



Investigating the Mindset toward English and Intercultural Understanding of Japanese and Taiwanese University Students - A Comparative Study -

メタデータ	言語: English 出版者: 宮崎大学教育学部 公開日: 2023-09-15 キーワード (Ja): キーワード (En): 作成者: 本部, エミ メールアドレス: 所属: 宮崎大学
URL	<a href="https://doi.org/10.34481/0002000053">https://doi.org/10.34481/0002000053</a>

# **Investigating the Mindset toward English and Intercultural Understanding of Japanese and Taiwanese University Students -A Comparative Study-**

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## **Abstract**

The present study compares the mindset of Japanese and Taiwanese university students based on the questionnaires conducted after telecollaborative exchanges between these two countries. The purpose is to determine the similarities and differences regarding attitudes toward English learning and intercultural understanding. In 2022, two intercultural telecollaborative exchanges were conducted on May 26 and June 2. Participants were 32 second-year Faculty of Engineering students of the University of Miyazaki, Japan, and 55 second and third-year International Understanding Course students of the National Chiayi University, Taiwan. Each side made oral presentations regarding the culture of its own country in English. A questionnaire was conducted after each exchange. The results of this study revealed that the decrease in Japanese students studying abroad might not be the introverted personality for the young generation. By conducting telecollaborative exchanges, students can better understand intercultural communication and motivate them to learn English as a lingua franca.

## **Introduction**

As we face a world of globalization, our university aims toward a global campus in its third mid-term objective and plans submitted to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. Therefore, to accomplish the objective set by the university, the author in charge of teaching English in fundamental education places importance on strengthening English communicative skills and intercultural understanding of students.

According to the Statistics Bureau of Japan<sup>(1)</sup>, the number of foreigners living in Japan reached over 2.7 million at the end of 2021, comprising about 2.2% of Japan's total population. In addition, Japan's inbound tourism has been growing before COVID-19, among the fastest rates in the world. As we head to a post-pandemic era, the dramatic increase of foreigners in Japan is foreseeable. Raising awareness for learning English as a lingua franca and understanding other cultural aspects is crucial. In addition, university students will have chances to communicate with international students on campus and in their workplace when they step into society. In order to increase the awareness of learning English

while in university, a telecollaborative exchange program was established between the University of Miyazaki (UoM), Japan, and its collaborative university-National Chiayi University (NCYU), Taiwan.

Telecollaborative exchange refers to online communication for language learners in geographically distant locations to develop their foreign language skills and intercultural competence through collaborative tasks and project-based work<sup>(2)</sup>. This exchange aims to motivate university students to improve their English communication skills and better understand other cultures. Thus, this study investigates university students' mindset toward learning English and intercultural understanding.

### Materials and Methods

In 2022, telecollaborative exchanges were conducted via Microsoft Teams on May 26 and June 2. Participants of the Japan side were 32 second-year Faculty of Engineering students of UoM taking a compulsory English class. Participants of the Taiwan side were 55 second and third-year International Understanding Course students of the NCYU.

Students were divided into five groups for each counterpart. On May 26, two groups and June 2, three groups from each side made oral presentations regarding the culture of their own country. The presentations were about 6 to 8 minutes each. Topics were:

	Taiwan Side	Japan Side
Group 1	Night Market	Kyushu Foods
Group 2	Tea Culture	Japanese Anime
Group 3	Human Relationship	Japanese Comic
Group 4	Chinese Triad House	Manner of eating Tempura and Sushi
Group 5	Taboo	New Year's Tradition

After the presentation, each group on each side was connected by LINE App. LINE QR codes of each group were exchanged in advance. By using LINE, students were able to talk and discuss the contents of the presentations while seeing each other online.

To investigate the mindset of students, students were asked to fill out a questionnaire after each exchange. The questionnaires were original questions made by the author and consisted of two parts, one for each exchange. The first part was ten questions regarding the psychological perception of using English. The second part was nine questions regarding intercultural aspects. Students needed to answer the questions on a Likert scale, 1-5, with 5 being the positive end of Strongly Yes and 1 being the negative end of Strong No. In Part 2 of the questionnaire, after Question 4, students were asked to write down three countries they wanted to visit; Questions 7, 8, and 9 required students to write their opinions and comments. Japanese students answered the questionnaire on the university's online system, WebClass. On the other hand, Taiwanese students answered the questionnaire on Google Forms. The results were compared and discussed in the present study.

## Results

The results for each questionnaire, shown below, were collected and analyzed. Table 1 and Table 2 are Questionnaire Part 1 and Part 2, respectively. In Part 2, Question 4, only the top 7 countries are shown for comparison purposes. Additionally, the complete list of countries students want to visit and the answers to questions that require written answers are under Appendices.

Table 1 Psychological aspects of using English as a communication tool (n=45 Taiwan, n=25 Japan)

Part 1					
Q1. I have experience communicating with foreigners in English.					
%	5	4	3	2	1
Taiwan	31.1	31.1	11.1	20.0	6.7
Japan	40.0	40.0	20.0	0.0	0.0
Q2. I can start a conversation with foreigners in English.					
%	5	4	3	2	1
Taiwan	20.0	28.9	20.0	28.9	2.2
Japan	32.0	20.0	32.0	16.0	0.0
Q3. When I speak in English, I feel good or happy.					
%	5	4	3	2	1
Taiwan	11.1	24.4	33.3	26.7	4.4
Japan	40.0	28.0	32.0	0.0	0.0
Q4. It was fun to communicate with students at an overseas university.					
%	5	4	3	2	1
Taiwan	48.9	33.3	15.6	2.2	0.0
Japan	48.0	28.0	24.0	0.0	0.0
Q5. I feel happy when I can understand what others are saying in English.					
%	5	4	3	2	1
Taiwan	40.0	40.0	17.8	2.2	0.0
Japan	48.0	32.0	16.0	4.0	0.0
Q6. I feel happy when others understand what I say in English.					
%	5	4	3	2	1
Taiwan	53.3	40.0	6.7	0.0	0.0
Japan	48.0	40.0	12.0	0.0	0.0
Q7. It was very difficult to communicate in English.					
%	5	4	3	2	1
Taiwan	28.9	20.0	26.7	17.8	6.7
Japan	48.0	36.0	12.0	4.0	0.0
Q8. I want to study English more.					
%	5	4	3	2	1
Taiwan	31.1	42.2	22.2	2.2	2.2
Japan	56.0	32.0	12.0	0.0	0.0
Q9. I was able to learn English from this online exchange.					
%	5	4	3	2	1
Taiwan	22.2	40.0	24.4	8.9	4.4
Japan	56.0	36.0	8.0	0.0	0.0
Q10. I want to have more chances to use English.					
%	5	4	3	2	1
Taiwan	31.1	33.3	31.1	2.2	2.2
Japan	44.0	28.0	28.0	0.0	0.0

Table 2 Intercultural aspect of telecollaborative exchange (n=45 Taiwan, n=25 Japan)

## Part 2

Q1. I think intercultural understanding is important through this online exchange.

%	5	4	3	2	1
Taiwan	44.4	48.9	4.4	2.2	0.0
Japan	68.0	16.0	16.0	0.0	0.0

Q2. I was able to know the differences and similarities between Taiwan and Japan.

%	5	4	3	2	1
Taiwan	20.0	28.9	20.0	28.9	2.2
Japan	52.0	36.0	12.0	0.0	0.0

Q3. Through the exchange, I was able to broaden my global viewpoints.

%	5	4	3	2	1
Taiwan	11.1	24.4	33.3	26.7	4.4
Japan	56.0	28.0	16.0	0.0	0.0

Q4. If there is a chance, I want to go abroad.

%	5	4	3	2	1
Taiwan	48.9	33.3	15.6	2.2	0.0
Japan	56.0	20.0	20.0	0.0	4.0

Please list the top three countries that you want to visit. (Top 7 countries)

	Taiwanese	%	Japanese	%
No. 1	Japan	21	USA	21
No. 2	USA	14	Korea	11
No. 3	Korea	7	Australia	11
No. 4	UK	7	Taiwan	11
No. 5	France	6	UK	10
No. 6	Switzerland	6	France	10
No. 7	Australia	5	Italy	4

Q5. If there is a chance, I want to study abroad.

%	5	4	3	2	1
Taiwan	40.0	40.0	17.8	2.2	0.0
Japan	28.0	20.0	40.0	4.0	8.0

%	Long term	Short term
Taiwan	44.0	56.0
Japan	33.0	67.0

Q6. I would like to participate in international exchange programs.

%	5	4	3	2	1
Taiwan	53.3	40.0	6.7	0.0	0.0
Japan	16.7	37.5	37.5	0.0	8.3

Q7. What kind of international exchange program or event would you like to participate in?

Q8. If you are not interested in international exchange programs or study abroad, please give your reasons

Q9. Please write down any comments you might have.

## Discussion

Extraversion-Introversion plays a significant role in language acquisition<sup>(3)</sup>. Previous studies reported that Japanese students are shy and unwilling to speak in English class<sup>(4,5)</sup>. They rarely initiate discussion, avoid bringing up new topics, seldom ask questions for clarification, and do not volunteer answers<sup>(6)</sup>. Therefore, Japanese students possess an image of introversion when studying or using English. Surprisingly, based on the results of our questionnaires, Q2, most students answered that they are able to initiate a conversation with foreigners which indicates a discrepancy in the introversion image of Japanese students. Followed by Q3 and Q4, the majority of students feel happy and think it is fun to use English, even though they think it is very difficult to communicate in English (Q7), and at the same time, they want to study English more (Q8). Taiwanese students also showed a similar trend. However, most Taiwanese students answered negatively when asked if they could initiate a conversation with foreigners (Q2). Unlike Japanese students, 64% of Taiwanese students feel that they do not feel good or happy when speaking English.

Regarding the intercultural aspects in Part 2 of the questionnaire, most students from both sides expressed strongly that intercultural understanding is important, as shown in Q1. Interestingly, in Q2, the answers to “I was able to know the differences and similarities between Taiwan and Japan” were almost evenly spread out from yes to no by Taiwanese students. On the other hand, Japanese students could know the differences and similarities through the presentations in the exchange. The answers in Q4 could explain the reason. Students were asked to list three countries they wanted to visit. Japan is at the top of the list, answered by Taiwanese students. Taiwanese students seem interested in Japan, can get information regarding Japan, or are in contact with Japanese culture in their daily life. In comparison, the country Japanese students want to go at the top of the list is the U.S.A. Taiwan, Korea, and Australia have identical scores and are ranked second place. It could be that Taiwan and Korea are close neighboring countries.

In the answers to Part 2, Q5, regarding studying abroad, 80% of Taiwanese students showed strongly yes. Similarly, Japanese students also showed a willingness to study abroad at close to 50%. Although, the highest answer for Japanese students was 40% in the middle. Students from both countries prefer the short-term to the long-term if they have a chance to study abroad. In Taiwan, the number of students studying abroad has increased steadily from 2012 to 2022, excluding 2020 and 2021 due to COVID-19<sup>(7)</sup>.

Frequently, we hear that the Japanese young generation is more introverted and does not want to go abroad willingly. In recent years, the number of students studying abroad has been decreasing. However, according to some articles<sup>(8,9)</sup>, the main reason might differ from the introverted personality of the young generation. The result of our survey agrees with the reports. In Q4, 56% of Japanese students strongly agreed to go abroad. Thus, the decrease can be interpreted as due to the Japanese economic situation or household financial reasons. In addition, a few students expressed in the questionnaire that they worry about infectious diseases and the safety of foreign countries.

In conclusion, the present study reveals that young generation university students are not introverted as images of public opinion. As language teachers conduct telecollaborative exchanges, students can benefit from using English for communication and exposure to other cultures. Therefore, the author hopes that students realize that English as a lingua franca is essential and that they are strongly recommended to improve their English communicative skills in the university.

### Acknowledgment

Special thanks to Assistant Professor Angel Chen, Department of Applied History, Director of International Cooperation, Office of International Affairs, National Chiayi University, for cooperating in making the telecollaboration exchanges possible.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: A complete list of the top three countries that students want to visit

	Taiwan	%	Japan	%
Africa	3	2.3		
Australia	6	4.7	8	11.1
Belguim			1	1.4
Cambodia	1	0.8		
Canada	5	3.9	1	1.4
China	2	1.6	2	2.8
Czech	2	1.6		
E.U.	3	2.3		
Ecuador	1	0.8		
Egypt	1	0.8	1	1.4
Finland	2	1.6		0.0
France	8	6.3	7	9.7
Germany	4	3.1	2	2.8
Greece	1	0.8	1	1.4
Iceland	3	2.3		
Italy			3	4.2
Japan	27	21.1		
Korea	9	7.0	8	11.1
Netherlands	2	1.6	1	1.4
New Zealand	3	2.3	1	1.4
Norway	4	3.1		
Peru	1	0.8		
Singapore			1	1.4
Spain	1	0.8	2	2.8
Sweden	2	1.6		
Switzerland	7	5.5	1	1.4
Taiwan			8	11.1
Thailand	2	1.6	2	2.8
Turkey	1	0.8		
UK	9	7.0	7	9.7
USA	18	14.1	15	20.8



## Appendix 2: Answers to Q7

<b>7. What kind of international exchange program or event you would like to participate in?</b>
<b>Japanese Students</b>
アメリカまたはカナダ長期留学
I want to participate in international exchange which can support children in Africa.
I would like to join festivals which related to culture exchange from several countries. By that, i think its more easier to be exposed to numerous unique culture around the world.
Intercultural exchange is possible.
カナダ長期留学
アメリカ長期留学
今回のような海外の文化を知ることができるような交流。
A program that teaches foreign children what they can teach.
Cultural exchange
Culture Event
Go on a trip together.
I can speak with native speakers a lot.
I want to do study abroad in English-speaking countries. Now, I am consulting with Global Support Office, University of Miyazaki. If I can, I want to go to overseas.
I want to meet many people from abroad.
Students who study English to understand thinking about society explain those ideas.
ホームステイ
海外の大学生と日常的な会話ができるようなイベント
<b>Taiwanese Students</b>
The exchange of food and culture.
打工度假
I'd participate in international symposium.
student exchange or language exchange
交換學生
Exchange Students
Local festivals
About sport,like basketball or track and field
kpop concert
藝術文化交流OR友校交換生
交換 留學
線上交流
交換生 打工遊學
産業學習 知識交流
biological seminar
Sport
短期交流
Cultural exchange program that can experience the local life and events.
線上課程、換宿體驗 (home stay)、短期交換體驗 (5-7day)
culture introduction、the view of international event、the essence of local expert
exchange student
biotechnology program or agriculture technology program
Share our culture , local cuisine. Learning about the culture of that country.
美術、藝術類。例如畫畫類型、文學類、電影類，對文學小說的感想、對電影的想法、看法
write letter, culture exchange

Appendix 3: Answers to Q8

<b>8. If you are not interested in any of the international exchange programs or study abroad programs, please give your reasons.</b>
<b>Japanese Students</b>
I like Japanese. I'm worried about communicating and eating.
I am interested in international exchange and study abroad programs.
I'm not interested in foreign countries.
I'm still nervous about interacting with other countries.
コロナウイルスの心配
日本での学習の遅れの心配
日本が安全であり離れたくないから。
<b>Taiwanese Students</b>
No. I. I'm interested.
I am interesting about it,so no reason for me
花費較多，語文方面需要學習大約80，困難高
I am interested.
語言能力不足
因為本身英文能力不足，然後自己目前也沒有要學習外語的動力。主要未來就學或就業是以同語言的國家為主
Because I'm afraid of speaking English.
留學，意味著要出國，我還是想在這照顧家人，雖然家人會說多出去看看，不要因為他們關在本國，但反方面，我很依賴家人，儘管不再同縣市，我還是希望能用電話把持聯絡。也有方法使把家人接去國外，但家人不一定會習慣國外的生活，畢竟他們生活在台灣半輩子

## Appendix 4: Answers to Q9

<b>9. Please write down any comments you might have.</b>
<b>Japanese Students</b>
For the first time, I had the opportunity to talk to foreign students online.
I like the detail information and clear voices presented by the presenters. I learnt many new things about taiwanese and japanese cultures.
I think Taiwan is near Japan but there are different things. Especially, I think we should pay attention about manners.
I was interested in Taiwan.
It was a very good experience.
The class makes me fun. I had a precious experience foe me.
Zoomでしたが、台湾の生徒の発表を聞いて楽しかったです。
台湾の文化を知ることができて台湾に行ってみたいなと思いました。
<b>Taiwanese Students</b>
Thanks for Japanese students to communicate together. Wish guys have a nice day
this program is really good
Nice present, thanks everyone
I don't think it's easy to get a chance to go abroad now.
It very intrestig thank you!
能夠跟日本學生交流我很開心，希望以後有更多這種機會
Can have more country to communicate
Thank you for arranging this programs, it is very nice! I have learn a lot more about Japanese culture.
It is interesting experience.
Thank you all for preparing and presentation. You're English speak very well and clearly. Hope you guys also understood our introduction and have a good travel in Taiwan someday :)
I am honored to communicate with Japanese students.
我覺得很棒對於這次的交流，理解不同地區文化差異，拓展自己的視野且了解別人的不同。
I love Japanese culture very much,such as the summer festival in Japan, Kimono,etc. I'm really really happy that I have this opportunity to learn about Japanese culture. By the way, I have a Japanese friend who often share the Japanese food and culture,which makes me long for Japan very much. I hope that I could go to Japan to taste delicious food and view the beautiful scenery of Japan. Thanks for reading 😊
我覺得有老師在我們學生(台灣、日本)之間，當作橋樑很好，這樣不會尷尬(我最討厭尷尬了)
I like this culture exchange experience and thanks for two teachers diligently arranged the course.