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Intercultural Learning Through a Telecollaboration Project: Video Conferences and Presentations Between Taiwanese and Japanese University Students[1]

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Abstract

This study aims to report whether cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity took place after presentation exchanges between university students from Japan and Taiwan. A telecollaboration project was conducted between Taiwanese and Japanese university students in 2018. The researchers created a three-month intercultural communication video project as a part of a class activity for university students in Taiwan and Japan. Students interacted with their counterparts on a face-to-face online video conferencing platform through group LINE[2] and exchanged two presentation videos through Flipgrid[3]. Cultural awareness and online communication surveys were administered before and after the project. The results indicated that students significantly increased their cultural sensitivity and appreciation toward each other's culture.

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 1   This paper is based on the research presented at the presentation session titled "Increasing Cultural Awareness through a Telecollaboration Project: Exchanging Presentations and Discussions between Japanese and Taiwanese University Students" of the 34th Annual Conference Society for Intercultural Education Training and Research of Japan, which was held in Tokyo, Japan in November 2019.

 2   LINE is a freeware application for instant communications on electronic devices such as smartphones, tablet computers, and personal computers. LINE users can exchange texts, images, video, and audio, and conduct free Voice over Internet Protocol conversations and video conferences. https://line.me/en/

 3   Flipgrid is a website that allows students to post their presentations. https://info.flipgrid.com/

The research data also revealed that while the students explored the different cultures through the online interactional project, their communication styles were distinctive and their intercultural communication skills improved. On a larger scale, depending on the duration of a series of presentations, such a cross-cultural telecollaboration project not only promotes intercultural awareness but can promote intercultural communication skills and intercultural competence.

Keywords: cultural awareness, intercultural communication, online communication, presentation, telecollaboration

Introduction

Today's fast-paced, technologically advanced world offers many opportunities to interact with people from different countries using online platforms. English has been used as the *lingua franca* for global commerce by non-native English speakers and it helps connect with non-native English-speaking communities (Seidlhofer, 2011). Non-native English speaking students who learn English as a foreign language usually practice with instructors and classmates, but they rarely have the chance to interact with international students. A classroom environment does not necessarily provide authentic contact with people from other cultures (Lee & Markey, 2014). However, students can interact with others, share their ideas, and gain cultural competence using online platforms.

English language pedagogy must prepare students to interact with people from other countries. This is crucial for people to accept the distinctive perspectives, values, and behaviors of individuals from different cultures (Bryam, Gribkova, & Starky, 2002). English language curricula should broaden the scope of students' learning to include cultural skills (Popescu & Iordachescu, 2015). The widespread use of English language has further resulted in the creation of multilingual contexts and many varieties of English (McKay & Bokhorst-Heng, 2008).

In this study, the researchers review previous studies on the importance of intercultural communication skills for English teaching and the effectiveness of intercultural telecollaboration. The study presents quali-

tative data on cultural awareness and online communication surveys as well as quantitative data on students' feedback on a telecollaboration project. It then discusses the findings of an intercultural telecollaboration project between students of English as a foreign language in Taiwan and Japan, and offers recommendations and prospects for future research.

Intercultural Communication in English as Part of Foreign Language Education

English as a foreign language course is required in Taiwan and Japan. In Taiwan, since 2005, the English curriculum is mandatory from the third grade of elementary school (Chu, 2006; Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2019a), and the government has subsidized many programs to cultivate the students' English ability across levels (Guo, 2015). In Japan, the English curriculum was mandatory from the fifth grade of elementary school since 2011; however, as of April of 2020, it has become obligatory from the third grade of elementary school (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2019b).

English as a foreign language course in Taiwan and Japan tends to focus on linguistic aspects, such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation (Chu, 2009a; Katsumata, 2014). This means that even when learners master a foreign language, it does not follow that they can communicate well with native speakers (Byram & Feng, 2004; Canale & Swain, 1980; Finkbeiner, 2008). Rather, English should be taught by focusing on intercultural communication (Erling, 2005; Kilickaya, 2009; McKay, 2003). Many English courses in Japan do not teach intercultural communication; therefore, Japanese students are able to communicate in English but their style reflects the way they communicate in their native language (Katsumata, 2014). In addition, they are not aware of their communication styles. The students need to understand different communication styles to engage in effective communication in English with non-native and native English speakers. Although intercultural communication courses are offered in universities in Taiwan and Japan, most of them are not required for all majors.

English proficiency is not correlated with intercultural competence (Chen & Yang, 2014); the latter does not necessarily mean linguistic competence (Bryam, Gribkova, & Starky, 2002). Intercultural competence, however, is needed to sustain in a multicultural society (Jandt, 2016; Martin & Nakayama, 2010; Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2007; Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012). Intercultural competence is based on knowledge, attitude, and behavior, measuring how effectively one can communicate and interact in a different cultural situation (Deardorff, 2006; Lusting & Koester, 2013; Spizberg & Changnon, 2009). Research on intercultural competence started in the 1970s with intercultural communication and personal psychology studies, and it has continued with studies in education, politics, economics, and many other disciplines (Bradford, Allen, & Beisser, 2000; Byram, 1997; Collier, 1989; Deardorff, 2006). Furthermore, studies on intercultural communication, multicultural education, foreign languages, and English as a foreign language emphasize the importance of including intercultural competence in foreign language education (Candel-Mora, 2015).

In a foreign language class, teachers can simulate an environment resembling a different culture for students to learn the culture of a foreign language while becoming more aware of their own (Byram, 1997). This would be challenging if a person is used to living in a particular environment for a long time (Bennett, 1986). Students can learn the differences in communication styles between English and their languages, making them even more proficient in a foreign language. Teaching intercultural communication and cultural differences in English courses encourages students to become aware of themselves and others. Intercultural communication is a tool that helps people work effectively and interact with people of different cultures (Lustig & Koester, 2013).

English Presentations

Taiwanese and Japanese students are highly encouraged to prepare their presentations in English. Taking a public speaking course is mandatory in some universities in Taiwan and Japan. Public speaking in English is considered one of the critical skills in Taiwanese and Japanese

university students. However, public speaking can be very stressful in general. Samovar and McDaniel (2007) pointed out that even many Americans, who are native speakers of English, feel that public speaking can be very stressful.

A previous study on the benefits of teaching English presentation skills to Japanese university students showed that the learners gained confidence after taking one semester of a public speaking course in English, although their audiences were only Japanese people (Katsumata, 2013). Giving a speech in the English language is challenging for Japanese students, especially if the audience is non-Japanese. Japanese students should learn English presentation skills and the cultural inclinations of the audiences simultaneously. Therefore, it is essential to prepare students to give presentations in the English language to international audiences.

Communication can be both verbal and nonverbal; it is important to learn both types of communication of a culture or individual in intercultural communication (Jandt, 2016; Martin & Nakayama, 2010; Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2007; Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012). Although English language curricula in Taiwan and Japan focus more on verbal communication than on the nonverbal aspects of the language, students tend to use gestures to explain themselves when they are not fluent in English. Nonverbal communication conveys the essence of a spoken word; thus, it is crucial for students. Even when giving a presentation in English, many Japanese students tend to use Japanese nonverbal communication to send messages (Katsumata, Maekawa, & Fujiki, 2013). Many experts argue that nonverbal communication differs by culture, and the ways it is expressed and interpreted are also different (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2007; Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012). To give an effective speech in English, a presenter has to learn the appropriate nonverbal communication style that is familiar to the audiences (Shibuya, Katsumata, Furuya, Maekawa, & Mori, 2018).

Telecollaboration

Social networks enable people to interact and collaborate with others

(Furstenberg & English, 2016). Telecollaboration is a virtual exchange using online systems, such as emails and videoconferences. Telecollaboration is widely recognized as being effective in improving language learning (Chu, 2009b; Greenfield, 2003; Muehleisen, 1997; O'Dowd, 2003; Vintage, 2005) as well as intercultural communication skills (O'Dowd, 2003). Previous research has shown that the use of email writing for intercultural and language learning is very effective (Liaw & Johnson, 2001; Mori & Nakano, 2018; Warschauer, 1996b). Telecollaboration decreases anxiety and insecurity about using a foreign language (Kern, 1995). Using an online system for intercultural exchanges also increases motivation (Warschauer, 1996a), enhances critical thinking (Warschauer, Tube, & Roberts, 1996), improves writing skills (Cohen & Riel, 1989; Cononelos & Oivia, 1993; Warschauer, 1996b), and eases communication (Cooper & Selfe, 1990).

As mentioned above, there are distinctive and practical considerations in using telecollaboration. Telecollaboration is the use of an online system to interact with people of different cultures. Reading about other cultures is not sufficient (Tuzel & Hobbs, 2017). The Internet allows communication to be interactive, visual, and flexible (Newhagen & Rafaeli, 1996). Learners play a crucial role as creators of knowledge, and social networking systems actively facilitate this.

The telecollaboration projects between Taiwanese and Japanese university students began in 2015 and adopted various online platforms. Almost all students have a social media account and frequently check their messages. Every year, there are new and useful applications, such as Facebook, LINE, Google, and Flipgrid. In 2017, the telecollaboration project between Taiwan and Japan used Facebook as the communication platform. However, messages and videos easily got buried under clusters of posts. The researchers instead used LINE and Flipgrid for this project in 2018. LINE was adopted because this mobile application is very popular among Taiwanese and Japanese students. LINE provides social participation functions, including video calls through which multi-users can communicate instantly at the same time. The Taiwanese students were already familiar with Filpgrid, which was useful for presentation

exchanges in this project. The purpose of exchanging video presentations was to equip students with the capacity to present to international audiences by developing their oral presentation skills and cultural sensitivities.

The researchers believe that intercultural communication through telecollaboration can promote dialogue and make English and cultural learning more enjoyable.

The research questions of this study were as follows:

1. Did the intercultural telecollaboration project motivate students to learn English?
2. Did the intercultural telecollaboration project increase students' cultural awareness?
3. Did the online platforms help students engage in intercultural communication?
4. How did students feel about the intercultural collaboration project?

Method

This study used quantitative and qualitative methods. A pre- and post-survey was used as a quantitative research method (see Table 1), whereas the students' written feedback was the qualitative research method used to support and clarify the results of the quantitative analysis.

Procedure of the Telecollaboration Project

Video Conferences

Seventeen Taiwanese students and twenty-one Japanese students were divided into six small groups. The researchers acted as members of each group to monitor the students. A week before the first video conference by the LINE group, the names of six group members were distributed to students in Taiwan and Japan. The duration of each videoconference was about 20 minutes. During the semester, Taiwanese and Japanese students had three face-to-face video conferences through the LINE group. They also exchanged text messages and emojis[4] (expressive icons)

4　An emoji is an expressive icon or small digital image used to express an idea or emotion.

on LINE. The three video conferences were held during class for the Japanese students, whereas the Taiwanese students used their lunch breaks.

Each video conference was conducted for two groups at the same time and the researchers observed them. In the first video conference, the students introduced themselves. For the second and third video conferences, they prepared questions for discussion.

Table 1.   The telecollaboration project schedule

Date	Surveys and Feedback	Video Conference by LINE	Video Presentation Exchange on Flipgrid
April	・Online pre-survey in English	・The 1st video conference	
May		・The 2nd video conference	・The 1st presentation of "Self-introduction" ・The 2nd presentation of "Favorite Lunch"
June	・Online post-survey in English	・The 3rd video conference	

Video Presentation Exchanges

Furthermore, the students exchanged two presentations: 1) self-introduction and 2) favorite or unforgettable lunch. These videos were uploaded to Flipgrid. The researchers were able to monitor each group. After watching the videos uploaded by the members of the same group, students gave comments and asked questions. Thereafter, students were also able to watch the presentations of the other groups.

Before starting the project, the researchers decided the topics and contents of the presentations. For the Japanese students, the course was a presentation class; therefore, they used the textbook *Let's Speak Out!*

Effective Speeches Through Collaborative Learning (Shibuya el al., 2018). Part 2 of Chapter 1 of this textbook is about how to give a unique and creative introduction. Part 2 of Chapter 2 of the textbook is about presenting a favorite or an unforgettable lunch. This information was shared with both Taiwanese and Japanese university students.

The Japanese students' presentations were recorded with their cell phones in the class and then uploaded to Flipgrid. The Japanese students stood up while giving their presentations. The Taiwanese students sat outside the classroom as their course was not a presentation one. The course differences were explained to students at the beginning of the course.

In the first presentation exchange, "Self-introduction," the Japanese students tended to use the same style of presentation when introducing their names, university, departments, ages, hobbies, and part-time jobs. The researchers proposed a unique form of introduction from one of the chapters of the textbook (Shibuya et al., 2018). This introduction needed to include a number related to something about oneself, which had to be explained. For example, one could choose the number 25 and explain that it meant "25 days without eating ice cream," "12 times moving residence," and "7 times losing a wallet." The introduction was about one minute long. Students used a cell phone to record their performance and upload the video on Flipgrid.

The second presentation was on the favorite or an unforgettable lunch. The presentation time was about two or three minutes. Talking about food is easy and the different food cultures were introduced briefly.

Participants

The participants were seventeen Taiwanese undergraduate students, who attended one of the major national universities in Taiwan (see Table 2), and twenty-one undergraduate Japanese students in one of the major private universities in Japan, for a total of 38 participants.

The Taiwanese students were aged between 18 and 19. They were taking the required 18-week English listening and communication course, which focused on listening and speaking skills as well as intercul-

tural learning. This telecollaboration project formed 30% of their final grade.

The Japanese learners were 17 first-year students and 4 junior students. They were aged between 18 and 21, and attended a 15-week English presentation course that emphasized presentation skills and public speaking to international audiences. The telecollaboration project accounted for 30% of their final grade.

Table 2.　Participants and course descriptions

	Taiwanese University Students	**Japanese University Students**
Number of students	17	21
Age	18–19 years	18–21 years
Weeks	18 weeks	15 weeks
Class time	100 minutes	90 minutes
Course	English listening & communication	English presentation
Grading	30%	30%

Research Instruments
Survey

This study used an attitudinal questionnaire titled "2018 English Learning & Cultural Exchange" with twenty-two 5-point Likert scaled questions. Fourteen question items on cultural awareness were adapted from Chen and Starosta (2000) and eight items of online communication were adapted from Dhir and Tsai (2017). The adapted questions, however, were further modified to fit the objectives of this project. The instrument was reviewed by two experienced English and intercultural communication teachers for face validity. The responses were coded for statistical purposes with numerical values.

Two online surveys were administered to the participants in the spring semester of 2018 (see Table 1). The spring semester for Taiwan-

ese universities starts from the middle of February until the end of June, whereas for Japanese universities, it begins from the second week of April until the first week of August. The overlapping three-month period from April to June was used to conduct this project. The cultural awareness and online communication survey was given to both the Taiwanese and Japanese students as a pre-survey in the middle of April and as a post-survey at the end of June 2018. After the project, both Taiwanese and Japanese students reflected on their experience in the telecollaboration, providing written feedback.

Results

The Cultural Awareness Questionnaire

The students filled out a questionnaire regarding how they perceived cultural awareness using video conferences and watching presentations. The results of the cultural awareness questionnaire showed statistically significant differences between the pre-test and the post-test. The mean score of the post-test, 4.19, was higher than that of the pre-test, 3.85 (see Table 3). The result indicates that after watching presentations and conducting video conferences, the cultural awareness of students increased significantly ($t = -5.43$, $p < .001$).

Table 3. The pre- and post-test of cultural awareness

Cultural Awareness	n	M	SD	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre-test	n = 38	3.85	0.5	−5.43***	37	0.00
Post-test	n = 38	4.19	0.45			

***$p < .001$

The Online Communication Questionnaire

The students filled out a questionnaire on how they perceived online communication via video conferences and presentations. The results regarding online communication showed statistically significant differences between the pre-test and the post-test. The mean score of the post-test, 4.33, was higher than the pre-test, 3.97 (see Table 4). The

result indicates that after watching presentations and conducting video conferences, the students significantly increased their interactions through online communication ($t = -4.29$, $p < .001$).

Table 4.   The pre- and post-test of online communication

Online Communication	n	M	SD	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre-test	n = 38	3.97	0.68	−4.29***	37	0.00
Post-test	n = 38	4.33	0.52			

***$p < .001$

Students' Written Feedback on the Project

After the post-survey, both the Taiwanese and Japanese students reflected on their experience in the project. Table 5 shows their feedback on the telecollaboration project. Almost all students mentioned that they had "positive learning experiences" through the telecollaboration project. A total of 37 comments indicated that the students enjoyed talking to each other through video conferences. The second ranking of "communication in English" included 28 instances in which the students expressed a boost in their confidence in their English language skills. Twenty-three comments mentioned learning "cultural awareness," indicating that students become aware of their own culture and intercultural communication. The fourth most frequent comments were seventeen instances in which the students mentioned that they received "positive comments on presentations." The fifth most frequent comments were ten instances in which the students mentioned that they were "anxious for the first video conferences." The sixth most frequent comments were nine instances in which the students pointed out the "technical challenges" in using video conferences.

Table 5. Feedback on the telecollaboration project

Feedback	Number of Comments
1. Positive learning experience	37
2. Communication in English	28
3. Cultural awareness	23
4. Positive comments of presentations	17
5. Anxious for the 1st video conference	10
6. Technical challenges	9

Discussion

Increased Cultural Awareness

The results show that both the Taiwanese and the Japanese university students increased their appreciation of the importance of cultural awareness through reciprocal interactions. The results of the survey showed that the students felt significantly more confident in their cultural understanding after the project. The students realized the importance of intercultural communication skills, and were curious about their partners' culture through online video conferences and watching presentation videos. They also became more aware of their own culture, being asked about it by their partners and comparing each other's cultures (Bennett, 1986). For example, students learned cultural similarities and differences in food culture and customs between Taiwan and Japan. In the second presentation topic, "Favorite or Unforgettable Lunch," some Japanese students presented the lunch boxes prepared by their mothers every morning over the past six years. It is typical for a mother to cook meals in Japanese culture; hence, Japanese university students were surprised to discover that many Taiwanese people eat out for breakfast. Then, the students talked about the role of women in a family in the third video conference. Many Japanese students did not know that Taiwan ranks high in Asia for gender equality.

There were three instances of cultural and communication differences through video conferences among the students. The first instance was

when the Taiwanese students asked during the video conference, "Do you wear a skirt to university?" Many Japanese students were puzzled because they had never thought about it before. It was something "normal" or "typical" for female Japanese students to wear a skirt to university. When the Japanese students asked about the reason for such as question, they found that many female Taiwanese students wore jeans or pants to university. They also discussed topics about wearing makeup at university and when to wear makeup. This question led to an exciting conversation about university life for both groups of students. They learned about a new culture as well as about themselves.

The second instance was when the Japanese university students were surprised to be asked questions such as "Do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend?" at the first or second video conference. These types of questions were considered intimate for Japanese students, and they only ask these questions after a solid friendship has been established. Therefore, these types of questions are usually not asked during first or second encounters among Japanese students. On the other hand, it was a question that Taiwanese university students would commonly ask even at the first meeting. Therefore, the Taiwanese university students did not understand why Japanese university students did not want to answer the question and why answering these types of questions was a problem for them. The Japanese students realized that they had never thought about this cultural difference before. Therefore, students need to learn intercultural communication (Katsumata, 1994) before starting a telecollaboration project to avoid cultural misunderstandings. The topics or acceptable questions to ask were different for both groups.

The third instance concerned when to follow someone's Instagram account. Even the researchers did not anticipate any differences on this issue, which was a new learning experience for them. A few Japanese students mentioned during and after the first video conference that they were surprised that the Taiwanese students followed their Instagram account while they were talking or right after the first video conference. The Japanese students said that becoming mutual Instagram followers usually happens after two people become good friends, and hence it

takes time. On the other hand, it is quite common to follow someone's Instagram account in Taiwan even if one has just met a person.

Table 5 shows that students have become aware of their and another culture through this project. Many students wrote in the feedback that learning a new culture is exciting. One Taiwanese student commented:

> We learned things that we cannot learn from textbooks. Reading thousands of books is not as good as traveling thousands of miles. In the era of information, we need to take the initiative to communicate with others and learn so that we can increase our strengths.

Another Taiwanese student noted that *"Now we have learned the differences, advantages, and disadvantages of the two countries in terms of education system, employment plan, etc."* They often ended up talking about different topics in which group members were interested, which the students found enjoyable. Through this project, students experienced a simulation of visiting a new culture within the classroom.

Advantages of Using Online Communication

Telecollaboration communication was appealing and engaging for both Taiwanese and Japanese students. The students used their cell phones and personal computers to access Flipgrid. Using a cell phone in this way was natural for them. Exchanging LINE messages was very easy and comfortable for them because they were familiar with it.

One of the advantages of telecollaboration is that the students can receive feedback quickly. With Flipgrid, students can watch and give instant feedback. With LINE messages, they can send emoji and text messages easily. Because of peculiar emojis that the students had never seen in their culture, they enjoyed LINE exchanges. Some Taiwanese students sent Japanese language emojis to Japanese students. Japanese students were excited and curious to learn their partner's language.

The students were introduced to different applications that they had not previously known during the video conference, which they found exciting. For example, during the video conference through the LINE group, one of the Taiwanese students suddenly used an application that displayed fire and a devil face. The Japanese students had never seen it,

so they asked about the application and started to talk more about it. It was an excellent tool for initiating discussion.

Some students were less motivated to learn English. However, less-motivated students were willing to speak at video conferences. The students in one group talked about their hobbies and found that they had a common interest in music; they even wanted to keep talking after the video conference time was over. Many students said that they wanted more time to talk.

Students began to feel more comfortable talking after every video conference. They became more aware of their differences, used more strategies, and became more confident. They became more relaxed in speaking to each other each time. At the third conference, they became very friendly, and could talk more comfortably and with a relaxed demeanor. One Taiwanese student commented:

> This online exchange with Japanese students made me feel very amazed. Although I was shy and unavoidably embarrassed during the conversation sometimes, I found that both sides showed enthusiasm and willingness to communicate. This experience prepared me for the future foreign exchange and will bring successful communication in the future.

It proved useful to keep the same group for the three video conferences. Each time, their conversation led to a more profound topic.

Positive Learning Experience

Many students gave positive feedback about how they gained confidence in communicating with each other after the telecollaboration project (see Table 5). The key to teaching is authenticity, and telecollaboration can provide this (Pulverness, 1996). The students also learned new information, which would have been difficult to obtain in their usual environment. One Taiwanese student noted in the feedback, *"The exchange with Japanese classmates broke my stereotype of Japanese people."* The stereotypes about Japanese people changed after talking to the Japanese university students through the project. On the other hand, many Japanese students had an image of Taiwanese students as being quiet,

but they later realized that Taiwanese students can actually be very active and cheerful.

One Taiwanese student wrote, "*I think the results of this video chat with Japanese students were very good, and the other members also felt very excited and enthusiastic.*" A Japanese student commented, *"It was a great experience for me to speak to people who have different backgrounds."* Overall, both the Taiwanese and Japanese students reported to have had great experiences through this telecollaboration project.

Non-native Speakers of English

Table 5 shows that 28 comments were about communicating in English. Many Japanese students reported that they were used to speak to native speakers of English, but most of them had never spoken to non-native speakers of English. These undergraduates felt comfortable speaking English with their counterparts, knowing that they were foreign language learners too. A Japanese student wrote, "*It was great to hear English of Taiwanese students, because I am used to listening English of Japanese speakers. It was good experience for me.*" A Taiwanese student commented:

> The whole communication process was quite new and interesting, because I usually do not have the opportunity to communicate with foreigners in English. Now I have more opportunities. I think I have more courage to speak in English in the future.

Even though some students had travelled to Taiwan or Japan, many of them said that the project was their first opportunity to talk to Taiwanese or Japanese people, especially university students. They appreciated and enjoyed talking to each other.

Some students noted that speaking to an English native speaker still made them nervous because they worried about their English not being good enough. However, talking to other fellow students, they tried very hard to speak and understand each other's English. They also understood how hard it is to speak English and this common difficulty made them more sympathetic toward each other.

Non-English speakers use English to communicate with people from

non-English speaking regions (Seidlhofer, 2011). Non-English speakers find it useful to talk to native speakers of English as a means to improve their English and learn about each other's culture. Many Asian countries, such as Taiwan and Japan have similar communication styles, giving them very similar cultural contexts (high-contexts). Furthermore, they can rely on indirect nonverbal messages in addition to verbal messages (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2007; Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012). These common communication styles made both groups of students feel very comfortable in speaking to each other.

Positive Comments on Presentations

Many students received positive feedback about the presentations and they gained confidence in giving them. Initially, they were worried about how much other students would understand. One Japanese student commented that *"I have never done a presentation in English to non-Japanese speakers, so I was very nervous. Reading very nice comments of my group members, I gained confidence in speaking English."* Another Japanese student noted, *"I learned Taiwanese culture and food. I enjoyed learning life of university in Taiwan."*

For their presentations, some Japanese students expected constructive criticisms from their Taiwanese counterparts. In the Taiwanese and Japanese cultures, it is confronting and rude to point out someone's weaknesses or criticize them (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2007). These comments from Japanese students were unexpected. However, the Japanese students filled out the peer evaluation sheets after each presentation in class; they also became accustomed to receiving feedback from their peers. These peer evaluation sheets were not used in the video presentations. It was determined that the instructions on how to give feedback regarding the presentation should be clarified, and that evaluation sheets were to be used instead of written comments.

In watching the first presentation (self-introduction), students realized that foreign names are complicated to distinguish and pronounce for non-native speakers. Most Taiwanese students used their English name for this project, but Japanese students used their Japanese names. At the second presentation (favorite or unforgettable lunches), many students

introduced a dish from their culture. The students realized that some dish names were difficult to understand for non-natives. They understood the importance of speaking the foreign names and words slowly and clearly and the need to explain more about the dishes. Obviously, these findings would not have been possible if the Japanese or Taiwanese students had interacted only among themselves.

The feedback of the students noted an improvement in nonverbal communication. The students learned some nonverbal communication of the partner's culture. For example, Japanese students learned different gestures of the Chinese and Japanese languages. Japanese students wanted to know how to count by fingers because they wanted to use the gesture in their presentations. Both Taiwanese and Japanese students felt less nervous about making a speech after learning the nonverbal communication of their counterparts.

Technical Challenges in Video Conferences

Even though the video conferences were effective, Table 5 shows that nine students noted a bad reception during the video conferences. Setting up the first video conference was challenging and took time. The volume was low, reducing comprehension, or the students were not close enough to a microphone. Sometimes students could not have a smooth conversation because of these technical problems. Some students noted that their video conferences sometimes froze and only transmitted audio. Some noted the loud static, making it difficult for them to hear. They wanted to have a longer time to speak and found these technical problems frustrating. One Taiwanese student wrote:

> The connection quality was generally poor. In addition to poor Internet connection, it may also have been due to the group video. I think it would be better just to do pair communication and chat one-on-one with other students, and then do a group video. I hope that there will be a smoother communication model in the future.

Conclusion

The telecollaboration project through intercultural communication

between Taiwanese and Japanese university students was proved effective in this study. Based on the results of this research, the researchers tried to respond to four research questions:

1. Did the intercultural telecollaboration project motivate students to learn the English language?
2. Did the intercultural telecollaboration project increase students' cultural awareness?
3. Did the online platforms help students engage in intercultural communication?
4. How did students feel about the intercultural collaboration project?

This intercultural telecollaboration project motivated students to learn English and increased students' cultural awareness of their partners' culture as well as their own. Students enjoyed using LINE message exchange, especially emojis. Overall, the students enjoyed talking, writing and reading their messages, and watching the presentations about the culture of their counterparts. This was done utilizing online video conferences and presentations.

Intercultural telecollaboration projects increase cultural knowledge and skills. Students asked many questions through video conferences and group LINE text messages. After watching the presentations, they asked questions via comments. Thus, intercultural telecollaboration projects raise awareness, curiosity, and critical thinking. Lastly, it should be noted that intercultural telecollaboration projects require cultural training and tech support.

Future Research Directions

This study has some limitations. During the video conferences, it was a challenge to monitor synchronized communication. It is recommended that the statements of the students be monitored. The recording of the students' conversations will give more detailed information on the students' cultural awareness.

Future research should focus on two aspects. First, including a paired video conference. Some Taiwanese and Japanese students pointed out that they wanted to have one-on-one video conferences because they did not get the opportunity to talk. Some groups took turns to speak, and

some students felt that they did not get many chances to speak. One student commented that *"I wanted to talk more with Taiwanese students. As a group, we took a turn to talk. If it is a one-on-one video conference, I have more time to talk."* It would be recommendable to have a one-on-one video conference within a group for a third video conference.

Second, future projects should set a video conference time. The one-hour time difference between Taiwan and Japan made it easy to arrange a time for a video conference. However, in projects between countries with bigger time differences, it might be challenging to hold a video conference. It is ideal to have a video conference during the class period for both countries. In this project, the Taiwanese students were kind enough to use their lunch breaks for this project. Another success driver for this project was the support of the Taiwanese professor, who supplied free lunch to the participating students.

The telecollaboration project requires extensive effort to be implemented. The results showed that there were statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-tests. The telecollaboration project between Taiwanese and Japanese university students has the potential to provide more opportunities to incorporate diverse learning contents and motivate students to learn about a different culture and their own culture. Further studies should conduct the telecollaboration project with a different country and collaborate on the project with multicultural nations at the same time.

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