table 5. Independent *t*-test Results on Factors Between Students With Intercultural Experience and Students Without Intercultural Experience

	M		SD			
	Experienced (*n* = 47)	Non (*n* = 64)	Experienced (*n* = 47)	Non (*n* = 64)	*t*	*p*
Cross-cultural expectation	4.20	4.00	.45	.57	1.983	.050
Intercultural friendship	4.32	4.10	.43	.48	2.465	.015
Communication skills	4.24	4.09	.57	.62	1.291	.199
Contribution to Eng. & culture learning	4.28	4.02	.46	.45	3.053	.003

Note: Maximum score = 5

Results shown in Table 5 revealed that there were no significant differences between students who had participated in the cross-cultural English collaborative project and those who had not participated. Among the 159 questionnaires, 48 were invalid and all 48 invalid questionnaires were filled out by the Japanese participants. These questionnaires were invalid because of skipped or insufficient answers. In cross-cultural expectation, those who were experienced in cultural exchange activities were more positive than those who had no experience. However, whether or not participants joined the cross-cultural English project did not influence their attitudes with regard to factors of intercultural friendship orientation ($p = .015$) and importance of communication skills ($p = 0.199$).

In contrast, with regard to contribution to English and culture learning, there was a significant difference between participants with experience in cross-cultural collaboration and those without experience. Overall, those who had intercultural experience demonstrated more positive attitudes related to the factors of cross-cultural expectation and contribution to English and culture learning; whereas, there was no significant difference between the two groups of participants with regard to intercultural friendship orientation and understanding the importance of communication skills.

Content Analysis

In addition, data for the study included the collection and examination of the contents of the online exchanges between the Japanese and the Taiwanese participants. Although many of these online exchanges were eloquent, particularly in terms of self-introduction as well as introducing one's own culture, most of the online conversations for the collaborative project were interrupted by delayed responses or by meaningless statements or responses that did not pertain to the questions given in the projects. Instead, responses such as "What do you think?" were

written to avoid answering the questions. The primary reason for the disruption of the online conversation seemed to be due to the participants' lack of motivation to deliver an immediate response. Another reason for this disruption was likely the inconvenience brought by the asynchronous computer-mediated communication.

The following are examples of these types of the Nicenet interactions.

Example One:

Hello, my name is Mayumi. I am a common student, too. Your hobbies are very nice. My hobbies are to draw the oil painting and to play the piano. But it is so good. Moreover, it is interesting also in foreign countries. Therefore, my dream is traveling around all over the world in the future. It is necessary to study English more.

Your country is Japan. My country is Taiwan. Japan is much closer for me. In my opinion, your hobbies are far more outstanding items. On the other hand, I walk in an elementary school in order to do exercise. By all means, the location is near my home. The elementary school playground is pretty useful for me. Therefore, I really love the elementary school playground a lot. On the other hand, I like my major subject, English, very much. I have various types of English course every semester, due to the fact that my major subject is English. Besides, English is my most splendid hobby.

Example Two:

(The Japanese student did not show up after the third response. The Taiwanese student wrote down his ideas alone.)

I will purchase a huge amount of wheat in order to have them have enough element to produce toast, common

breads, and noodles to eat. In addition, I will use the rest part of the money in order to let them have a huge amount of rice to taste and buy a huge amount of petroleum to make them ride the scooters. If they get a huge amount of petroleum, they may choose to drive airplanes, deluxe ships, and automobiles. In fact, this is a huge amount of money. I ought to take full advantage of the money to help the people.

To better understand the motivation of the participants of the two culture groups, we recorded the frequencies of each participant logging in to Nicenet to deliver an online response. The results in Table 6 show that the Taiwanese participants logged in twice as often as their Japanese counterparts. The results correspond to the results in Table 4, where the Taiwanese participants were more active and positive about the online cross-cultural collaboration program.

Table 6. Comparison of Average of Nicenet Log-ins per Student

	Taiwanese participants	Japanese participants
Mean number of log ins	8.27	4.81

The following table (Table 7) is based on collections of our observations of the two cultural groups during the period of the experiment. During the observation, we recorded the students' reactions regarding their online, cross-cultural activity such as their comments and attitude. This observation was to gather more information to further understand the students' motivation in their cross-cultural activity. Details we observed in the participants of the two different cultural groups provided non-

numerical information to understand participants' attitude, and also the change of behavior during the cross-cultural exchange experiment.

Many of the Taiwanese students were excited about, and strongly expected, an international collaborative partnership at the beginning of the program. However, some of them may have been preoccupied with other things or careless about checking in to view the responses from their Japanese counterparts. Those who were positive and active complained about the absence of the Japanese participants. On the other hand, the Taiwanese researcher had to devote time to check the online interactions to ensure communication included fluent and nonstop conversation. A similar situation occurred with the Japanese participants. Some expected international friendship and English collaborative learning, but were disappointed in only seeing very late responses made by their Taiwanese counterparts. Table 7 shows the teachers' observations of the participants from the two cultural groups.

Table 7. Teachers' Observations

Stage	The researcher's observation of Taiwanese participants	The researcher's observation of Japanese participants
1	Students were all excited about the intercultural interactions.	
2	Students complained that their Japanese partners did not reply.	Students complained that the Taiwanese partners did not show up.
3	Some students were lazy checking their online messages.	Students complained that the project was an overload for them.
4	Some students were confused about how to use Nicenet.	Students commented that the project was too time consuming.

| 5 | Dissatisfaction grew among students who did not receive feedback from their partners. | Students did not check and reply in the proper time. |

Overall, the Taiwanese participants were strongly motivated compared to their Japanese counterparts, as the results in Table 6 and the observations in Table 7 demonstrate. In the initial stage, the participants were excited about the projects. However, many were reluctant members of the online activity, and only under their teachers' strict guidance would they write comments and replies at appointed times. This situation was quite similar for both cultural groups. Towards the middle and the later periods of the program, many of the Japanese participants stopped logging in to Nicenet, leaving the program unfinished. However, most of the Taiwanese participants completed the required tasks to meet their teacher's demand. From Table 7, we can see that it is evident that the Japanese participants were generally less motivated than their Taiwanese counterparts, and this observation aligns with the results given in Table 6, which showed that the Japanese participants logged in to Nicenet half as often as their Taiwanese counterparts.

Discussion and Suggestions

This study searched for factors influencing Asian college students' attitudes toward online cultural English learning and sought to make a comparison between the results of the two cultural groups of participants as well as those with and without previous cross-cultural experience. The factor analysis yielded a 23-item factor taken from interviews, with four factors extracted using SPSS. Among the four factors extracted, three belonged to the same component in ICC related assessment tools of the Intercultural Willingness to Communicate (IWC) and the Intercultural Effective Scale (IES).

The first factor extracted from the interview questions was intercultural relationship orientation. Intercultural relationship orientation captures the concept of English learning as a tool for interactions with people of another culture. The results gained from the current study show that intercultural relationship orientation is strongly correlated with the other three factors influencing the participants' attitudes toward the online activities.

The second factor, communication skills, is an important component influencing the success of interaction using computer-mediated communication. This factor refers to the ability to deliver messages, to express ideas concisely, to organize messages and make them understood, and to effectively ask and answer questions.

Contribution to English and culture learning is a component similar to the factor first described as "Desire to learn English" by Gardner and Lambert (1972). This factor refers to a strong motivation to learn English and to gain the benefits from the cross-culture collaboration in terms of both language and cultural aspects.

Cross-cultural relationship expectation was a newly extracted factor. This refers to a prospective attitude toward cross-cultural interaction and a desire to have reciprocal benefits for each participating cultural party. This factor also predicts motivational intensity for cross-cultural English learning.

The results of our study show that the Japanese students were not as active as the Taiwanese students in cross-cultural activity. In addition, the results demonstrate that those who were experienced in cross-cultural interaction tended to be more positive in their attitudes regarding only the factors of cross-cultural expectation and contribution to English and culture learning. In the students' online discussions, the contents varied according to the commitment of the different participants. In terms of the disconnected online interaction, there are many reasons for students opting to decline the potential benefits of cross-cultural

activities. One of these reasons might be failure to maintain a continuous online discussion, another might be anxiety and fear of discussion, and yet another might be lack of motivation. In future studies, the use of an in-depth qualitative research method is needed to discover the various reasons for the participants' attitudes in this regard.

Bio Data

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