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Enhancing Learners' Intercultural Communicative Competence in an Undergraduate Content-Based English Class in Japan: Examining the Effectiveness Using RFCDC*

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This paper reports an attempt to enhance Japanese learners' Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) through an undergraduate English class in 2022. The students read essays on an American writer's experience living in Japan, exchanged thoughts, and gave individual presentations. They also learned and practiced discussion skills in the first half of the semester. In the second half, they read and discussed several chapters of a book on propaganda and gave group presentations. Its effectiveness was examined by conducting a questionnaire survey after the first and last lessons based on the Council of Europe's (2018b) Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC). The 21 participants responded to pre- and post-surveys, wrote reflections on their learning, and gave consent to the use of their responses for research. Their answers to the multiple-choice questions were analyzed using SPSS, and their comments were analyzed using KH-Coder. Significant improvement was found in some descriptors in the competence areas of "attitudes," "skills," and "knowledge and critical understanding." The participants' comments revealed that the activities of sharing opinions in groups, practicing discussion skills, including how to disagree politely, lessons on culture and propaganda, and group work for group presentations contributed to the improvement.

Keywords: Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), RFCDC, Intercultural Competence (IC)

1 Introduction

The world is becoming increasingly interdependent partly due to accelerating globalization; intercultural interactions occur more often, and the need for

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"intercultural competences has never been greater" (Jackson, 2019, p. 479). To meet these needs, higher education institutions are pressed to nurture global citizens: "globally minded individuals" "equipped with language and intercultural communication skills" for "a diverse society and workforce" (Jackson, 2019, p. 479).

1.1 Intercultural communicative competence

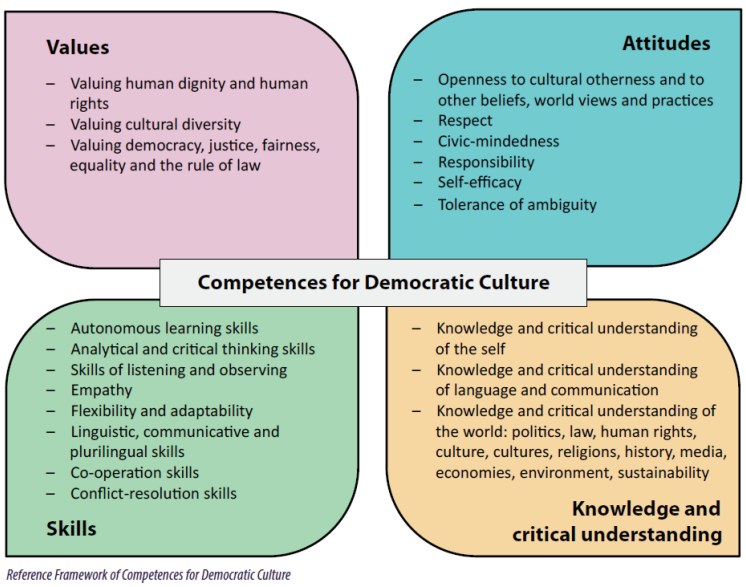
Reflecting the rise of the world Englishes and the growing interest in English as a lingua franca (ELF) study, the notion of intercultural competence has changed over the years: from focusing on adaptability and effectiveness in unfamiliar cultural contexts to involving effectiveness and appropriateness as major elements (Jackson, 2019). In other words, the notion has shifted from seeing how effectively newcomers can adapt themselves to the dominant culture to seeing how effectively and appropriately people can interact with linguistically and culturally different others. Among many models of intercultural competence, Byram's (1997) model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) has had a significant impact, especially in Europe, on intercultural pedagogy, second or foreign language teaching, and the drafting of the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC).

According to Byram (2021), ICC is the qualities primarily "required of the sojourner" and is "the foundation for intercultural citizenship" (p. 4). ICC expands intercultural competence (IC) to include the language dimension and views linguistic elements as necessary to characterize an intercultural speaker (Jackson, 2019, p. 482). As Byram (2021) states, while IC assumes the use of the same language, ICC involves communication among those whose native languages differ. This is why foreign language teaching, in addition to other subject areas, can contribute to the development of ICC.

This paper aims to provide an overview of an elective English course planned and taught to enhance undergraduate students' ICC in Japan and examines its effectiveness using the RFCDC.

1.2 RFCDC

The RFCDC, published in 2018 by the Council of Europe, "includes competences that align with those of intercultural citizenship" (Byram, 2021, p. 123). This framework provides a model of 20 competences required for individuals "to function as democratically and interculturally competent citizens" (Council of Europe, 2018a, p. 37), which are subdivided into four areas: values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge and critical understanding. Figure 1 shows the so-called "butterfly model" that summarizes and categorizes the competences into four areas.



Note. From "About the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture" by Council of Europe (n.d.) (https://www.coe. int/en/web/reference-framework-of-competences-for-democratic-culture/rfcdc)

Figure 1. Model of competences for democratic culture

Volume 2 of the RFCDC provides descriptors, which display the learning targets and outcomes of the competences. Descriptors are "statements referring to concrete observable behavior of a person with a certain level of competence" (Council of Europe, 2018b, p. 11), like a "can-do" list. These descriptors support the assessment of proficiency and provide a reference and a toolbox for educators. There are a total of 135 key descriptors divided into three proficiency levels: basic, intermediate, and advanced.

1.3 RFCDC in pedagogy and assessment

The RFCDC has increasingly been applied in pedagogy and used as an assessment tool to evaluate the effectiveness of ICC or global citizenship education not only in Europe but across the globe, including Japan. In terms of pedagogy, among many studies, Ingoglia et al. (2021) report how they tried to foster democratic and intercultural competences in the primary school contexts in Europe using the RFCDC.

Matsumoto and Kitazawa (2022) piloted teaching models incorporating the RFCDC in language and language-related academic courses in Japanese universities. The two researchers, who prepared a few prototypical instructional models for three class types−required English classes, specialized English classes, and communication-related or applied linguistics courses−,

modified them by listening to the challenges shared in the meetings with teachers using the model (Matsumoto & Kitazawa, 2024). They found that the students reported improvement in their abilities outlined in the RFCDC descriptors. The abilities related to the descriptors in communication "skills" and "attitudes" tended to improve more than those in "values" and "knowledge and critical understanding" (Matsumoto & Kitazawa, 2024).

In Japan, attempts to evaluate the appropriateness of the RFCDC descriptors have been in progress. Sakurai et al. (2021) translated the 135 key descriptors of RFCDC into Japanese, and the same group of researchers conducted a pilot study to examine the appropriateness of RFCDC as an assessment tool for global citizenship competences in Japanese tertiary contexts (Miyamoto et al., 2021). The framework was found to work well overall, with some issues, such as the participants' inability to understand the meaning/intention of some of the key descriptors' Japanese translations. Matsumoto and Kitazawa (2024) report the results of an online survey of 191 teachers of the RFCDC's 135 descriptors from such viewpoints as the necessity for students, the validity in light of the present curricula, and the practical doability. They found that many teachers think most descriptors were necessary for students and that the validity and doability varied by class type. The two researchers also report, as a result of discussions with 21 teachers, that a) some of the RFCDC descriptors are too abstract, b) some that encourage taking actions can be difficult for Japanese students with a culturally ingrained mindset of refraining from raising voices, c) some descriptors use strong expressions which Japanese students may find too aggressive, and d) some deal with religious concepts and viewpoints which could lead to stereotyping unless dealt with carefully and thoroughly. They suggest minor adaptations so that they fit the Japanese educational contexts.

As an assessment tool, Geier and Hasager (2020) report the impact of service learning and active-citizenship learning of undergraduate students from two universities—in the U.S. and Germany—on their civic-mindedness and democratic awareness using the Framework. They found that both pedagogies were effective in cultivating a culture of democracy regardless of national or cultural contexts. Also, Peraza and Furumura (2022) examined how project-based learning (PBL) in a virtual exchange (VE) program for Costa Rican and Japanese students has contributed to developing their intercultural competence by using the RFCDC as a framework. The PBL was found to have had a positive impact on their ICC in all four areas of the framework. Similarly, Moriyama (2021) used the RFCDC to examine whether an international student forum provided the participating Japanese students with intercultural citizenship education opportunities.

As described above, there has been increasing awareness of the RFCDC in many parts of the world in addition to Europe, yet with the growing need to foster democratic and intercultural communicative competences in learners, more research and pedagogies using RFCDC are called for. This paper hopes

to add to this growing body of research by examining how a semester-long English class at a women's university in Japan with a content theme of culture and propaganda enhances learners' ICC.

2 Class, Students, and Content

2.1 Class and students

The class reported in this paper is an elective English class titled Advanced Communication Training I at a women's university in Japan. The researcher taught the class face-to-face in the spring semester of the academic year 2022. The class met once a week for 90 minutes and had 15 lessons, including two Active Learning Hours where students were supposed to learn actively outside of class. The class was intended for those interested in studying abroad in the future. The class motto was to study "in" English; it was a content-based English class. It was also an all-English class where the teacher and students only used English. This class can be categorized as a "specialized English class" according to Matsumoto and Kitazawa (2024).

There were 27 registered students: three juniors, five sophomores, and 19 first-year students. The students majored in various fields; there were five human life and environmental science majors, 10 humanities majors, and 12 science majors. Although this was an "advanced" English class, there were no proficiency requirements. Out of the 27 students, the TOEFL ITP scores of 26 students at the time of entrance to the university were available, with a mean of 512 and a standard deviation of 37. More than two-thirds belonged to B1, and a little less than one-third belonged to B2 in terms of CEFR. Out of the 27 students, two students have experience living outside of Japan for more than one year before entering university (i.e., returnees from abroad). The remaining 25 students had no or limited (e.g., one to two weeks) staying or studying abroad experience.

2.2 Content

To follow the concept of studying "in" English and to meet the needs of the students wanting to study abroad in the future, the lessons were planned and given so that they could acquire ICC in addition to content knowledge and language-related skills. The content theme of the class was twofold: culture and propaganda. The themes were chosen to shed light on or provide a new perspective on what they had taken for granted.

The two themes of culture and propaganda were chosen also because they aligned well with ICC, as articulated in the RFCDC. For example, by going through the culture-related lessons, it was hoped that the students would be curious about other beliefs and cultures (Q7 in Appendix), that they would

show respect to others regardless of their cultural backgrounds (Q8), that they would imagine how things look from their counterparts' perspectives (Q20), that they would reflect critically on their values (Q27), and that they would understand the dangers of stereotyping (Q33). Also, by experiencing the propaganda lessons, the students were expected to understand better the effect of propaganda and how to protect themselves against it (Q35).

The class was divided into two phases. In Phase I, the students read short essays on episodes written humorously by a female author from the US living in Japan, with the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level readability between 5 and 8. The topics included those familiar and relatable to the students, such as school life, seeing doctors, holiday customs, proverbs, and bringing up children bilingually. At the end of Phase I, they individually gave presentations on culture-related topics with brief Q&A sessions and wrote a reaction paper on one of the texts they read.

In phase two, the students read the text on propaganda. The content included the definition of propaganda and various techniques, such as card stacking, glittering generalities, and name-calling. The readability of the texts in Phase II was around 11, more challenging than that of those in Phase 1. At the end of Phase II, they gave group presentations on one of the propaganda techniques and facilitated group discussions. The students also wrote a reaction paper on one of the propaganda techniques at the end of the semester. Table 1 provides an overview of how the class proceeded in this semester.

Table 1. Overview of Lesson Topics and Foci

Phase I			Phase II	
#	Content (Topic)	Discussion Skills	#	Content (Topic)
1	Intro. to the Course		9	Intro. to Propaganda; Reaction Paper Due
2	Sharing Experiences; Discussion on Culture	Active Listening	10	Assertion
3	School Life; Seeing Doctors	Giving Opinions	11	Six Propaganda Techniques Overview
4	Rain and Proverbs; Holiday Customs	Disagreeing	12	In-Class Prep. for Group Presentations
5	Raising Bilingual Children	Discussion Leading	13	Active Learning Hours
6	Effective Translation	Paraphrasing	14	Group Presentations (Bandwagon, Card Stacking, Glittering Generalities)

Phase I			Phase II	
#	Content (Topic)	Discussion Skills	#	Content (Topic)
7	Active Learning Hours		15	Group Presentations (Name Calling, Plain Folk, Testimonials)
8	Presentations on Culture (Individual)			Reaction Paper Due

2.3 Lesson flow and its relevance to ICC

Throughout the semester, the lessons revolved around group work. During the first 30 minutes of each lesson only in Phase I, the students practiced their discussion skills, which are essential when studying abroad. The skills included listening actively, giving opinions, disagreeing politely, paraphrasing, and facilitating discussions. Each skill was explained, modeled, and then practiced in pairs or groups. The discussion training was to help them to participate actively and confidently in discussions and group work in class. From the perspective of ICC, it was hoped that the students would be better able to listen effectively to ascertain their counterparts' intentions (Q19 in Appendix), ask clarification questions to show their understanding (Q22), and show politeness in another language (Q23), as described in the RFCDC.

After the discussion skill practice, the students shared their experiences and ideas by responding to warm-up questions related to the topic of the text. Since the English in the text was relatively straightforward, there were no "planned" vocabulary or comprehension check activities in class. The vocabulary list had been provided on the worksheet, and the students looked them up in the dictionary before class and asked questions if necessary. The same was true of text comprehension.

The main in-class activity was sharing their opinions on the discussion questions related to the text. The students were supposed to choose one of the three questions on each text and submit their written responses as homework, but they discussed all the questions in class. This enabled them to confidently participate in the questions they had prepared for and to experience and practice participating in discussions on the spot. In addition to responding to the teacher-created questions, creating their original discussion questions was also an option and welcomed. The students shared opinions about those student-created questions on the spot as well. Through these group discussions, in which the students were grouped with different members in each class, it was hoped that the students would become used to and more comfortable with unfamiliar situations (Q13 in Appendix) and that they would figure out their group members' meaning by observing their gestures (Q18).

The lessons in Phase II had a similar flow with three differences. The first difference was the absence of focused discussion skills practice. However,

the students were reminded to use the skills so that they could consciously apply them in discussions. Second, comprehension questions were given in the worksheet, and comprehension checks were done in groups and as a class. It was because the text was much more challenging in terms of readability and the degree of abstraction. Third, instead of giving presentations individually to a group of students, the students gave group presentations to the class and facilitated small-group discussions on their topic—one of the propaganda techniques. They explained the technique, provided background information on the examples from the textbook for the audience's better understanding, and searched for and presented real-life examples using the technique. Each group had to create discussion questions as well. It was expected that the students would go through challenges in preparing for and giving group presentations, which was expected to be the opportunity for them to be able to discuss what can be done to make their group better (Q10 in Appendix), be more confident in navigating obstacles (Q12), deal with uncertainty positively and constructively (Q14), learn autonomously (Q15), work to build a consensus (Q24), and encourage the parties in conflicts to actively listen and share issues (Q26). Figure 2 depicts the typical lesson flow in both phases.

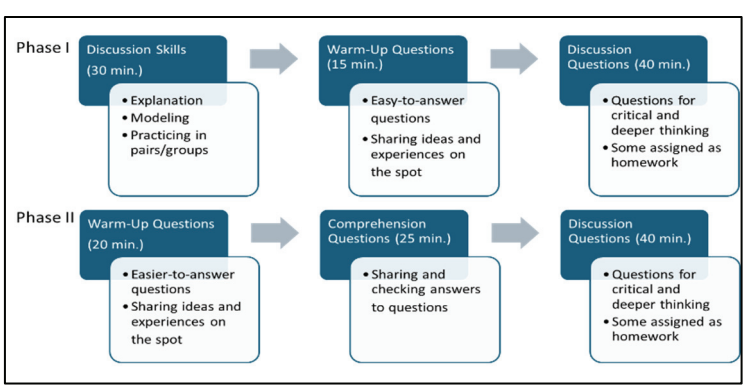


Figure 2. Overview of lesson flow in phase I and phase II

3 Research Questions

The following two research questions were addressed to examine how effective this content-based English class was in enhancing students' ICC in light of the RFCDC and to closely investigate their metacognitive perception of their changes throughout the semester.

Q1. How effective was the class in terms of enhancing learners' ICC?
Q2. How do learners perceive their changes through the learning of the semester?

4 Methods

4.1 Data collection

Regarding the first research question, 35 multiple-choice questions written in both Japanese and English, provided by Dr. Kahoko Matsumoto, were prepared. These questions were the adaptations of the intermediate key descriptors of the RFCDC and covered all four competence areas: "values," "attitudes," "skills," and "knowledge and critical understanding." The intermediate level of key descriptors was chosen because the class was the "specialized English class" in Matsumoto and Kitazawa's (2024) categorization, to which the use of intermediate-level descriptors was recommended. The questions were written bilingually (in English and Japanese) in a "can-do" list style, and the participants chose the option that best matched their self-perception on a five-point Likert-like scale, from 1 (disagree) to 5 (agree). The same questions were asked twice: after the first lesson at the beginning of the semester and after the last lesson at the semester's end. The 35 questions are provided in the Appendix.

Regarding the second research question, students were asked to reflect on their semester of learning and describe how their values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge have (or have not) changed in either English or Japanese.

4.2 Participants

Those who responded to both two surveys and those who gave consent to their responses being used for research were the participants of this study. Out of the 27 registered students, 21 became the participants. No honorarium was paid to the participants. The entire procedure had been approved by the researcher's university's research ethics committee.

4.3 Analysis

As for the first research question, the participants' responses to the 35 multiple-choice questions, or their self-perception, were analyzed using SPSS 27. Descriptive statistics were obtained, and the test of normality, examining data distribution, was conducted on each to determine whether a parametric or non-parametric test should be conducted. Depending on the test of normality results, t-tests or W-tests were conducted to ascertain whether the differences in the participants' responses between the first and second surveys were statistically significant.

As for the second research question, the participants' comments on the additional question in the second survey were analyzed qualitatively. Since they were allowed to choose the language of preference–English or Japanese–for writing their reflections, about one-third wrote in English, and the

remaining two-thirds in Japanese. Before the analysis, the researcher translated their Japanese comments into English, and the errors in their English texts were corrected. The comments were then analyzed using KH-Coder (khcoder.net), a free software for text mining developed by Koichi Higuchi.

Using KH-Coder, the researcher obtained a summary of the words that frequently appeared in the participants' texts, categorized by parts of speech (e.g., nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs). This was done to have a general understanding of what they noticed, realized, and perceived. Then, these high-frequency words were coded manually by the researcher into several groups of thoughts, linked to class activities and content. Finally, the co-occurrence network of the participants' texts was created by KH-Coder, which visually illustrates the frequency and co-occurrence of the words in the texts. This network enabled the researcher to reexamine the data from a different perspective and whether the manual coding was appropriate.

5 Results

5.1 Changes in participants' self-perceptions

5.1.1 Values

Regarding the responses to the questions on "values" (Q1–Q6), the average scores at the beginning (M = 4.49; SD = 0.64) and at the end (M = 4.49; SD = 0.48) of the semester showed no significant improvement; the effect size was small. It is worth noting that the scores were high already at the beginning of the semester and were the highest among those of the four areas at both times. No single response to the questions regarding "values" recorded significant improvement nor medium effect size. See Table 2 for details.

5.1.2 Attitudes

The average scores of the participants' responses to the questions on "attitudes" showed significant improvement from the beginning of the semester (M = 4.01; SD = 0.51) to the end of the semester (M = 4.34; SD = 0.37), with a medium effect size.

Among individual questions, the participants' self-reported scores on questions 8 (about showing respect to those with different socio-economic status and cultural backgrounds), 10 (about making a better community through discussions), 12 (about expressing the belief in one's ability to go through obstacles and to change), and 14 (about dealing with uncertainty constructively and working well in unpredictable circumstances) were higher at the end of the semester with statistical significance with medium effect sizes. Table 2 shows the details.

5.1.3 Skills

The average scores of the participants' self-perceptions on "skills" also showed significant improvement from the beginning of the semester (M = 4.00; SD = 0.54) to the end of it (M = 4.25; SD = 0.24), with a medium effect size.

Out of the twelve questions, the participant's self-reported scores on questions 23 (about expressing politeness in another language) and 26 (about encouraging those involved in conflicts to listen to each other and to share issues) were found to have improved with statistical significance and with medium effect sizes. Table 2 provides the detailed figures.

5.1.4 Knowledge and critical understanding

The average scores of the participants' responses to the questions on "knowledge and critical understanding" improved significantly with a large effect size from the beginning of the semester (M = 3.32; SD = 0.78) to the end (M = 4.04; SD = 0.57).

Regarding individual questions, the participants' responses to questions 27 (about reflecting critically on one's values and beliefs from different perspectives), 29 (about explaining how social relationships are reflected in language in conversations), 34 (about reflecting critically on religions and the religious use of language), and 35 (about explaining the effects of propaganda and how to protect oneself from it) scored higher at the end of the semester with statistical significance. Table 2 provides the details.

Table 2. Change in Participants' Self-Perceptions

Question #	Beginning	End	*P*	Effect Size
	M (SD)	*M (SD)*		
		Values		
Q1	4.57 (0.68)	4.71 (0.46)	.257	0.17
Q2	4.67 (0.58)	4.76 (0.44)	.317	0.15
Q3	4.71 (0.46)	4.62 (0.59)	.414	0.13
Q4	4.38 (0.92)	4.57 (0.60)	.206	0.20
Q5	4.48 (0.81)	4.33 (0.91)	.366	0.14
Q6	4.14 (1.15)	4.29 (0.90)	.567	0.09
Average	4.49 (0.64)	4.49 (0.48)	.133	0.23
		Attitudes		
Q7	4.76 (0.44)	4.86 (0.36)	.317	0.15
Q8	4.43 (0.68)	4.76 (0.44)	.008*	0.41
Q9	3.29 (0.96)	3.67 (0.58)	.065	0.29
Q10	4.19 (0.81)	4.62 (0.59)	.021*	0.36
Q11	4.33 (0.66)	4.57 (0.81)	.132	0.23
Q12	3.81 (0.81)	4.29 (0.72)	.019*	0.36
Q13	3.62 (1.20)	3.90 (1.00)	.222	0.19
Q14	3.62 (0.92)	4.05 (0.67)	.013*	0.39
Average	4.01 (0.51)	4.34 (0.37)	.005**	0.44
		Skills		
Q15	4.00 (0.63)	4.10 (0.44)	.564	0.09
Q16	4.00 (0.89)	4.14 (0.85)	.378	0.14

Question #	Beginning	End	*P*	Effect Size
	M (SD)	*M (SD)*		
Q17	4.05 (0.74)	4.33 (0.58)	.166	0.21
Q18	4.57 (0.60)	4.71 (0.56)	.257	0.17
Q19	4.29 (0.85)	4.52 (0.68)	.225	0.19
Q20	4.38 (0.59)	4.57 (0.60)	.248	0.18
Q21	4.05 (0.67)	4.29 (0.64)	.197	0.20
Q22	3.71 (1.01)	4.05 (0.86)	.134	0.23
Q23	3.10 (1.00)	3.75 (1.02)	.014*	0.38
Q24	4.43 (0.68)	4.48 (0.75)	.593	0.08
Q25	3.62 (1.02)	3.76 (0.70)	.405	0.13
Q26	3.76 (1.04)	4.30 (0.73)	.008**	0.41
Average	4.00 (0.54)	4.25 (0.24)	.010[a**]	0.41[b]
	Knowledge & Critical Understanding			
Q27	3.81 (0.93)	4.38 (0.59)	.003**	0.46
Q28	3.67 (1.11)	3.90 (0.94)	.353	0.14
Q29	2.85 (1.27)	4.05 (0.74)	.004**	0.44
Q30	3.00 (1.34)	3.62 (1.12)	.056	0.30
Q31	3.62 (0.86)	3.71 (0.72)	.564	0.09
Q32	3.57 (1.21)	4.10 (0.70)	.074	0.28
Q33	3.80 (1.15)	4.14 (0.79)	.305	0.16
Q34	2.76 (1.04)	3.62 (1.02)	.001***	0.50
Q35	2.76 (1.26)	4.81 (0.40)	.000***	0.58
Average	3.32 (0.78)	4.04 (0.57)	.000***[a]	0.70[b]

Note. n=21. This table demonstrates the participant's responses to the questions, asking their self-perceptions of proficiency on a five-point Likert scale (5: Agree—1: Disagree).

[a] To examine statistical significance, t-tests were conducted due to the normal distribution of the data. For others, Wilcoxon's tests were conducted.

[b] To determine the effect size, Cohen's d was calculated because of the normal distribution of data. For others whose distribution was not normal, *r* was calculated.

*p<.05. **p<.01. **p<.001.

5.2 The participants' reflections on the semester's learning

5.2.1 Participants' words by frequency and parts of speech

From the list of words the participants wrote, sorted by parts of speech (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) and by frequency, several groups of thoughts emerged among the participants. See Table 3 for details.

The first category seems to be about content knowledge as characterized by the words such as "propaganda," "culture," "value," "understanding," "know," "learn," "think," "understand," "foreign," "different," and "Japanese." Regarding the propaganda topic, one student wrote, "Through propaganda lessons, I got to know its power and technique to sway people's minds and the fear of doing so." Another student wrote:

> Through lessons on propaganda in the second semester, research for our presentation, and listening to my peers' presentations, I learned that propaganda is everywhere in our society, that it is

> familiar to our lives, and that it is effective. This led me to think of how to deal with it.

The topic of culture also led the learners to a new noticing. A student wrote, "By reading the texts written by a foreigner living in Japan, I have come to have a better understanding of diversity and cultural differences." Another student described how her values changed through the semester's learning: "Especially my values on foreign cultures and customs have changed; by reading concrete examples in the text, I could get to know a foreigner's perspectives, which we Japanese don't usually sense." In essence, as one student wrote: "Through the study of cross-cultural understanding and propaganda, I learned new values and the importance of not believing blindly in things."

The second category is about English and communication skills, especially related to discussions and presentations, as can be seen in words such as "discussion," "presentation," "opinion," "skill," "speak," "convey," "communicate," "listen," "English," and "actively." One student wrote about discussion skills:

> Through the discussions we had during classes, I improved my ability to convey my thoughts in English with understandable expressions. I am also happy to learn the expressions to express my opinions and agree/disagree with others' opinions in a mild way. By getting to know those expressions, I think that my attitude toward discussions improved, and it became easier for me to express my thoughts."

Another student commented on one aspect of discussion skills: "This semester, we practiced politely disagreeing with others. In speaking English, I used to agree entirely with others, but after taking this class, I have become able to criticize them without making them feel bad." Another student wrote about listening skills: "The teacher taught us how to listen actively and how to ask questions, so I became much more aware than before. In discussions not only in English classes but in other classes, I now consciously ask questions for better understanding and listen actively." Finally, one student wrote about presentation skills: "By experiencing presentations in English, I noticed the importance of thinking about how to convey my message better to the audience."

The third group of thoughts is about change or growth, displayed in words such as "become," "come," "want," "able," "better," "more," and "before." One student described her change in interpersonal communication: "I became able to communicate better with someone I met for the first time. I became able to speak in front of strangers confidently and enjoyably, compared to before taking this class." Another student described her change in mindset: "I have come to think that it is so fortunate to have the opportunity to speak and take

classes in English, even if I am not confident in my English proficiency." Another student described her change in motivation: "The class where almost everything was communicated in English . . . led to my desire to speak English much better. Many of the peer students who took the same class were very motivated, which naturally made me want to work hard." Finally, one student reflects on her change in attitude: "I was not proactive enough in speaking English before. It was because I was afraid of making mistakes and did not have confidence in myself. However, in this class, I tried to be active because I had an opportunity to challenge myself, and I think I could participate actively."

The last group is about group interaction, as can be seen in words such as "friend," "student," "convey," and "listen." One student described how she behaved in group work: "When I couldn't find the right words in English and am stuck, I have come to think of it as something that can't be helped, not as something bad. Also, when my friends were in the same situation, I became able to elicit what the friends wanted to say by guessing and saying the words for them." Another student reflected on her learning through group discussions: "It was important not only for me to see data and textbook, but also to get new perspectives through discussions with my friends. I will continue to listen carefully to what my friends are saying and to give my opinion." Further, another student stated that the interaction she experienced helped her participate in a program with international students: "I had many opportunities to convey my opinions in English, so I have been able to speak English naturally without hesitation. This skill was useful when I discussed with foreign students in the Summer Program."

In summary, the participants seem to have felt their change or growth by learning content knowledge and English communication skills and by experiencing discussions, presentations, and interaction with group members.

Table 3. Participants' Words by Parts of Speech and Frequency

Noun		Verb		Adjective		Adverb	
propaganda	17	be	48	able	10	not	25
class	14	have	23	other	7	also	13
discussion	8	know	13	better	5	actively	5
presentation	8	learn	12	English	5	so	5
culture	7	think	11	foreign	5	before	4
opinion	6	become	10	many	5	even	4
skill	6	do	10	first	4	better	3
value	6	speak	10	bad	3	especially	3
group	5	come	7	different	3	more	3
other	5	get	7	Japanese	3	much	3
semester	5	convey	6	more	3	well	3
friend	4	feel	6	new	3		
importance	4	take	5				
lesson	4	communicate	4				
opportunity	4	listen	4				
student	4	try	4				

Noun		Verb		Adjective	Adverb
text	4	understand	4		
understanding	4	use	4		
		want	4		

5.2.2 Co-occurrence network of participants' words

The co-occurrence network of the words in Figure 3, produced by the participants, visually shows their thoughts in terms of the frequency and relatedness of the words used. The size of the bubbles shows how frequently the words were used; the larger the bubble surrounding the word is, the more frequently the word was used, and the distance between words signifies how closely they were used.

The words in this network exhibit the participants' reflections from a different perspective. From the networked words, it could be summarized that the participants "have" "come" to "know" "propaganda" and "learn" "values" in "Japanese" and "foreign" "culture." "Group" "work," including group "presentations," was "found" to be an "important" experience, and they could see "different" "things" "more," "especially" how "Japan" is compared to other "countries." In addition, "taking" this "class" led them to "speak" "English." They could "also" "become" "able" to "communicate" partly because they had "many" "opportunities" to "convey" their "thoughts," and using the "expressions" helped them "better" at it. They also became able to "listen" "actively" and find out "what" their "friends" "wanted" to "say."

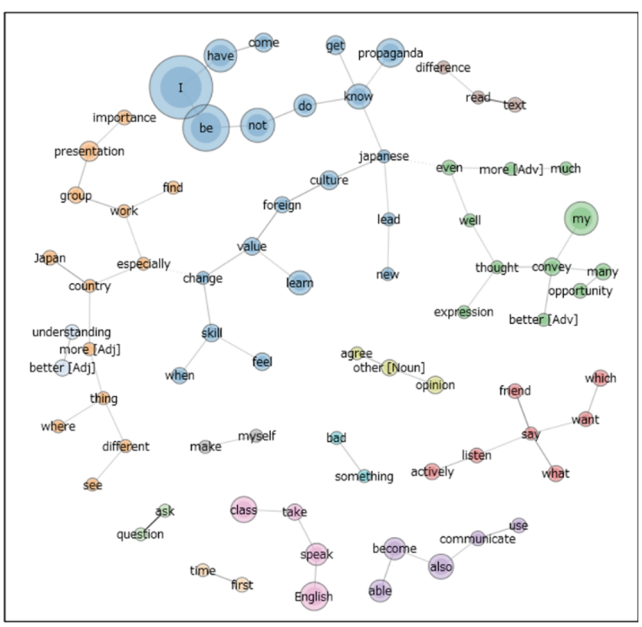


Figure 3. Co-occurrence network of participants' words

6 Discussion

6.1 Changes in participants' self-perceptions

There was no change in the participants' "values" at the end of the semester compared to the beginning of the semester, in part because the scores at the beginning of the semester were already high. This could imply that the participants already mostly shared the values described in the RFCDC.

Many factors could explain the participants' change in "attitudes." It seems that the culture topic may have triggered students to realize different perspectives and values in other cultures, leading to respect towards different others, as shown in the change in question 8 (about showing respect to those with different socio-economic status and cultural backgrounds). In addition, by experiencing group work many times, including group discussions and group presentation preparation, the participants may have encountered some obstacles and overcome them. By going through these experiences, they may have sensed their growth and become more confident than before, as can be seen in the changes in questions 10 (about making a better community through discussions), 12 (about expressing the belief in one's ability to go through obstacles and to change), and 14 (about dealing with uncertainty constructively and working well in unpredictable circumstances).

The participants' responses to the two questions in the "skills" were found to have changed significantly after their learning in the semester. They learned how to disagree politely in class, practiced doing so, and applied it in discussions. This experience is likely to have led them to feel that they became better able to express politeness, as described in question 23 (about expressing politeness in another language). In terms of conflict resolution skills, they learned how to listen actively to their counterparts' opinions, including asking questions for clarification. They might have also experienced conflicts and resolved them while doing group work. These two factors could have contributed to their self-perceived improvement in mediating the parties in conflict, as stated in question 26 (about encouraging those involved in conflicts to listen to each other and to share issues).

"Knowledge and critical understanding" was the area in which the participants' self-perceptions improved the most. This could be partially explained by the fact that those at the beginning of the semester were the lowest and that there was much room for improvement, especially when they had opportunities to consciously learn something related to this area. As for individual questions, the lessons on propaganda embedded with student discussions and student group presentations on it probably enhanced the participants' deeper understanding of and strategies for dealing with it, which is reflected in the improvement with statistical significance in their responses to question 35 (about explaining the effects of propaganda and how to protect oneself from it). Reading texts written by an American female writer on her

new experiences in Japan and her thoughts on them may have surprised them, led them to reflect on their values and (unconscious) beliefs, and reconsider what they had taken for granted. In addition, listening to peers' reactions in discussions could have prompted them to reflect critically on their way of thinking. These factors might have contributed to the improved average score in question 27 (about reflecting critically on one's values and beliefs from different perspectives).

However, the improvement in scores in question 29 (about explaining how social relationships are reflected in language in conversations) and question 34 (about reflecting critically on religions and the religious use of language), as depicted in Table 4, is hard to explain with direct association to the content in this class as no class content directly dealt with the relationship between language and social relationships and the religious use of language. Perhaps the participants have become more sensitive to how the language is used by learning how to disagree politely, by reading texts on culture, or by interacting with peers and the teacher. They could also have become more confident in detecting similarities and differences—even if they are subtle—in language use regarding social relationships between Japanese and English. In other words, perhaps their awareness of language use led them to realize what had been unnoticed when they read or listened to English in other classes or outside of class. In terms of the religious use of language, their learning in propaganda lessons, including persuasion and assertion techniques, helped them become more aware of it. Since the participants' comments did not provide clues to these phenomena, however, the above are mere speculations or surmises at best.

Also, not all of the response scores to the questions that had been expected to improve showed improvement. As summarized in Figure 6, out of the five questions (7, 8, 20, 27, and 33) that were expected to bring about improvement from the culture lessons, three (7, 20, and 33) did not show significant improvement. Similarly, although group presentations including preparation were planned as an activity to lead to the score improvement in six questions (10, 12, 14, 15, 24, and 26), two (15 and 24) showed no significant improvement. Moreover, discussion skills practice was done to improve their perceptions in three questions (19, 22, and 23), but only one (23) showed significant improvement. In addition, group discussions were expected to improve their perceptions in two questions (13 and 21), but none showed improvement in scores.

One possible explanation is that some of the scores (e.g., descriptors 7 and 24) were already high at the beginning of the semester and had limited room for improvement. Another explanation could be that the link between the activities and ICC was not clearly visible or understood by the participants. Had the teacher's explanation or comments touched more explicitly on ICC, the participants might have connected the two more easily. This could also be due to the difference in the degree of abstraction; compared to the hands-on in-

class activities, the explanation in the descriptors was more abstract, which might have resulted in obscuring the link. Linking the two may have required deeper reflection. Thus, the participants were possibly less aware that their progress was associated with ICC. The final account could be that at least some participants did not see their improvement or that the degree of improvement varied largely by students. This shows the possible limitations of the treatment done in one class in one semester.

Table 4. Comparison of Intended Learning Outcomes and Participants' Improvement in Self-Perception with Statistical Significance

Content/Skills/Activities	Intended Learning Outcomes	Participants' Improvement in Self-Perception
Culture Lesson	7, 8, 20, 27, 33	8, 27
Propaganda Lesson	35	35
Discussion Skills Practice	19, 22, 23	23
Group Discussions	13, 18	
Group Presentation Prep.	10, 12, 14, 15, 24, 26	10, 12, 14, 26
Other		29, 34

6.2 The participants' reflections on the semester's learning

The participants' rich reflections described their learning and change throughout the semester. The four categories of thoughts that emerged by analyzing the participants' texts—content knowledge, discussion and presentation skills, growth or change, and interaction with peers—seem to show that the content knowledge that they learned in class, the language aspect of the class especially on discussion and presentation skills, and their experience in engaging in group work led them to realize their growth or change.

Many of the participants' comments seem to imply that at least some of those experiences and learning were new to them and that many saw growth in themselves. There are three possible explanations for this. First, considering that approximately 70% of the registered students were first-year students, this "newness" could be explained by the change in learning style and learning outcomes between high school and university education. For those first-year students, this class was among the first classes they took as university students, and their flexibility and positive attitude toward new experiences, or "mini culture shock," could possibly explain their change, as shown in the self-reported perceptions. Second, this class was composed of students of different years and majors. Since students at this university usually take language classes with those in the same year in the same department and with similar English proficiency, the mixed composition of students in this class might have been new for them. This class composition provided the environment for the students to interact with those with different backgrounds, interests,

experiences, and proficiency levels, which might have involved some conflicts and reconciliation, feeling an inferiority complex and overcoming it, and going through new experiences and noticing through them. Third, the purpose of the class was to prepare students for their possible future study abroad, and naturally, they mostly participated in speaking English actively in class. The class content and activities were planned and done, simulating the class style and group work in the study-abroad setting in mind. It might have been a rare opportunity for the registered students to encounter and interact with those who have similar aspirations and motivations and experience the somewhat new class style with them.

The class reported in this class does not have any virtual exchange element, as described in Peraza and Furumura (2022), or international exchange, as reported in Moriyama (2021). Still, by providing an environment to enhance learners' ICC and planning the lessons towards the aim, it would be possible to improve some aspects of their self-perceived ICC as measured by the RFCDC descriptors, to a certain extent.

7 Conclusion

This paper has examined whether and how a semester English class at a Japanese women's university enhanced learners' ICC. The class seems to have enhanced the participants' self-perceptions of some of the descriptors in the "attitudes," "skills," and "knowledge and critical understanding" areas of competences outlined in the RFCDC. The descriptors that showed significant improvement were often linked to the content knowledge they learned as well as the practice of newly learned language skills of discussion and presentation skills, and rich opportunities for applying them in group work. The participants' reflections revealed that some students became more confident and perceived themselves as more competent than before taking the class.

However, this study has several limitations. First, the researcher was the teacher of this class. Even though the students were well informed that the content of their reflections and self-reported scores were irrelevant to their grades, the responses could have been given to please the teacher researcher. Put differently, the positive results could have been inflated, and the participants' comments might have been written in favor of the teacher. On a related note, the study only shows the participants' perceptions, which are not endorsed by any objective assessment. Therefore, the results may require conservative evaluation. Second, there is no longitudinal data that examines whether the effect lasted even after the semester ended. There is no data on students who did study abroad after taking the class, either. Thus, even though this class seems to have triggered a positive effect on some aspects of ICC to a certain extent, whether the class produced a long-term effect or helped the participants prepare for their studying abroad is unexplored.

Possible future studies may include investigating the long-term effect of this class or its effect on learners who studied abroad after taking it. Interviewing learners before, during, and after studying abroad may reveal insights into what learners experience and find difficulties in while studying abroad, which may give insights into how to improve the class. In addition, some students took the continued version of this class in the next semester. Examining how they regarded the second semester's class and whether there is any difference between the participants who took the class for the first time and those who continued is worth exploring.

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Appendix
35 Questions Asked to the Participants in the Survey

Values

1	I can defend the view that no one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

2	I can argue that all public institutions should respect, protect, and implement human rights.
3	I can express the view that the cultural diversity within a society should be positively valued and appreciated.
4	I can argue that democratic elections should always be conducted freely and fairly, according to international standards and national legislation, and without any fraud.
5	I can express the view that, whenever a public official exercises power, he or she should not misuse that power and cross the boundaries of their legal authority.
6	I express support for the view that courts of law should be accessible to everyone so that people are not denied the opportunity to take a case to court because it is too expensive, troublesome or complicated to do so.

Attitudes

7	I can express curiosity about other beliefs and interpretations and other cultural orientations and affiliations and express an appreciation of the opportunity to have experiences of other cultures.
8	I can treat all people with respect regardless of their cultural background and express respect towards people who are of a different socio-economic status from himself/herself.
9	I can express commitment to not being a bystander when the dignity and rights of others are violated.
10	I can discuss what can be done to help make the community a better place.
11	I can submit required work on time and show that I take responsibility for own mistakes.
12	I can express a belief in my own ability to navigate obstacles when pursuing a goal, and if I want to change, I can express confidence that I can do it.
13	I can be comfortable in unfamiliar situations.
14	I can deal with uncertainty in a positive and constructive manner and work well in unpredictable circumstances.

Skills

15	I can learn about new topics with minimal supervision and assess the quality of my work.
16	I can assess the risks associated with different options.
17	I can show that I think about whether the information I use is correct.
18	I can watch speakers' gestures and general body language to help himself/herself to figure out the meaning of what they are saying.

19	I can listen effectively in order to decipher another person's meanings and intentions.
20	I can try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective and take other people's feelings into account when making decisions.
21	I can adapt to new situations by using a new skill and by applying knowledge in a different way.
22	I can ask questions that show my understanding of other people's positions.
23	I can adopt different ways of expressing politeness in another language.
24	I can work to build consensus to achieve group goals, and when working as a member of a group, I can keep others informed about any relevant or useful information.
25	I can assist others to resolve conflicts by enhancing their understanding of the available options.
26	I can encourage the parties involved in conflicts to actively listen to each other and share their issues and concerns.

Knowledge and Critical Understanding

27	I can reflect critically on my own values and beliefs and on myself from a number of different perspectives.
28	I can describe the social impact and effects on others of different communication styles.
29	I can explain how social relationships are sometimes encoded in the linguistic forms that are used in conversations (e.g. in greetings, forms of address, use of expletives).
30	I can explain the universal, inalienable, and invisible nature of human rights.
31	I can reflect critically on the relationship between human rights, democracy, peace, and security in a globalized world.
32	I can reflect critically on the root causes of human rights violations, including the role of stereotypes and prejudice in processes that lead to human rights abuses.
33	I can explain the dangers of generalizing from individual behaviors to an entire culture.
34	I can reflect critically on religious symbols, religious rituals and the religious uses of language.
35	I can explain the effects that propaganda has in the contemporary world and how people can guard and protect themselves against propaganda.

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