

Outcomes of Intercultural Volunteer Work Experiences in Korea

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This study was conducted with Japanese participants of a work-camp in Korea in order to explore the effects on intercultural communication competence of the participants. This program was organized by the NPO NICE for 10 students at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies and it included volunteer work and activities aimed at fostering cultural exchanges with their partner students from Korea. The effects of this program were assessed using the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI; Kelley & Meyers, 1995), open-ended pre- and postquestionnaires, 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 postquestionnaires 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.

これは日本人学生の異文化コミュニケーション能力が、韓国におけるワークキャンプに参加したことによってどのような影響を受けたかに関する研究である。名古屋外国語大学の10人の学生が参加したプログラムは、ボランティアワークと韓国人大学生との文化交流を目的に、NPO団体のNICEとの共同企画で実施された。このプログラムの効果はCross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (Kelley & Meyers, 1995)と事前・事後アンケート調査、参加者のグループ面接によって測定した。CCAIのスコアの上昇は、ワークキャンプ参加者の異文化コミュニケーション能力が上がったことを示唆していると考えられる。質的データの分析により、参加者の変化をより詳細に説明する。この研究の結果は、意味のある交流や内省の機会を与えるなどの介入の必要性を示唆する。

IN THE 21st century, global society is seeking young people who can work and negotiate with people from different cultural backgrounds. In order to respond to this need, hundreds of Japanese universities have initiated English short-term study abroad programs in English-speaking countries such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States (Hazumi, 2006; Yashima, 2010). However, as the number of Japanese students studying abroad declined in 2008, some universities are having difficulty in recruiting enough participants to run their programs partly due to the expensive air fares and high costs of living in these countries (Akasaki, 2011).

Nowadays, more and more university students are interested in participating in international volunteer work projects (Yashima, 2010) in Asian countries including Indonesia, Cambodia and Laos. These international volunteer work projects are usually organized by NPOs and are open to people from different cultural backgrounds. The volunteer work could be physical, education-



al or cultural. Under the instruction of local NPO leaders, participants work collaboratively using English as a lingua franca.

Since this is a new form of exposing Japanese youth to the international environment, the impact of it has not been investigated much (Yashima, 2010; Decker, 2010). Yashima (2010) found that the volunteer work experience improved the Japanese participants' intercultural competence including openness/ethno relativism, international concern, interpersonal communication skills, and self-efficacy. As she collected data from 286 university students who joined international volunteer projects from all over Japan via mail, it was difficult for her to observe their process of gaining intercultural competence.

Another researcher, Decker (2010), on the other hand, participated in an international volunteer work-camp in Mongolia with five Japanese university students and interviewed them on the subject of English language learning during their participation in the project. While the Japanese students used English out of necessity, he found that they realized that imperfect English could still be effective. However, no other aspect of intercultural communicative competence was explored in his study.

In this study, the impact of international volunteer work on ten participants will be investigated. This six-day work-camp in Korea was organized by an NPO called "Never-ending International Work Camps Exchange" (NICE). Since the researcher accompanied the participants and spent five days together, she could observe their process of learning closely.

Method

Program

This work-camp in Korea was implemented from February 22-27, 2011 for both Korean and Japanese participants to understand each other's culture through various collaborative activities. Ten Korean and ten Japanese participants were first

paired up and then combined to make four mixed groups. They engaged in ice-breaking activities, volunteer work, and culture learning activities either in pairs or small groups.

In their first ice-breaking activity, each group was asked to give a name to their team and share motivations, fears and expectations about this work-camp. Throughout the program, ice-breaking activities were provided at least once a day. The volunteer work they conducted included giving hand massages to elderly residents in pairs at a local senior center. Since Japanese participants could not speak Korean, they had to depend on their Korean partners to communicate with the residents.

In order for the Japanese participants to learn both traditional and modern Korean culture, 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. Home stay and a group cultural excursion were the highlights of Korean culture learning activities for Japanese participants. The Japanese students visited the homes of their Korean partners and stayed overnight. It was a valuable opportunity for the Japanese participants to learn about Korean families. The destination of a half-day cultural excursion was decided by members of each group, and during the excursion, they worked together to accomplish tasks such as taking a jumping photo with three Korean strangers. After coming back from the excursion, each group did a presentation about their excursion. The culture festival was the only chance for Japanese participants to share their traditional culture. The Japanese participants performed the *Yosakoi* dance, which they had practiced over the previous three months, and encouraged the Korean visitors to try calligraphy, wearing *yukata* and *origami*.

Participants

Participants in the research included 10 students (two male and eight female) at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies. They

were in their second, third or fourth year majoring in English. All the participants except for two participants had previous intercultural experience and two of them had lived in an English-speaking country for a year. Table 1 presents the demographic information of each participant. In order to protect their privacy, pseudo names were given to each participant.

Table 1. Demographic Data of Participants

Name	Gender	Year	Overseas experience
Akira	M	2	1 year in US
Asami	F	2	1 month in US 1 month in UK
Chikako	F	2	1 month in UK
Fumiko	F	2	1 month in Canada
Kanako	F	3	None
Yumi	F	3	1 month in UK
Satoshi	M	4	1 year in Canada
Sakura	F	3	None
Tomiko	F	2	1 month in UK
Yuri	F	2	1 month in Canada

Research Instrument

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 (Ed-

wards, 2009; Williams, 2005). The CCAI contains 50 Likert scale, six-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, seven 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, and was translated by the researcher for the purposes of this study.

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

Procedure

The CCAI was administered as a pretest and posttest at the beginning and the end of the program. The first CCAI and the prequestionnaire were distributed to the participants on the plane to Korea and were completed by the time they arrived at the camp site. The second CCAI and postquestionnaire were given on the way back to Japan and collected a week later when the group interview was administered in the researcher's office.

Results

CCAI

Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations for the pretest and posttest CCAI scale scores and differences between each pretest and posttest score computed by subtracting the pretest score from the posttest score.

Table 2. Summary of CCAI Survey Results

	Pretest scores <i>M (SD)</i>	Posttest scores <i>M (SD)</i>	Differences <i>M (SD)</i>
Emotional resilience	68.1 (15.8)	77.1 (9.0)	8.1 (11.3)
Flexibility / openness	64.7 (11.3)	72.8 (11.3)	6.9 (10.8)
Perceptual acuity	43 (6.8)	46.4 (6.3)	2.6 (5.6)
Personal autonomy	25.3 (4.0)	28.5 (4.2)	2.3 (6.0)
Total score	201.2 (30.7)	225 (19.3)	19.9 (27.5)

Qualitative Data

Data analysis illustrates how the four dimensions of the CCAI are evident in the participants' responses to the postquestionnaire. A total of 29 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 3 exhibits the number of coding references and text coverage per aspect identified in the postquestionnaire. Some coding references were coded at more than one aspect. Therefore, the percentages for coverage in the text total more than 100%.

Table 3. Number of Instances and Percentages of Categories Found in the Postquestionnaire About Personal Changes

Rank	Categories	Instances	Percentages
1	ER	18	62.0 %
2	FO	11	37.9 %
3	PA	2	6.8%
4	PAC	1	3.4%

Most comments (18) fall within the category ER, having a positive attitude without being overly concerned about making mistakes, enjoying new challenges, and interacting with people in new situations. Satoshi described his personal change thus, “(I came to) use affirmative sentences (such as) not half empty but half full”. Kanako was afraid to communicate with Korean people due to her lack of confidence in speaking English. However, she made an effort to talk more and made many Korean friends. Asami first had difficulty playing the Korean drum and dancing to K-pop, but ended up being able to do these things. Yuri couldn't eat any spicy food before coming to Korea, but she now enjoys it.

The second most common changes (11) fall within a category FO, being interested in unfamiliar people and culture and gaining a new perspective as a result of being open toward them. Many participants had very positive interactions with their friendly Korean partners, and it raised their motivation to learn not only English but also Korean. However, interactions with the elderly at the senior center were not all positive. When Yumi entered a 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, Yu-

mi'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. Unlike Yumi, Chikako and Kanako had positive interactions with the residents, so their interactions with residents eliminated their stereotype that Korean old people dislike Japanese people. Kanako, for example, commented in the postquestionnaire: "My fixed idea changed. I thought that most elderly Korean people don't like Japanese, but it isn't correct".

One participant, Sakura expressed two instances related to PA, being able to maintain a sense of self and becoming decisive. 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 enabled 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. She also reported that she used to be an indecisive person: "If I wasn't sure I could do something, I wouldn't do it", but now she has a strong intention about try new things.

Another participant, Tamiko mentioned one instance which implies PAC, becoming sensitive to nonverbal cues. Tamiko 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.

Discussion

Overall Discussion of Findings

The results indicated that the participants developed their intercultural communicative competence. ER registered the highest increase ($M=8.1$, $SD=11.3$), followed by FO, PAC and PA with

the smallest increase. 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 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 aspect of ER, which was frequently mentioned both in the questionnaire and the group interview was interacting with people in new situations and overcoming ambiguity. This finding was consistent with Yashima's study (2010), which revealed a gain in intercultural approach. As a result of interacting with the Korean participants, the Japanese participants formed enduring friendships with them and still remain in contact with them through Facebook. It was learned from the group interviews that the participants successfully applied their new skills in their part-time jobs or job hunting. Sakura, a third-year student, 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 the company information session. In the final interview, she reported: "I used to wait for other people to speak to me, but I was able to approach a stranger by asking which university she was from." It was unexpected that only one participant expressed her changes in PA. This 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 work-camp had been longer, the participants might have experienced a gain in PA.

Implication for Education

This study may imply that if developing students' intercultural communication skills is a goal of study or residence abroad,

organizers need to do much more than send students abroad to study or work.

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 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-to-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, meaningful cross-cultural interactions are necessary. In this 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.

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 voice, 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, a control group was absent in this study. With the single group pretest and posttest design, it is not clear that the changes truly derived from the study abroad experience. Comparing a group that participated and one that is planning to participate in the future and assessing prior to and after participation in the program seems more ideal. 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 a short international volunteer work project had a large impact on the Japanese participants. The outcomes of such projects need to be further investigated in a longitudinal design with a control group 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 the globalizing world.

Bio Data

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