

Development of Global Competencies through Model United Nations

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This article reveals the preliminary findings of a three-year mixed-methods research project to investigate university students' participation in an international Model United Nations conference and their development of global competencies. It addresses the Japanese Ministry of Education's (MEXT) continued call for fostering "global human resources" (global *jinzai*) at tertiary institutions (MEXT, 2012). The article presents findings of eighteen students who underwent a quantitative and qualitative assessment of their global competencies, pre- and post-participation in a Model United Nations conference. Findings suggest positive development of the participants' broad global competencies, especially in their self-management skills. Still, both positive and negative changes in various areas of the participants' global competency portray a more complicated impact from their participation in the Model United Nations.

本稿は、模擬国連会議への参加とグローバル・コンピテンシーの育成を目的とした3年間の混合研究プロジェクトの予備的な成果を明らかにするものである。これは、日本の文部科学省が高等教育機関における「グローバル人材」の育成を求め続けていることに対応するものである(MEXT、2012)。本論文では、模擬国連会議への参加前後に実施されたグローバル・コンピテンシーの定量的・定性的評価を受けた18名の学生を対象とした調査結果を報告する。分析結果から、参加者のグローバル・コンピテンシー、特に自己管理能力に関して、統計的に有意な向上が認められた。しかしながら、グローバル・コンピテンシーの諸領域においては、肯定的な変化と否定的な変化が混在しており、模擬国連参加がもたらす影響の複雑性が示唆される。

What are Global Competencies?

Global competencies refer to the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values that enable individuals to effectively navigate and engage in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world (OECD, 2018). Global competencies go beyond the ability to speak a foreign language or understand different cultures; they encompass the ability to:

- **Think critically and analytically:** Analyze complex global issues, evaluate information from diverse sources, and form reasoned judgments.
- **Communicate effectively:** Interact respectfully and productively with people from different backgrounds, both verbally and nonverbally.
- **Collaborate and cooperate:** Work effectively with individuals and groups from diverse cultures to achieve shared goals.
- **Show empathy and intercultural sensitivity:** Understand and appreciate different perspectives, values, and beliefs, and respond to them with respect and understanding.
- **Take action:** Engage in responsible and ethical ways to address global challenges and contribute to a more just and sustainable world.

Many global competency frameworks highlighting aptitudes, such as those above, have been created and promoted by international and educational organizations, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), OxFam, American Foreign Service (AFS) Intercultural Programs, and the International Baccalaureate (IB) (Fast, 2022). Each varies somewhat depending on the organization's mission, geographic location, cultural orientation, etc.

This study measured the global competencies of Model United Nations (MUN) delegates using the Global Competency Inventory (GCI) created by Kozai Group, Inc (n.d). It was designed to measure the following (see Table 1):

Table 1
Global Competency Inventory Categories and Sub-categories

Perception Management	Relationship Management	Self-Management
Nonjudgementalness	Relationship Interest	Optimism
Inquisitiveness	Interpersonal Relationship	Self-Confidence
Tolerance of Ambiguity	Emotional Sensitivity	Self-Identity
Cosmopolitanism	Self-Awareness	Emotional Resilience
Interest Flexibility	Social Flexibility	Non-stress Tendency
		Stress Management

The attributes noted above significantly differ from those in published global frameworks by the OECD, AFS, IB, and other international organizations. The GCI was designed to measure an individual's perception of self and others, and how that individual manages relationships and themselves. It does not measure or factor global competencies such as thinking skills, ability to 'take action,' etc. Yet, it does cover concepts related to open-mindedness and empathy for others. Thus, it was chosen as a tool for this research project.

What is the Model United Nations?

MUN is a student-led simulation of the work of the United Nations (UN) and its constituent bodies and agencies. Participating students take on the role of diplomats, called delegates, representing various UN member states. They must work together to address multiple global issues. Over several days of a MUN conference, delegates negotiate and write a document shared shared goals related to real-world international issues.

MUN conferences happen worldwide in varying conditions, formats, and with different outcomes. National Model United Nations (NMUN) is one of the world's oldest and largest, taking place in spring each year in New York and drawing thousands of university students from around the world to take part in a modern simulation of the work of the UN (National Model United Nations, 2025). In addition, NMUN hosts an international conference at different universities each year, ranging from Japan to Canada. The current project takes place with students who participated in the National Model United Nations 2023 Germany conference in late November, 2023.

Model United Nations Preparation and Process

Before participating in the MUN event, students undertake a lengthy preparation process. Participating students participated in a 16-week preparatory course consisting of lectures and outside student-led sessions to practice discussion and negotiation, and to hone policy ideas. Student delegates must first learn about the country they plan to represent at the MUN conference to advocate for the country's position and policies in an international setting. Furthermore, students must study the UN to participate in a simulation of the selected body or agency (General Assembly, Economic and Social Council, Security Council, etc.). They must also study both the history and structure of the UN, as well as the current status of various international issues and the related Conventions, Resolutions, and Declarations related to these topics. Student delegates must have enough knowledge and understanding of the member state and its position in the international community to successfully role-play as a government representative from the state's government at the UN. For the students who participated in the project, this research preparation took place over several months in both professor-led and student-led assignments and practice.

In addition to the requisite knowledge and understanding necessary for successful participation, there is an additional conference structure and related rules of procedure (RoP) that student delegates must learn to move through the conference process. RoP at a MUN conference differs in each event but typically consists of parliamentary rules that control the flow of the document writing process and how the body adopts documents. NMUN RoP does not reflect the writing process that happens at the UN, as real-world document drafting can take months, but it exists to help facilitate the work of student delegates during the four-day conference.

Finally, there is an additional level of preparation for the students participating in the project because they are English language learners. A combined two decades of MUN experience by the researchers and much academic research have established that while participating student delegates have among the highest levels of competency among their peers, there are still areas for development and improvement necessary for these student delegates to participate in a successful MUN conference. In particular, the development of academic writing skills to help contribute to the writing process during the conference (Zenuk-Nishide, 2015), as well as the development of speaking skills to participate in discussion and negotiation with other delegates effectively (Nasution & Sukmawati, 2019), are among the most critical areas where students of all proficiencies must improve to better participate in the MUN conference.

Model United Nations Benefits

Previous research has already established the benefits for student development through participation in MUN conferences. The development of language proficiency and skills has been demonstrated for English language learners in terms of writing skills (Zenuk-Nishide, 2015), negotiation skills (Zenuk-Nishide, 2011), and overall language proficiency in an international setting (Tatsuki & Zenuk-Nishide, 2021). Furthermore, for all participants in MUN conferences, research has established the development of political efficacy (Levy, 2018), building an understanding of international relations (Calossi & Cotichchia, 2018; Jesuit & Endless, 2018), and overall changes in self efficacy (Zenuk-Nishide et al., 2019). However, the specific development of students' global competencies through participation in MUN conferences has not been thoroughly investigated. Thus, this project examines the following question: To what extent does participation in a Model United Nations conference develop the global competencies of English language learning students?

Methodologies

Quantitative Study

First, the research question was investigated using a quantitative method. Quantifying an element of human social psychology, such as global competency, is notoriously tricky. Still, the researchers thought it essential to include some third-party measurement of the target trait to provide a more comprehensive analysis of student development. The GCI is a quantitative assessment tool developed by Kozai Group, Inc. (2023). The GCI is a 150-item inventory that asks participants to evaluate statements on a 7-point Likert scale to see how various statements apply to their opinions, values, and beliefs regarding their global competency. Participants then receive a report with a composite score based on their answers in categories and sub-categories. These scores give them advice and recommendations on further developing their global competency.

Eighteen students from two different universities participated in the project and were selected to attend the NMUN Germany 2023 conference. The participants included 13 female and four male undergraduates in their first through fourth years and one female research student. Twelve undergraduates were English Language and Literature Majors, while the other five majored in International Relations.

After receiving institutional and participant consent, the participating students took the GCI at the start of the preparation process, approximately in August 2023, and then again after participating in the NMUN conference, approximately in December 2023.

The participant cohort was varied, including students who had previous experience with MUN activities and those who did not, those who had lived abroad previously and those who had not, as well as a variety of English language proficiencies and knowledge of international relations and the UN.

For the quantitative analysis, the researchers received the raw data from the completed GCI, which included answers to the individual questions and the total scores for each category and subcategory. The raw scores for both the pre- and post-conference participation for the categories and subcategories were then analyzed via a paired two-tailed *t*-test to determine the statistical correlation between their pre- and post-development of student global competencies.

Discoveries

After performing a two-tailed *t*-test between pre- and post- assessment of global competencies, the results for each major category and subcategory are as follows (see Table 2):

Table 2

Results of the Global Competencies Inventory

	Pre-Test Mean	Pre- Test SD	Post-Test Mean	Post-Test SD	Mean Difference	<i>p</i> -value
Global Competencies	696.28	95.18	729.06	84.59	32.78	0.04*
1. Relationship Management	240.78	35.31	248.39	31.84	7.61	0.12
1.1 Relationship Interest	45.22	6.47	47.06	5.38	1.83	0.12
1.2 Interpersonal Engagement	47.67	7.47	46.78	5.26	-0.89	0.51
1.3 Social Flexibility	61.17	14.33	65.94	13.28	4.78	0.04*
1.4 Emotional Sensitivity	40.11	7.94	41.78	7.57	1.67	0.16
1.5 Self-Awareness	46.61	7.37	47.33	8.01	0.72	0.52

	Pre-Test Mean	Pre- Test SD	Post-Test Mean	Post-Test SD	Mean Difference	p-value
2. Perception Management	228.50	27.92	237.50	28.69	9.00	0.19
2.1 Non Judgmentalness	39.72	6.75	41.00	7.38	1.28	0.51
2.2 Inquisitiveness	55.78	8.19	58.44	7.98	2.67	0.14
2.3 Tolerance of Ambiguity	51.28	8.63	52.17	8.58	0.89	0.65
2.4 Cosmopolitanism	27.67	10.09	28.72	8.67	1.06	0.48
2.5 Interest Flexibility	54.06	9.72	57.17	7.85	3.11	0.15
3. Self-Management	227.00	40.99	242.67	34.64	15.67	0.02*
3.1 Optimism	53.11	9.61	56.33	7.28	3.22	0.15
3.2 Self-Confidence	45.94	10.34	49.22	9.87	3.28	0.09
3.3 Self-Identity	40.06	7.35	47.06	7.61	7.00	0.0002***
3.4 Emotional Resilience	35.78	9.67	37.33	8.56	1.56	0.43
3.5 Non-Stress Tendency	21.28	7.69	21.72	6.72	0.44	0.72
3.6 Stress Management	29.67	8.44	31.00	7.11	1.33	0.28

* = $p < 0.05$; *** = $p < 0.001$

As seen from the data above, the quantitative assessment had varied results regarding its impact on developing global competencies and related categories and sub-categories. As for the correlation between participation in MUN and the positive development of global competencies, we can see a statistically significant relationship with a p -value of 0.04, giving evidence of MUN participation's positive impact. However, of the three main categories, only *Self-management* shows statistical significance with a p -value of

0.02, while *Relationship management* and *Perception management* are not statistically significant. Furthermore, of the 16 sub-categories, only *Social flexibility* and *Self-identity* show a statistically significant relationship. However, all categories and 15 of the 16 sub-categories showed a positive increase in the mean difference between pre- and post- assessment of the GCI, which could be used as evidence of the positive impact of participating in a MUN event.

The quantitative results here provide clear evidence for improved global competencies, both in the positive increase in mean difference for all but one of the categories and subcategories and the statistical significance of the pre-/post-development of general global competency. However, there is a need for an additional qualitative approach to investigate the development of student traits through this process, which will be discussed in the following section.

Qualitative Study

The post-participation quantitative assessment was conducted at each university shortly after returning from the NMUN conference. However, due to only one of the researchers being trained to conduct post-assessment reflections, only nine students from one of the universities participated in a follow-up qualitative interview study. This qualitative aspect of the project reflects on the changes in global competencies as measured by that quantitative assessment and allows participating students to reflect on their own development through their participation at the MUN conference.

The GCI results are compiled into a Global Competencies Inventory Report, intended to be jointly interpreted by both the examinee and a GCI-trained intermediary, preferably one who has some history with the examinee and knows them well. One researcher received this training from Kozai in 2019 and thus was able to conduct one-on-one sessions with students he had previous experience teaching and help them interpret and evaluate their GCI results.

1. The semi-structured sessions lasted approximately 30 minutes. During this time, the students were asked the following questions:
Did the overall NMUN experience (including the 16-week class and conference) affect your global competency development?
2. Do you agree with the GCI scores you received?
3. What areas do you want to focus on and improve in the future?

The students answered the first question before seeing their GCI results. Then, their statements were compared with the scores received in each inventory category, allowing them to agree, disagree, comment, or question the results. Finally, the students were asked which GCI categories and subcategories they would like to focus on and improve upon, and what strategies they might consider (note that the GCI Report provides three suggestions for improving its various categories). For example, to improve self-confidence, it recommends: “Choose a specific area in which a lack of self-confidence causes you difficulty. Obtain feedback from others on your performance in that domain to determine whether your perception of your performance is accurate... Keep a journal of what you learn from this to improve your self-confidence.” (Kozai Group, 2023, p. 20).

Discoveries

Overall, the participants and the researcher intermediary felt that the GCI Feedback Reports accurately measured most of their global competence levels in the various domains *at the moment* they took the pre- and post- assessments. Summary groupings of how interviewees responded to their results are as follows:

- **Three interviewees showed improvement across all three categories** (*Perception management, Relationship management, and Self-management*): It’s hard to draw any overall conclusions about the three students other than they approached the NMUN project with open minds and positivity. Time did not allow for the targeted development of global competencies in the pre-conference class. Two participants said that it was their first overseas MUN conference, and they had few expectations. For the third student, it was her second international MUN experience, and while it was by no means easier, she commented that she was able to find a fulfilling role within her working committee during the working paper process. Thus, their lack of expectations may have helped increase their *Perception management* scores. Meanwhile, successful interactions with others during the trip and at the conference may have positively affected their *Relationship management* and *Self-management* scores.
- **Two interviewees showed improvements as well as ‘reality checks’**: These students had scores that went down between their pre- and post- GCI assessments and felt that their lower post scores were accurate. For example, a student who had never been overseas had a pre-assessment score of 5 for ‘non-judgmentalness’ but scored a 3 in her post-assessment. Upon reflecting on her difficulties in Germany, she realized that she was closer to a 3 than a 5 in terms of being non-judgmental of other cultures.

- **One interviewee who lived in the UK for a year prior showed few changes**: She and her professor both felt that her relatively high score was due to her year in the UK, which had a more significant impact on her global competency development than her one-semester Model UN experience.
- **One interviewee tested low and remained low**: This student, while showing small gains in non-judgmentalness, emotional resilience, and stress management, ultimately did not gain much in terms of global competencies through the NMUN experience, but believed that she could improve more, perhaps with continued intercultural experiences and competency development strategies over the long term.

There were two out of the nine students whose scores were inaccurate in the opinions of the examinee and/or their professor:

- **One interviewee tested low and remained low**: The student felt the score was accurate, while the professor did not. This student is known by her peers as a solid leader (a former MUN Chair) who is particularly trustworthy in relationship management. Yet she admitted that she had very low self-confidence. The researcher believes that her lack of confidence undermined her ability to accurately self-assess on the pre- and post-GCI assessments, thus rendering her scores inaccurate.
- **One interviewee had a lower post score**: The student and her professor felt this was inaccurate overall, but did reflect her state of mind when she took the post-GCI assessment. According to the student, she was much more focused on job hunting after returning from Germany and feeling like she wanted to put everything related to MUN behind her. This negative mindset she felt was reflected in her low results. When asked if she felt the NMUN experience had helped her develop global competencies like those described in the report, she felt very strongly that it had, and her professor agreed.

The qualitative results described in this section correlate with the quantitative results in Section 4. They both revealed overall global competency improvement through preparing for and participating in NMUN Germany 2023. Interviewees’ GCI Reports noted improvements in *Inquisitiveness, Self-identity, Relationship interest, and Stress management*. The students themselves also acknowledged these improvements.

The qualitative study further revealed competencies needing improvement for the group: *Tolerance of ambiguity, Self-confidence, Emotional sensitivity, Self-identity, Optimism,*

and *Non-stress tendency*. For the nine interviewees, student *Self-identity*, in particular, was negatively affected by participation in NMUN. Thus, if these students are representative of their peers, targeted in-class strategies to improve students' sense of self could be beneficial before engaging in future MUN conferences overseas.

Regarding the Tool

The GCI attempts to quantify complex and interrelated social-psychological traits in a way that can be tracked and assessed among different cohorts and across longitudinal surveys. However, the GCI clearly states that it is not an objective metric but a personalized development tool that can prepare better businesspeople who work in international environments (Kozai Group, Inc., 2023). Thus, it is helpful for these particular situations. However, for students taking part in MUN events, especially English language learners, several issues with the GCI impede it from being an entirely appropriate measurement.

In particular, students' English ability is not factored into the GCI. While other global competency frameworks, such as the IB Learner Profile, highlight the ability to express oneself "confidently and creatively in more than one language" (IBO, 2023) as a global competency, measuring foreign language ability is beyond the scope of the GCI. Thus, students' English development through MUN must be measured by other means and merits further study.

In addition, the GCI's presentation of students' global competency results in the form of a numerical score can have the negative side effect of labeling students as 'global' or not. Highly motivated students who take the inventory and receive their reports without the help of an intermediary may react negatively to what they perceive as a low score and lose motivation to improve. This might be different if the GCI results were presented in a way that did not involve numbers. Thus, the GCI results should be considered with other information (e.g., English proficiency measures), as well as students' and intermediaries' own opinions.

The GCI works best as a measure that provides input on an individual's global competencies at the time they take it (similar to getting one's blood pressure checked) and provides helpful advice for improving global competencies for the future. In addition, the GCI is a good tool for teachers to see trends among groups of students (as noted in the section on Qualitative Discoveries).

Limitations

The project has several limitations, from having students self-assess through an inventory to creating a composite metric of their development. First, response bias is something that will invariably affect the data. Second, the Japanese students took the inventory in English, and while their English skills are advanced, they may have misunderstood some questions. Furthermore, while the questions were written to be simple and straightforward, there were cases where questions suddenly switched from positive to negative statements, which might have led to students answering the opposite of their intended response. No process for overcoming these limitations was employed. Finally, the quantitative and qualitative studies were conducted with a small selection of participants, whereas a larger sample of participants would increase the reliability of the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the project.

Conclusion

Through the use of the quantitative GCI assessment and the follow-up joint interview with a trained intermediary, it is clear that participation in the MUN conference, both the preparation process and the conference itself, led to the development of student global competencies. While the varied aspects that compose global competency are challenging to isolate and investigate, there are also some clear tendencies in terms of the categories and sub-categories that these English language learners were able to develop more significantly than others. The project results show that participation in MUN conferences continues to benefit participating students. The researchers hope that more schools incorporate MUN-style curricula into their programs, that faculty familiarize themselves with MUN teaching methods, and that teachers encourage students to participate in MUN conferences and similar events.

Bio Data:

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