

# A Report of the Collaborative Video Project between Japanese Students and Foreign Residents living in Echizen, Japan

Yuko KATO

Faculty of Human Studies, Jin-ai University

This study explores the impact of the collaborative project conducted with Japanese students and foreign residents living in the Japanese city of Echizen. From the 1600s to the 1800s, Japan closed its doors to overseas countries for two centuries, but today shows the inevitable global trend towards a multicultural society. Accordingly, the number of foreign people living in Echizen is growing rapidly. There has been a lack of collaboration, however, between academics and the local communities in this region. Our project was therefore implemented to develop students' intercultural competence, a required attribute for living in multicultural societies, and to promote cooperation between academics and communities. During the project, the researcher investigated the impact of the project by interviewing participants. The findings indicated that similar collaborative projects between academics and communities should be encouraged in order to develop intercultural competence; this project is only a first step toward preparing students for living in multicultural societies. This study was supported by grants from Jin-ai University.

*Keywords: Intercultural Understanding Education, Collaborative Research and Community Cooperation, Higher Education*

## 1. Background Information

The number of foreigners living in Japan has significantly increased: in 2015, there were more than 2.3 million foreigners living in Japan, accounting for 1.76% of the entire population (Immigration Bureau of Japan, 2016). Although this number decreased slightly after the Great East Japan Earthquake, it has grown at an estimated rate of 46.6% since 1998. In 2015, the number of foreigners living in the Fukui prefecture was approximately 11,965, or 1.52% of the entire population of Fukui (Fukui Prefectural Government, 2016). Echizen City, where this study was conducted, has the highest percentage of foreigners in the Fukui prefecture, accounting for approximately 3.89% of the total population in 2015 (Echizen City Government, 2016; Fukui Prefectural Government, 2016). The three most common nationalities of foreign residents are Brazil, China, and the Philippines. As Japanese society becomes more multicultural, promoting intercultural

competence among the Japanese people is imperative.

Aiming to promote students' intercultural competence, a study group, the Society for Advancing Cross-Cultural Understanding, was formed in 2009. As of May 2016, the group had 21 members. Intercultural competence is a term that is considered mainly with reference to the idea of intercultural communication, which originated in the United States. The following definitions are based on the ideas of Yamagishi (1995) and Mizuta (1989):

Intercultural competence refers to:

1. the ability to study and work among different cultures;
2. having cultural awareness;
3. psychological skills to help manage stress in order to live a rewarding life.

The above definitions indicate that intercultural

competence is largely concerned with a person's ability to interact effectively with different people, which enables them to live successfully among people of different cultures. Focusing on pedagogical research in intercultural training—which employs various empirical learning styles, such as simulations, role-play, and workshops—our study group investigated effective teaching and learning methods with the aim of promoting intercultural competence.

The projects formed the basis of one of our empirical studies, which intended to promote students' intercultural competence. These projects were implemented for two main reasons. First, we believe that it is imperative to provide students with intercultural activities out with classroom in order to provide students with real-world experiences. Pedagogical research in which theory and practice are well balanced is considered significant in our study group. The researcher had previously carried out a cultural exchange program between Japanese and overseas students, and implemented an experimental class to help students learn English through participating in intercultural activities (Kato, 2007). The findings suggested that academic studies that provide knowledge of different cultures are not always helpful in allowing students to have effective interactions with different people. Empirical studies and real-world experience are thus important to developing students' intercultural competence.

Second, we identified a need to create a platform for organising cultural exchange activities for students in the Echizen area. In Fukui City, the capital of Fukui prefecture, the Fukui International Association, non-profit organisations (NPOs), and educational institutions work together and regularly offer various cultural exchange programs. The students in higher education in Fukui City can easily organise and attend these activities. However, there is no central meeting

location that allows students enrolled in higher education in Echizen to organise intercultural and collaborative activities with the local community and organisations in the City. Although the Echizen City International Association (EIA) and NPOs provide support for foreign residents, such as Japanese language lessons, there is a lack of collaboration between these organisations and higher education in the area.

In 2011, we therefore organised our first educational project in collaboration with the university, local communities, and the local government in Echizen City. In this project, participants collaborated to create a multilingual map showing some of the highlights in the Echizen area (Kato, 2013). Our second project, implemented in 2015 and 2016, involved making a video clip that would introduce some important Japanese words and activities in the case of an earthquake. These projects were conducted to encourage students to develop the intercultural competence necessary for living in a multicultural society and to enhance collaboration between academics and communities. There were 3 main aims of the projects: (1) to make a base for university students to participate in intercultural activities; (2) to foster cultural exchange and understanding for a multicultural society through collaboration between academics and communities; and (3) to cultivate the necessary human resources for planning and carrying out these kinds of grass-roots activities in the Echizen area. This paper examines our second project, which was implemented in 2015 and 2016.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Making a Video Clip in 2015/2016

The first project, creating a multilingual map, was implemented in order to introduce foreign residents to attractive places in Echizen City (Kato, 2013).

However, the Great East Japan Earthquake, which occurred during the same year as the first project, revealed that foreign residents may not know what action to take or where to go in the case of an emergency. While Japanese people generally learn how to respond in the event of natural disasters, foreign residents may not have experience of the kinds of natural disasters that occur regularly in Japan, such as earthquakes and floods. We therefore decided to launch the second project to provide foreign residents in Echizen with important information related to such emergencies.

The researcher and eight students thus decided to make a video clip for their second collaborative project, which took place in 2015 and 2016. This project involved the following steps: (1) discussing the contents, that is, what foreign residents would need to know in the event of an earthquake; (2) choosing the foreign language most commonly used by foreign residents in the Echizen area; (3) making an original video clip; (4) distributing the DVD to relevant organisations and local communities. In order to realise this plan, the researcher planned the following outline of the activities, in collaboration with a professional cinematographer, a professor living in Echizen City, an administrator from EIA, and eight students from the study group. The activities were conducted between July 2015 and February 2016.

Following the above plan, we implemented our project as follows.

#### 1) Discussing the Content of the Project with the EIA (July, August, and December 2015)

The researcher and the eight students contacted an administrator of the EIA to discuss the content of the project. Although we knew our project would be related to natural disasters, we were unsure of

Table 1. Outline for Creating the Video Clip

Contents	Dates	Places
1. Discussing the content of the project via e-mail with the EIA	28 July~	Online
2. Conducting meetings with EIA	10 August, 21 December Duration: 3.5 ours	EIA
A professor who was interested in this project and a cinematographer introduced to us by the EIA joined the project.		
3. First meeting for the creation of the video clip	2 February 10:00–15:00	Jin-ai University
4. Second meeting for the creation of video clip	10 February 18:00 –19:00	Jin-ai University
Students decided the contents and the language to use.		
5. Filming	17 February 18:00 –19:00	Echizen City Youth Centre, Sipy (a supermarket in Echizen City)
5. Presentation of the video clip	24 March 13:00 – 15:00	Jin-ai University
Students presented and distributed the DVD to relevant organisations.		

the best way to introduce important information on natural disasters to foreign residents. After several meetings, we eventually decided that the topic should be earthquakes, which occur reasonably frequently in Japan. We also decided to create a video clip. Important information on emergencies was already been shown on a homepage of the EIA; however, according to an administrator of the EIA, not many foreign residents read this carefully. We noticed that many foreign residents use the Internet and watch video clips, as opposed to reading notes written on the EIA homepage. We chose Portuguese as the foreign language to use in the video, since it is the language spoken by most foreign residents in Echizen City.

#### 2) Advertising and Meetings (February 2016)

Having confirmed the content of the video clips, the students were given a lecture from a professional cinematographer who joined the project in February.

In addition, another professor, who lives in Echizen City, joined the project as an observer and gave a significant amount of important local information with regards to filming. Meanwhile, the administrator asked a number of foreign participants to take part in the filming. Since most foreign residents living in Echizen City are young families from Brazil, the most common language used by foreign residents in Echizen City is Portuguese; in order to make the video clip relatable for such foreign families, we decided to ask one young family to participate, whose first language is Portuguese. Accordingly, five foreign residents from Brazil agreed to participate in this project.

### 3) Filming (February 2016)

On the day of the filming, we gathered at a local supermarket, where we obtained permission to film. The topic of the video was earthquakes, and we focused on preparing for an emergency. Therefore, the first scene depicted a scenario in which someone shops for food. In the explanation, we insisted on the importance of buying non-perishable food items when preparing for an earthquake. Meanwhile, students practiced Portuguese in their recorded explanations.

The second scene was shot in a local community centre. During large earthquakes, no electricity can be used, and it is almost impossible to immediately contact one's family. The scene therefore pictured a meeting place where a family could go in the case of an emergency. In this scene, Japanese students tried to speak in Portuguese.

### 4) Presenting the Video Clip (March 2016)

In the last stage, the researcher and Japanese students conducted a few meetings in which they edited the video clip. In order to avoid copyright

infringement, one student created original background music. An original DVD was produced in our last meeting, and a video clip showing important information on emergencies in Portuguese was completed in March 2016.

## 3. Findings and Analysis

On the last day of the project, a brief interview was conducted with each participant. The key question concerned whether or not these projects were effective in helping students learn about different cultures.

All of the participants believed that the project had been helpful in promoting an awareness of different cultures. Foreign participants responded that they could gain a deeper understanding as a result of being exposed to Japanese student culture, while Japanese students found the project to be a good opportunity to learn about their own culture, as well as the cultures of the foreign participants. Although it is difficult to conclude whether or not the project was successful in developing cultural competence, due to the brevity of the interview, the views expressed by both the Japanese and foreign participants imply that the project was effective in and meaningful for promoting an awareness of different cultures.

In terms of achieving the projects' aims, the first goal was to establish a base for university students to undertake intercultural activities. The project was implemented mainly at the Jin-ai University Campus and did not cause any problems; it could therefore be an appropriate foundation for planning intercultural activities for students in the future.

The second aim of the project was to foster cultural exchange and understanding in a multicultural society through collaboration between academics and communities. As mentioned above, exchanges related

to different cultures occurred during the creation of the video. We concluded that all participants gained a better understanding of different cultures.

The third aim was to cultivate required human resources for planning and implementing grass-roots activities in the Echizen area. The Japanese students maintained a good relationship with the foreign participants—some even conducted research for their theses in partnership with the participants. If we are able to make such cultural projects the subject of academic research, more Japanese students will be likely to participate in such activities.

Finally, perhaps the most significant outcomes of the project was the DVD, which outlined some important information on earthquakes and how we should respond to them. This DVD can help inform foreign residents, who may never have experienced an earthquake, to avoid any issues during an earthquake-related emergency. In conclusion, the aims of the project were achieved with great success.

#### 4. Further Studies

In terms of future studies, there are four pertinent points to note. First, more support networks in higher education need to be developed in order to facilitate the implementation off-campus projects led by students. The project was implemented as part of an educational project in collaboration with the university and local communities. Although economic support from the university played a very important role in this project, almost all of the activities were planned and implemented solely by the researcher and the students from our study group, who were required to invest more time in the activity than expected. This work was in addition to time spent on regular academic studies. In order to make such collaborative and educational projects a regular activity, it is necessary

to create a more structured system within the higher education framework; this could be done for example, by means of increased administrative support and the establishment of a credit transfer system.

Secondly, we need to consider the meaning of ‘collaboration’ more carefully before initiating collaborative activities. Although some may consider budget preparation to be a form of collaboration, using human resources and local networks is essential to implementing community-based projects. When undertaking collaborative activities, it is important to define the roles of each participant.

It is also crucial to strengthen networks with people in related institutions on a regular basis. A personal network, which had already been developed by the researcher over time, was thus very useful in embarking on this project.

Finally, it is important to encourage and sustain students’ motivation. Intercultural activities out with the classroom require a certain amount of time and effort. It is difficult to accomplish such activities when students are not highly motivated. Therefore, it is necessary for organisers to explain the aims and purpose of collaborative activities, and to ensure students will easily understand their content.

In conclusion, the findings of this study indicate that most of the respondents found the project to be effective in promoting an awareness of different cultures. The project can be seen as one of numerous meaningful activities that can help to cultivate a more multicultural community. It is also evident that more practical support from higher education institutions and organisations is needed to ensure such projects run smoothly. Furthermore, empirical activities undertaken in a community need to be linked with academic studies in order to encourage

students to be more critical when considering the purpose of intercultural activities. In the future, more collaborative projects between academics and communities should be encouraged in order to develop intercultural competence, which is the first step in preparing students for living in a multicultural society. In light of these four points, we hope to continue our own collaborative activities in order to contribute to efforts in promoting intercultural competence.

## Acknowledgements

The project titled “Let’s make a video clip” was implemented by members of the Society for Advancing Cross-Cultural Understanding with support from Jin-ai University. We would like to thank Mr Yokohama, Professor Kagoya, and Ms Nakasuga who greatly assisted with the project.

## References

- Echizen City Government (2016) The Total Population in Echizen-city. Retrieved May 30, 2016, from <http://www.city.echizen.lg.jp/office/050/130010/jinkou.html>
- Fukui Prefectural Government (2016) Statistics of the Number of Foreign People living in Fukui in 2015. Retrieved May 30, 2016, from [http://www.pref.fukui.lg.jp/doc/kankou/touroku\\_d/fil/039.pdf](http://www.pref.fukui.lg.jp/doc/kankou/touroku_d/fil/039.pdf)
- Immigration Bureau of Japan (2016) Statistics of the number of Foreign People in 2015. Retrieved May 30, 2016, from [http://www.moj.go.jp/nyuukokukanri/kouhou/nyuukokukanri04\\_00057.html](http://www.moj.go.jp/nyuukokukanri/kouhou/nyuukokukanri04_00057.html)
- Kato, Y. (2007) Education for Multicultural Society in the Global Age: Promoting Active Communication with Different Communities in Japan. *Memoirs of the Graduate School of Engineering, University of Fukui*. 55, 121-132.
- Kato, Y. (2013) On a Collaborative Project to Create a Multilingual Map with Japanese Students, International Students, and the Local Community in Japan. *Ningengaku Kenkyu*, 11, 29-35.
- Mizuta, S. (1989) Ibunka Training (Intercultural Training). In Nishida et al., *Kokusai Ningen Kankei Ron (Theory of International Human Relations)*, Tokyo: Seibunsha, 234-259.
- Yamagishi, M. (1995) Ibunaka-kan Nouryoku to sono Ikusei (Intercultural Competence and its Promotion). In Watanabe et al., *Ibunka Seshoku no Sinri Gaku – Sono Genjyo to Riron (Psychology for Intercultural Contact)*, Tokyo: Kawashima Shoten, 209-223.

## 抄録

本研究は、異文化への理解を深め、多文化共生社会に必要と考えられる異文化間能力の育成を目指す、地域連携教育事業の実践を報告するものである。本事業では、仁愛大学の学生と、越前市国際交流協会との協働で、災害を題材としたDVD『もしも越前市で地震が起きたら：家族と連絡を取る編』を作成した。本研究では、実践内容の報告と、今後も地域貢献活動を継続するための改善点について考察する。本研究は、「仁愛大学地域貢献活動支援補助金事業」の助成を受けたものである。

キーワード：地域連携教育，異文化間教育学，異文化理解