

[Article]

Intercultural Communication in Student-produced, Multimodal, Digital Artefacts

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of virtual exchanges (VE) on enhancing intercultural communicative competence (ICC) among Japanese learners of English as a second language (L2), utilising student-produced multimodal digital artifacts focused on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through an analysis of pre- and post-project survey responses from Japanese university students who engaged in a VE project with peers from China and Spain, this research explores the potential of VE in fostering cultural understanding. The findings reveal a positive shift in students' attitudes towards other cultures, improved perceptions of international relations, and an increased openness to living abroad. Furthermore, the study highlights the role of multimodal digital artifacts in promoting active engagement and deeper cultural immersion. By leveraging digital platforms for authentic intercultural exchange, this VE project advances a nuanced appreciation of global diversity, underscoring the pedagogical value of integrating VE and multimodal learning in language education. This paper contributes to the expanding discourse on innovative language teaching methods, offering insights for educators and policymakers on incorporating technology-enhanced learning strategies to prepare learners for the demands of a globalised world.

Keywords: Intercultural communicative competence, virtual exchange, multimodality, video, SDG

Introduction

In an era marked by rapid globalisation and a near ubiquitous uptake of digital technologies, the ability to communicate effectively across boundaries with people from different cultural backgrounds has become a critical skill. Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in second language acquisition is a concept which embodies the interface of linguistic proficiency and cultural awareness, enabling individuals to navigate the complexities of global interactions with sensitivity and understanding. This paper examines the enhancement of ICC among Japanese foreign language learners of English as a second language (L2) through virtual exchanges (VE), which represents an opportunity in language education to leverage the power of digital platforms to connect learners from diverse cultural backgrounds and facilitate

authentic communication and cultural exchange.

Given the status of English as a *lingua franca* in international communication, it is particularly important for learners to develop these skills in their L2, English. The integration of ICC learning approaches in L2 education not only enhances linguistic skills but also fosters a deeper understanding of and respect for cultural diversity, thereby preparing learners to participate more fully in the global community.

Against this backdrop, VE emerges as a potent educational tool, offering L2 English learners enhanced opportunities to engage directly with the target language and culture. Unlike traditional classroom settings, virtual exchanges allow for authentic interaction with native speakers and fellow learners from around the world, either synchronously or asynchronously. VE has been shown to significantly improve language competencies and intercultural understanding, as learners are able to practice and apply their language skills in meaningful contexts. The literature on language education and technology-enhanced learning provides ample evidence of the efficacy of VE in promoting linguistic and cultural learning (e.g. Helm, 2015; O'Dowd, 2021), underscoring the potential of these interactions to add value to traditional L2 educational contexts.

The objective of this paper is to assess the impact of a VE project involving students from Japan with students from China and Spain on the Japanese participants' ICC. By engaging in the creation and exchange of videos focused on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the project seeks to provide a content-rich context for learners to explore global issues through the lens of multiple cultures while practicing their English language skills. The SDGs, with their emphasis on global challenges such as poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace, and justice, offer a compelling framework for students to engage in critical social discussions, requiring a deep level of interconnectivity and critical engagement (United Nations, 2015).

The choice of video as the medium for this exchange is deliberate and strategic. In today's digital age, video has become one of the most dominant forms of communication, offering a dynamic and engaging way to share and receive information (Cisco, 2021). The visual and auditory elements of video make it a powerful tool for storytelling and persuasion, allowing for a richer, more nuanced expression of ideas than text alone (Mayer, 2009). Furthermore, the multimodal nature of video production—incorporating speech, text, images, and sound—provides learners with a unique opportunity to exercise greater agency in their language learning process. By creating videos, students are not merely passive recipients of language instruction; they become active creators of content, applying their linguistic and cultural knowledge in creative and meaningful ways (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001).

This study contributes to the existing body of literature on innovative methods for teaching and learning English as a second language by examining the effectiveness of student-produced video exchanges in enhancing ICC for Japanese learners of English in higher education settings. Through an analysis of responses to pre- and post-project surveys, this paper aims to show how such an approach can foster a deeper understanding of cultural differences, enhance linguistic proficiency, and prepare learners for the demands of a globalized world. By

highlighting the benefits and challenges of implementing VE in L2 education, this study seeks to offer guidance for educators and policymakers looking to incorporate technology-enhanced learning strategies into their curricula.

This paper will argue that the creation and sharing of video content focused on the SDGs can enhance ICC among Japanese learners of English, fostering not only improved linguistic proficiency but also a deeper understanding and respect for cultural diversity, equipping students with the essential skills needed to navigate and contribute to the global community effectively.

Literature Review

The concept of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) has become an influential element in second language acquisition, reflecting an educational shift towards preparing learners to operate effectively and respectfully across cultural divides. One of the earliest models of ICC was introduced by Michael Byram (1997), presenting a comprehensive framework comprising five key components, or *savoirs*: (1) Attitudes (*savoir être*), fostering curiosity and openness towards other cultures; (2) Knowledge (*savoirs*), understanding social groups and their products and practices; (3) Skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*), enabling individuals to interpret and relate documents or events from another culture to their own; (4) Skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*), allowing individuals to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices; (5) Critical cultural awareness (*savoir engager*), involving the ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices, and products in one's own and other cultures and countries.

Building on foundational theories, such as Byram's model, Darla Deardorff (2006) developed a refined model of intercultural competence by emphasizing the outcome-oriented process of intercultural competence. Deardorff identified a core of intercultural competences, including the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes. She posited that such competence is demonstrated through external outcomes of effective and appropriate behaviour and communication, predicated on an internal transformation that reflects a deep understanding and respect for cultural differences.

In the context of globalisation, and the various problems it brings, the development of ICC is not merely beneficial but essential for learners. The OECD (2018) framework and the Council of Europe's (2018) competences for democratic culture underscore the growing recognition of global competence as critical to education in the 21st century. These frameworks emphasize skills such as critical thinking, cultural awareness, and global citizenship, advocating for education systems to prepare students for the challenges and opportunities of a connected world. Thus, a shift from traditional grammar and vocabulary-centred approaches, which have been common in English language education in Japan, to more comprehensive and innovative methods in language education allowing learners to engage with complex global

and intercultural issues is also essential. Researchers such as Byram & Wagner (2018), Guadamillas Gómez (2017), and Porto, Houghton & Byram (2017) have highlighted the efficacy of these innovative approaches in various contexts. Research suggests that engaging students in intercultural dialogue, project-based learning, and critical thinking about global issues can significantly enhance their ICC, preparing them for the demands of a globalized society. On the other hand, Baker (2015) has found that there is still a need to have these innovative practices more widely and appropriately integrated into language classrooms.

Amidst this development of innovative pedagogical practice, virtual exchange (VE) has emerged in recent decades as an approach in the field of SLA that offers a compelling alternative to traditional language learning and intercultural exchange methods. For students who lack the time or financial wherewithal to travel abroad, VE leverages digital platforms on the internet to facilitate direct communication and collaboration among participants from different physical and cultural backgrounds. From an efficiency standpoint, VE presents a more accessible, cost-effective, and flexible option compared to physical study abroad programs. It eliminates the need for travel and accommodation expenses, making international and intercultural education opportunities more inclusive (Helm, 2015). This accessibility allows a broader range of learners to engage in meaningful intercultural interactions and language practice. As such, VE has the potential to play an important role in developing ICC among participants. O'Dowd (2012) highlighted that VE, or telecollaboration, offers the possibility for significant growth in intercultural sensitivity, an essential component of ICC, while Lenkaitis found that VE "provided a context for intercultural communication to occur" (2020: 267).

VE has also been shown to facilitate the enhancement of various aspects of linguistic proficiency and motivation. Studies have documented improvements in language skills such as vocabulary expansion, grammatical accuracy, and conversational fluency. For example, Kato, et al. (2016) found improved listening and speaking abilities in Japanese students and improved listening abilities in American students from an online exchange. Canals, in a 2020 study with English learners at a Spanish university interacting with Canadian college students found "that learners express higher motivation to learn and find collaborating as part of the VE much more motivating than collaborating with their classmates" (Canals, 2020: 114).

VE also lends itself well to leveraging the affordances of multimodal digital artefacts in education. Multimodality in communication represents the integration of various semiotic resources, such as text, sound, images, and video, to convey meaning. This approach is particularly effective in language learning environments, as it aligns with the cognitive theory of multimedia learning, which posits that individuals learn more deeply from words and pictures than from words alone (Mayer, 2009). In the context of SLA, by combining verbal and visual information, multimodal audio-visual artefacts, such as student-produced videos, can be beneficial in developing both language skills and cultural awareness. The pedagogical value of student-produced videos in L2 learning extends beyond the cognitive benefits. Creating videos encourages learners to engage actively with the language and culture they are studying, fostering creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. It provides students with a sense of agency in their learning process, as they take ownership of the

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content creation, deciding how best to communicate their ideas and narratives.

Godwin-Jones (2018) emphasizes the role of video in facilitating authentic language use and cultural immersion. He points out that student engagement with video creation projects not only aids in developing language proficiency but also helps students understand and interpret cultural practices and nuances firsthand. This hands-on approach to learning mirrors real-world communication, making it an invaluable tool for developing both linguistic and cultural competencies. Yeh (2018) explored the benefits of multimodal video making in developing multiliteracies as perceived by L2 learners in Taiwan. The findings indicated that participants believed that producing videos in English not only improved their language skills but also helped them gain a deeper understanding of cultural nuances.

Feedback from learners involved in video production projects often highlights increased motivation and interest in the language and culture being studied (Castañeda & Rodríguez-González, 2011; Gong, et al., 2019). Students appreciate the opportunity to use the language creatively and contextually, which contrasts with more traditional, textbook-based approaches. The process of planning, scripting, filming, and editing videos encourages learners to collaborate and communicate, further enriching their language learning experience.

Despite the promising advantages of VE, a gap remains in our understanding of its impact across diverse cultural contexts, notably between East Asian and European learners. To the author's best knowledge, there are few studies examining VE interactions with learners from diverse contexts such as between students from East Asian and Europe. This study aims to contribute to the literature in the nexus of language education, intercultural communication, and technology-enhanced learning by examining what changes occur, if any, in the attitudes of Japanese students towards China and Spain as result of engaging in a VE of student-produced digital artefacts. The research question at the heart of this study was:

Can participation in a VE exchange with students from different cultural contexts lead to improved attitudes towards other cultures among Japanese learners of English?

To answer this question, pre- and post-project surveys were administered to assess Japanese students' impressions of China and Spain. The results of the surveys will be presented below.

Description of the Project

The international video digital exchange described here was conducted during the latter half of 2023. The participants were 89 Japanese participants, 68 Chinese participants and 26 Spanish participants.

Students formed small groups of three or four people to collaborate on producing a short, English-language video on one of the 17 SDGs.

Students were given a demonstration in the use of two software tools: a free audio editing

application, Audacity; and a free video editing application, VideoProc Vlogger. However, students were given the freedom to choose different applications to complete their projects. Students were also provided with instruction in the concept of copyright. Given the importance of respecting the laws of copyright, students were encouraged to take their own images, moving or still, wherever possible to complete their videos. They were also introduced to several internet sites where copyright free images and music could be downloaded for use in their projects. A project website was created as a central resource hub, where explanations of the project and links to potentially useful resources were made available, including links to useful sites, applications, and “how-to” tutorials.

Students were asked to create small collaborative groups to produce a video on a single SDG from the perspective of their own country or region. Each group in a class was required to choose a different SDG on which to focus, on a first-come, first-served basis. On completion, the videos were submitted to class instructors and then exchanged between the instructors from each country. All students were then required to watch several videos from each country, including from their own country.

Written peer-feedback was provided by students in all three countries via a rubric designed specifically for the project. The rubric was distributed to students as a fillable form in Microsoft Word. Students were able to provide evaluation of the videos they watched using a five-point Likert scale (Excellent; Good; OK; Not very good; Bad) in various areas as well as writing comments, in English, on what they considered to be well done in the videos they watched and what needed to be done to improve the videos. To assure that a similar amount of feedback was given and received for each video, an equal number of videos to be watched by each student were assigned, at random, by the class instructor. To maintain a sense of objectivity, two caveats were adhered to in assigning videos:

- 1) Students were assigned videos which were focused on a different SDG from the one they themselves had created a video on;
- 2) In the case of watching videos made by other Japanese students, the videos assigned were created by students in classes other than their own.

All students took a nine-item survey prior to beginning the project designed to ascertain their feelings about the people and countries of the other students who participated in the project: China and Spain. However, the focus of this paper is on changes, if any, in attitudes of Japanese students towards Spain and China. Consequently, survey responses from the students in China and Spain are not presented.

Each item on the survey was presented as a statement regarding the other people and countries in the project:

1. I have a positive attitude towards Chinese/Spanish people.
2. I would like to visit China/Spain as a tourist.
3. In 2023, I think Japanese – Chinese/Spanish relations are good.

4. If I found a job in China/Spain that paid more than one in Japan, I would take it.
5. It would be fine with me if my brother or sister married a Chinese/Spanish person.
6. Japanese – Chinese/Spanish relations are better than they were 30 years ago.
7. I would like to live in China/Spain for a while if given the opportunity.
8. I believe Japanese – Chinese/Spanish relations will be better in the future.
9. Personally, I don't have any problems with China/Spain.

Responses were given using a five-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree; Agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Disagree; Strongly Disagree). Two items, statements 1 and 9, relate to students' personal feelings about the other countries; two items, statements 2 and 7, ask about students' feelings about spending time in the other country/culture; two items, statements 4 and 5, are hypothetical statements, although statement 4 does also consider the possibility of spending time in the other country; and three items, statements 3, 6 and 8, relate to students' impressions of international relations between the other two countries and Japan.

The exact same statements were also posed in a survey conducted after the project had been completed. 89 Japanese students from four separate classes in the first or second year of their studies responded to the pre-project survey, and 86 responded to the post-project survey.

The surveys were administered using SurveyMonkey, an online, proprietary survey creation and analysis application. The surveys were administered during class hours. The surveys were administered in English, but Japanese translations of the nine statements were provided to students in the event they were needed.

Results

Due to space considerations, no more than three figures per paper can be displayed in the pages of this journal. Graphic representations of the responses to Statements 1-3 are given below in Figures 1-3. For graphic representations of the responses to Statements 4-9, Figures 4-9 can be viewed at the following internet address: <https://figshare.com/account/articles/25586265>.

As the number of respondents differs slightly between the pre-project survey and the post-project survey (n=89; n=86 respectively), for the sake of clarity the responses to each statement are presented as percentages rather than the number of responses. Responses to the pre-project survey are displayed in black, and those to the post-project survey in grey. Responses towards China and Chinese people are shown in the graph on the left-hand side of each figure and those for Spain and Spanish people on the right-hand side.

Figure 1 shows the results of responses to the first statement:

I have a positive attitude towards Chinese/Spanish people.

As can be seen, attitudes towards the people of both countries improved over the course of the project. Although attitudes towards Chinese people were less favourable than those towards Spanish people in the pre-project survey, they were quite similar in the post-project survey: 77% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they had a positive attitude towards Chinese people and 78% agreed or strongly agreed with respect to Spanish people.

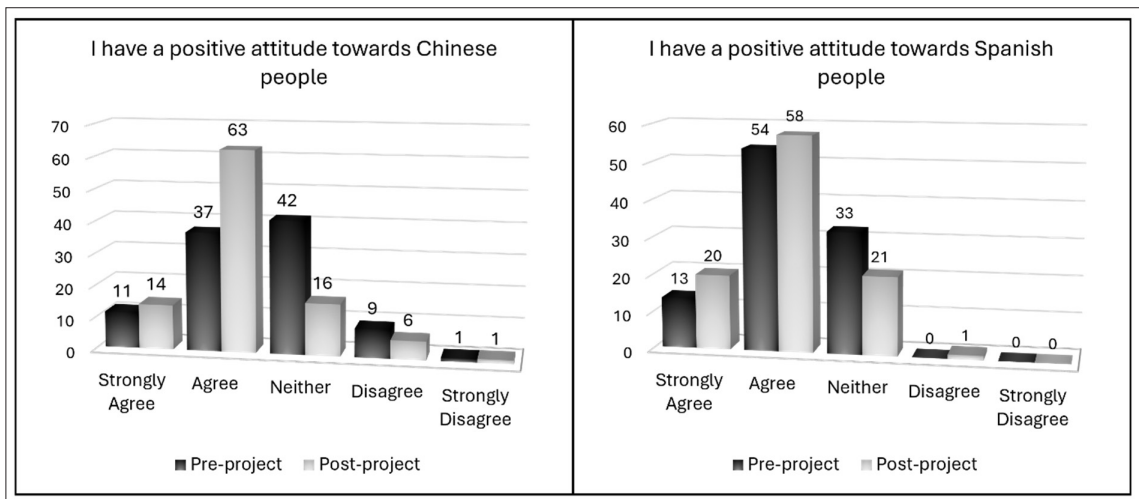


Figure 1. I have a positive attitude towards Chinese/Spanish people.

The larger positive change in attitudes towards Chinese people is most likely explained by the fact that pre-project attitudes towards Spanish people were already very positive. The percentage of students who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement regarding Chinese people only reduced by a small amount. The positive change came mostly from those students who did not have a strong opinion either way prior to beginning the project, which suggests that participation in the project itself may have been the catalyst for the change in attitudes.

The second statement was:

I would like to visit China/Spain as a tourist.

Interestingly, the results, as displayed in Figure 2, show a slight drop in the percentage of students who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement with respect to holidaying in either country. The percentage of students either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement also dropped, meaning that there was a slight change towards a more neutral attitude towards both countries, as evidenced by the increase in the percentage of students who neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.

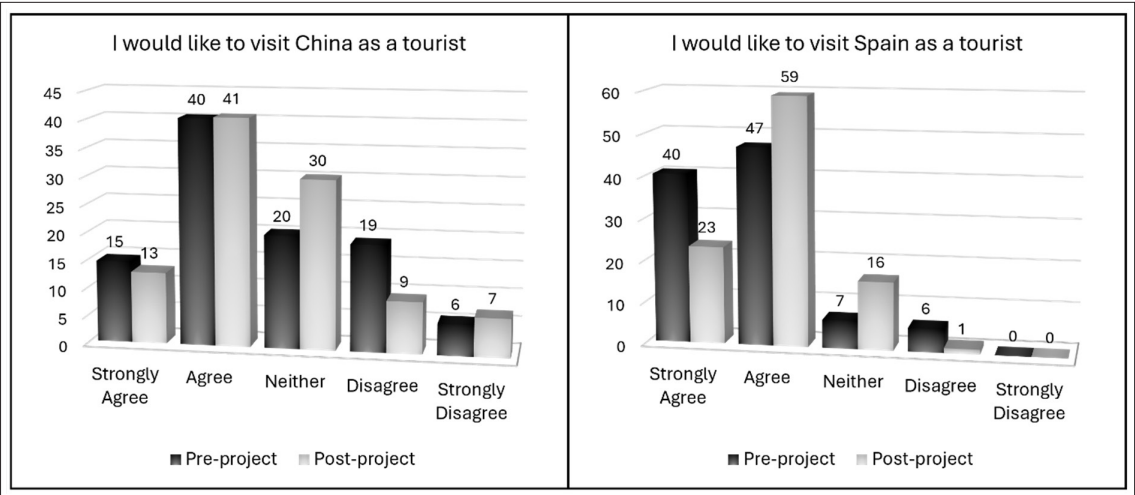


Figure 2. I would like to visit China/Spain as a tourist.

This is a difficult result to interpret. Results to most statements in the surveys showed an improvement in attitudes, which one would expect to extend to the desire to visit the other countries as tourists. Perhaps the more neutral stance to this statement is in response to growing political tensions around the world, reflecting not so much a lack of interest in visiting either of these two particular countries, but more a general trend towards short-term travel. As this was not investigated in the surveys, it is no more than a speculative explanation. However, according to the Immigration Services Agency (n.d.) of the Japanese government, the number of outbound Japanese tourists dropped by more than 20% from 1,200,930 in August of 2023 to 947,911 in December of the same year, corresponding to roughly the same time-period of the project.

Figure 3 shows the results of responses to the third statement:
In 2023, I think Japanese – Chinese/Spanish relations are good.

The responses to this statement indicate that the students who participated in the project tended to have more favourable impressions of the relations between Japan and both China and Spain after completing the project than they did before beginning. 50% of students either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement in relation to China prior to the project, and that fell to 33%, all disagreeing, and not a single student strongly disagreeing with the statement. Those agreeing or strongly agreeing rose from just 14% to 34%. On the other hand, while only 1% of students disagreed with the statement in relation to Spain and 46% agreed or strongly agreed prior to beginning the project – which at face value appears to be a very favourable response – the percentage of students agreeing or strongly agreeing rose to 58% after completing the project.

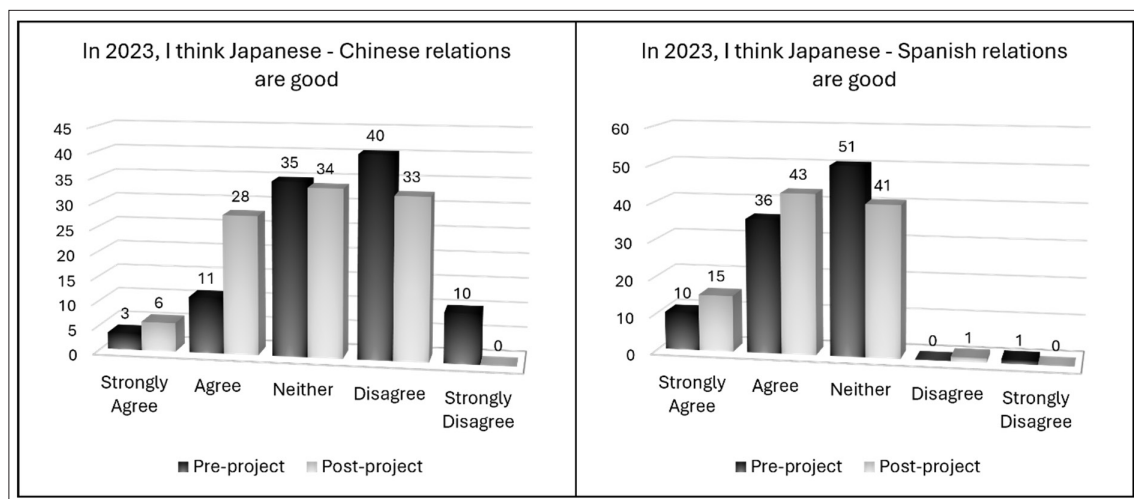


Figure 3. In 2023, I think Japanese – Chinese/Spanish relations are good.

To the best of the author's knowledge, there were no major political events or announcements regarding relations between either Japan and China or Japan and Spain during the course of the project, suggesting that engaging with students from the other two countries in this international VE led to an improvement in the impressions of international relations among the Japanese students who participated in the project.

The fourth statement presented to students was:

If I found a job in China/Spain that paid more than one in Japan, I would take it.

The results of responses to this statement are presented in Figure 4 (see: <https://figshare.com/account/articles/25586265>), and indicate a slight improvement regarding both countries. However, the improvement is less in the percentage who agree or strongly agree than in a reduction of those that disagreed or strongly disagreed. In relation to both countries, the category which saw the greatest change in percentage was “neither agree nor disagree”, up 9% in the case of China and 8% in the case of Spain.

This statement was posed as a hypothetical, but it does have some similarity to Statement 2 in that both statements assume spending time in the other country or culture. The responses to statement 2 were slightly worse after completing the project compared to the response given prior to beginning, and the responses to this statement show the opposite tendency. It is feasible that it was the hypothetical nature of this statement which elicited slightly more positive results.

The fifth statement put to students was:

It would be fine with me if my brother or sister married a Chinese/Spanish person.

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This statement seeks to elicit a response regarding comfort with the idea of a sibling marrying a Chinese or Spanish person, a more personal concept than most in the surveys. Overall, the data indicates a relatively positive attitude towards international marriage in these two cases (or at least not a negative attitude), although there is more positivity expressed towards international marriage with Spaniards than with Chinese people. The graph showing the results of responses can be viewed at: <https://figshare.com/account/articles/25586265>. However, there is little change in the results between the pre- and post-project surveys. It should be noted, however, that while there is a small number of students who disagree with the statement, in the post-project survey there are fewer who *strongly* disagree. On the other hand, in both cases, with regard to sibling marriage with Chinese people or Spaniards, there was an increase in the percentage who agreed with the statement, and simultaneously a decrease in the percentage who strongly agree with it.

The relatively similar results between the pre- and post-project surveys suggests that such deep-seated, personal feelings are not easily altered. This presents as a area that may be worthy of further research.

The sixth statement was:

Japanese – Chinese/Spanish relations are better than they were 30 years ago.

A graph showing the results of responses to this statement can be viewed at: <https://figshare.com/account/articles/25586265>. None of the students who participated in this project had even been born 30 years ago, so this statement seeks to gain an awareness of students' perceptions of the evolution of Japanese–Chinese and Japanese–Spanish relations over what for them must appear to be a long period of time. As with the responses to several other statements, students initially appear to have had a slightly more positive impression of Japanese–Spanish relations than of Japanese–Chinese relations, or at least a less negative impression, but their impressions of relations with both countries were similar on the post-project survey. While 41% of students felt that Japanese–Spanish relations had improved in the last few decades, as many as 58% did not possess a strong opinion.

After completing the project, the percentage of students agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement had increased to 53%, but 45% of students still had no strong opinion, the category with the highest percentage of responses. This may be because of the geographical distance between Japan and Spain, in addition to the likelihood that Spain does not figure as highly in news reports as China or major world-powers such as the USA. With regard to China, on the pre-project survey “neither agree or disagree” was also the most common response, but it was “agree” which became the most common, suggesting a small degree of improvement in students' impressions of relations between Japan and China.

Statement 7 was:

I would like to live in China/Spain for a while if given the opportunity.

The results of responses to this statement, which considers students' openness to living in China or Spain if given the opportunity, can be viewed in Figure 7 at this address: <https://figshare.com/account/articles/25586265>. The data shows a positive shift in attitude towards the possibility of living in these countries, particularly with regard to China. In the pre-project survey, just 17% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they would like to live in China, and 60% disagreed or strongly disagreed. In the post-project survey, this had changed to 36% and 35% respectively. The improvement in positive responses to living in Spain was less pronounced, but the percentage of students who disagreed or strongly disagreed that they would like to live in Spain almost halved.

This shift is reflective of an increased comfort with and perhaps even a curiosity about these countries and cultures, possibly sparked by the project's immersive intercultural engagement.

Figure 8 can be viewed at: <https://figshare.com/account/articles/25586265>, and shows the results of responses to the eighth statement:

I believe Japanese – Chinese/Spanish relations will be better in the future.

This statement returns to international relations, exploring students' optimism regarding the future of Japan's relations with China and Spain. Notably, there is an increase in positive outlook post-project, though little change in the percentage of student's holding a negative outlook. This suggests that a substantial number of students who held no particular opinion prior to beginning the project had formed a positive opinion by the time they completed the project. Those with no opinion changed from 45% regarding China and 39% regarding Spain, to 26% and 23% respectively.

This suggests that the VE experience may have contributed to a more hopeful perspective on international relations. This optimism can be attributed to the mutual understanding developed during the project, reinforcing the idea that even asynchronous people-to-people exchanges can counteract negative stereotypes and promote a more positive vision of global collaboration.

Figure 9 (see: <https://figshare.com/account/articles/25586265>) shows the results of responses to the final statement:

Personally, I don't have any problems with China/Spain.

Once again, a positive trend can be seen in responses, particularly regarding the percentage of students who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement with respect to China, changing from 27% to 17%. This statement has a strong similarity to Statement 1 (I have a positive attitude towards Chinese/Spanish people. The difference in the statements is that Statement 1 focusses specifically on the people of the other countries, and Statement 9 on the countries in general. A comparison of Figures 1 and 9 reveals that the overall responses are similar. However, it can be seen that improvement in positive attitudes towards China is

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greater in Statement 1, which focuses on people.

This suggests, at least in the case of China, that a significant number of students differentiate in their attitudes between the people and the country. Taken together, the responses to both statements indicate that the collaboration in this VE project has enhanced positive intercultural attitudes among Japanese students towards China and Spain and the people of both countries.

Discussion

This study aimed to assess the impact of VE on the development of ICC among Japanese foreign language learners of English, through the prism of student-produced multimodal digital artifacts centred on the SDGs. The study has illuminated the potential of VE in fostering a deeper understanding and respect for cultural diversity.

The research question posed was:

Can participation in a VE exchange with students from different cultural contexts lead to improved attitudes towards other cultures among Japanese learners of English?

The results presented, based on pre- and post-project survey responses, show a general positive trajectory towards enhanced ICC among Japanese participants. This was particularly evident in the responses to statements regarding international relations and the students' personal feelings towards the people and countries of the non-Japanese participants: China and Spain.

Consequently, the research question can be answered in the affirmative.

The degree of improvement was greater in attitudes over the course of the project towards China than towards Spain, but this may be because students' attitudes towards Spain were originally better than those for China. It should also be noted that for several of the statements, the highest percentage of answers towards Spain was "neither agree nor disagree". This most likely reflects a lack of knowledge about Spain among students.

On the other hand, two of the three statements which aimed to assess students' feelings about spending time in the other countries saw more ambiguous responses. Only the statement about actually living in those countries saw a clear positive change in responses. Interestingly, the statement about taking a job in the other countries, which would obviously entail living in that country (indeed, living in another country would also entail, for most people, taking a job) did not see the same level of improvement in responses. Perhaps for students, the idea of working does not hold the same sense of concreteness or immediacy. However, these results are particularly salient in the context of students' perceptions of international relations, willingness to engage with foreign cultures, and openness to the prospect of living abroad.

With regard to statement 5, about the prospect of a sibling marrying a foreigner, further research is required. This question goes to the heart of students' psychological state of mind

and will need to be investigated with more tools than a single question on a survey.

Furthermore, the study highlights the role of multimodal digital artifacts can play in amplifying the VE experience. By engaging in the creation and exchange of video content, students were not mere recipients of language instruction but active contributors to a cross-cultural dialogue. This can provide a rich, authentic context for students to apply their language skills while navigating the complexities of global issues through a multicultural lens. The hands-on experience of crafting videos, coupled with the interactive dimension of providing and receiving feedback, offers agency to participants in their educational experience.

The findings of this study, along with previous research in these areas, call for reflection on policy and practice in the realm of language education. As we stand on the precipice of an increasingly digitalized educational landscape about to be further transformed by the introduction artificial intelligence, the integration of VE and multimodal projects into language learning curricula represents a constructive approach to cultivating global competencies among learners. The value of these methodologies in preparing students for the demands of a globalized world by fostering environments that encourage the exploration of cultural differences through collaborative projects, has the potential to navigate a path towards a more interconnected and empathetic global community.

In conclusion, this study affirms the positive potential of VE and multimodal digital artifacts in enhancing ICC among Japanese learners of English. The positive shifts observed in students' attitudes towards other cultures, coupled with the pedagogical benefits of engaging in digital content creation, underscore the importance of integrating these approaches in the contemporary educational paradigm. As we navigate the complexities of a globalized society, the integration of VE and multimodal learning experiences into language education emerges not merely as an innovative pedagogical strategy, but quite possibly as an imperative for fostering cultural understanding and global citizenship.

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