

Developing a Global Curriculum: Student Interest in Global Education

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Abstract: With globalization of universities being a major concern in Japan, many universities are designing new programs and courses with a focus on global education. The goals of these programs, however, do not always align with the goals of the students at the universities, leading to a lack of student interest in the course content. This has led toward a need for designers of these global curriculum and courses to think of ways to increase student interest in these programs, thus helping to align student goals with those of the program (Spera & Wentzel, 2003). This paper will share data from a course in one such program, which utilized participant-developed questions to engage student interest in the course content. These questions are shared and suggestions for future research are given.

Key words: Global Education, Course Development, Student Interest, Student-Centered Learning

1. Introduction

The introduction of the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Science, and Technology's (MEXT) "Super Global University Initiative" has pushed Japanese universities to create new projects and design plans to show their progress toward "globalization." This idea of globalization and a focus on intercultural understanding and competence is not limited to Japan (i.e. Wang & Kulich, 2015), but many Japanese universities have embraced this globalization goal nonetheless. One way that some universities are pursuing this goal is through the development of new global certification and international baccalaureate (IB) programs, such as the Globally-Minded Teacher Training Program found in the School of Education at one university in the Hiroshima prefecture. However, the goals of a university, program, or instructor (such as the goal of globalization) do not necessarily align with the goals of the students of these programs, and this potential incongruence can have a negative effect on student interest and motivation to learn about the topic (Spera & Wentzel, 2003). It was a need to develop a course for a global curriculum that led the researcher to look at instructional methods that would assist in increasing and maintaining student interest in global education. In the following review, studies relating student interest and course performance will be discussed first, followed by those with suggestions for improving student interest.

2. Student Interest and Performance

The importance of student interest and motivation to learning has long been researched, having been characterized by Bruner (1977) as a key attribute to the promotion of greater student

engagement and learning. This has been supported by research further showing an increase in student interest having an effect on student motivation, affective learning, and attention (Mazer, 2017; Mazer, 2013; Renninger, Hidi, & Krapp, 1992; Bruner, 1977), learner empowerment (Weber, Martin, & Cayanus, 2005; Weber, 2004), and may lead students to use deep comprehension processes (Renninger, 1992). Tobias (1994) summarizes these points by stating that “interest contributes to learning in the following ways: invokes deeper types of comprehension processes, leads to greater use of imagery, and may stimulate a more emotional, more personal, and more extensive network of relevant associations than is invoked by prior knowledge” (p. 50). An increase in student interest can also affect student behavior in class, leading them to “listen attentively, verbally contribute during discussions, take notes, and ask questions of instructors” (Mazer, 2013, p. 89). On the other end of the spectrum, a lack of student interest has also been associated with negative emotions associated with learning and may be tied to students’ disengagement, withdrawal, and failure in school (Skinner, Furrer, Marchland, & Kindermann, 2008).

From these few articles, it is apparent the importance of considering student interest when designing a new course or program, but what is the best way to do this? Researchers seem to point to a more student-centered approach to instruction for an answer, finding that often students feel more traditional courses lack context, are unrelated to their future careers, and believe that their instructors may have even lost sight of the current issues facing the future or their field (Hains & Smith, 2012). This move toward student-centered instruction may be different from even the learners’ previous learning experiences, but it is exactly this “break with previous experiences of learning contexts [which] creates opportunities” (Reneland-Forsman, 2016, p. 20) and leads to “student empowerment and educational ownership” (Hains & Smith, 2012, p. 370). Researchers also suggest that instruction should be tailored to students’ interests to motivate them, and doing so could have positive motivational characteristics for long periods of time (Tobias, 1994). As will be described below, the course developed for the current study took these points into consideration and designed a chance for the students to guide the direction in which their learning would take place by allowing them to generate a list of questions focused on their interests in global education.

3. Research Question

The current study had two eventual goals: first, to generate a list of questions that may be used to guide the development of a course on global education and, second, to classify these questions to see if there are any common trends apparent in student interest on the topic of global education. As a result, the following research question was developed:

When participants from a Japanese university are given an opportunity to create questions based on their own interests in global education, what emerging themes are revealed?

4. Methods

Development of questions

This study was designed for a 15 week course on differences between education in Japan and education in various countries around the world. As part of this course, guest speakers from the United States, China, Kenya, Nigeria, Norway, Iran, and India were asked to give a presentation on their experiences with education from their countries which were then followed up with a question and answer session in which participants could get further clarification on any part of the presentation. In order to prepare for their presentations, the guest speakers were given a list of questions developed by the students (see Appendix). This list, developed by the participants, is the driving force of the

current study and represents the interests of the students in regards to global education. As such, the questions were not altered by the researchers or professors of the course, nor were any questions added by these individuals.

On the first day of the course, the participants were given a description of the course and in the subsequent lesson were put into small groups to think of questions they would like to give to the guest speakers. Participants were told that any question was acceptable and that their questions would help to shape the design of the presentations. The instructor also reminded the participants that speakers would be coming from various countries, so the questions should not necessarily focus on any specific country but rather be appropriate on a global scale. All questions were written in English. The participants were given the majority of the second lesson (50-60 minutes) to develop their lists of questions before submitting them to the instructor at the end of the day.

Participants

Participants were composed of undergraduate students enrolled in a university in Japan. Participants for this study were limited in two ways. First, participants were limited by the number of students admitted by the special degree program of which this course is but one requirement. Second, participants were limited by the number of students allowed to register for this course. As mentioned above, the questions were developed in groups on the second day of class, so the response rate for the study was 100% ($n = 47$).

Of the 47 participants, 18 (38 %) were male and 29 (62 %) were female. The participants were either in the second semester of either their second ($n = 43$), third ($n = 3$), or fourth year ($n = 1$) of schooling in their respective undergraduate programs. Although all students came from the School of Education, their respective majors varied across different fields (i.e. elementary education, English education, music education). Student enrollment in the course and special degree program itself was completely voluntary, so the students actively participated during class time. Acceptance to the course required no specific English proficiency requirement, so the levels of English proficiency were varied.

5. Results and Discussion

Question Categories

At the conclusion of the question development activity, the groups of participants submitted a total of 127 questions. After checking the questions for clarity and duplication, a final list of 111 questions was developed. An analysis of these questions led to the organization of the list according to themes representing different aspects of education. These themes or categories are: Impressions of Japanese Education, English Instruction, Primary/Secondary School, Student Life, Statistics, General Administration, and Other. More detail on the meaning of these categories will be given below.

Analysis of Questions

The aim of this study was to discover what emerging themes are revealed when participants from a Japanese university are given an opportunity to create questions based on their own interests in global education. As mentioned above, the questions received seemed to fall under seven different categories.

Impressions of Japanese Education

The first category of questions developed by the participants focused on student interest in the world view of Japan's educational system. It is interesting that students who are taking a course where they can learn about cultures outside of their own seemed concerned, rather, with their own culture's

global image. Examples of questions from this category include: “What do you think about Japanese education,” “What do you think about English education in Japan,” and “What parts of Japanese education do students in your country consider great?”

English Instruction

The second category of questions focused more specifically on how English is being taught in other countries. English education always seems to be in the forefront of discussions on education in Japan, so this category is not too surprising. Examples of questions from this category include: “When do you start English study,” “Were there any Assistant Language Teacher in your school,” and “What do you think about students’ motivation of learning English as a second language?”

Primary/Secondary Education

The third category listed above focused on education policies for elementary schools, junior high schools, and senior high schools in the guest speakers’ countries. As many participants were from an elementary education background, it should not be a surprise that the majority of these questions focused on elementary schools. Examples of questions from this category include: “How was your break time in your elementary school,” “What subject do student study in elementary school,” and “Did you have the opportunity to learn Japanese until high school?”

Student Life

The fourth category of questions focused on the daily activities of students from the guest speakers’ countries. These questions tended to focus less on the academic aspect of education and more on the extracurricular activities. Example questions from this category include: “Did you wear school uniform,” “What kinds of club activity do they have,” and “Are there students who walk to school?”

Statistics

Questions from the fifth category focused on more data based information about the educational systems in other countries. This category was titled “statistics” because most of the questions ask for a specific number or percentage for the presenters to provide. This category had the second most questions at 25, suggesting that the students were more interested in quantitative information. Questions from this category include: “How many students are there in a class,” “How much is the fees? School expenses,” and “The percentage of students in elementary school? Advancing to higher education?”

General Administration

These questions in the sixth category focused less on the students of other countries and more on policies of the schools or departments of education themselves. This category represented the largest category at 26 questions. Examples of questions from this category include: “Are there school rules in your school? And how was,” “Is there a system of provision or meals,” and “What are the goals of education?”

Others

The final category included questions that didn’t really fall under any of the other categories, or they were not really related to any of the other questions. These questions often asked for presenter opinions or definitions of terminology that the participants had heard of. Examples of these types of questions include: “Who was your admirable teacher and why,” “When did you start to use SNS (Social Network Services),” and “What is grade skipping?”

6. Impact of Data and Suggestions for Further Research

Considering a recent focus in higher education on learner-centered practices and globalization of curriculum, many researchers have suggested that the current generation of students must be taught in a manner that forces them to construct knowledge for themselves and consider how their knowledge will be used outside of the context of only the academic system (Hains & Smith, 2012; Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007; Huba & Freed, 2000; Kroll & LaBosky, 1996). It is also suggested that this can be accomplished by creating a classroom in which students are emotionally interested, can see the practicality of what they are doing, and can combine their newly acquired knowledge with their previous knowledge (Ablin, 2008). The activity developed for this research, allowing students to actively participate in the development of their own knowledge by creating questions that focus on their personal interests, is one way to ensure that this type of instruction is present in any classroom situation. Further, the categories of questions developed from this activity may serve as a starting point for further development of global curriculum or courses on global education in Japan. However, perhaps the largest limitation of the current study is the lack of statistical analysis.

Using the current study as a starting point, future research on the topic of increasing student interest in a global curriculum can take many paths. One suggested method for measuring development and effects of student interest in learner-centered coursework is to include the use of journaling (Hains & Smith, 2012). Allowing students to write freely what they feel about the course progress or having them write summary reports on the presentations after they are given would provide the research with documentation that could be analyzed for degree of interest and to check if student questions were being answered. If future research does take this course of analysis, it should be cautious as a free response format may not provide a sufficient or accurate picture of participant learning as they may “avoid writing about areas in which they have uncertainty, instead choosing to elaborate on areas of greater confidence” or they may “provide a response that only tangentially relates to the target answer” (Hubbard, Potts, & Couch, 2017).

Another way to measure the effects of student development of questions on student learning and interest could be through the use of a KWL chart at the beginning of the course, in which students first write what they know (K) about education in other parts of the world, followed by what they want to know (W) about global education, and finally at the end of the course write down what they learned (L) through the presentations based on their questions. This would not only show which aspects of global education interest the participants the most, but could also create further data on the relationship between interest, prior knowledge, and learning, a topic which has been found in educational research for a while (Tobias, 1994; Renninger, 1992; Asher, 1980). A third course that the research could take would be to look at how participant creation of questions on global education affected the development of their intercultural competence. This could be measured with the use of the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) measurement tool as suggested by Wang & Kulich (2015).

7. Conclusions

This study was developed with two main goals in mind: to generate a list of questions that may be used to guide the development of a course on global education and to classify these questions to see if there are any common trends apparent in student interest on the topic of global education. The achievement of these goals was guided by the research question of “When participants from a Japanese university are given an opportunity to create questions based on their own interests in global education, what emerging themes are revealed?” The first of these goals was accomplished by the group work assigned to the participants on the second day of their course comparing education

in Japan with education in various countries around the globe, and was the main methodology used to help answer the research question and accomplish the second goal. Analysis of the developed question list showed seven categories of interest for the Japanese students in this course: Impressions of Japanese Education, English Instruction, Primary/Secondary School, Student Life, Statistics, General Administration, and Other. The data provided for this study suggest a greater interest in questions of statistical data and general administration and policies of education in other countries, but a lack of statistical analysis and the use of convenience sampling does not allow for generalizations beyond the samples students and institution. Suggestions for future research included the use of student free writes or KWL charts to show development of student interest in the topic of global education or the use of the IDI measurement tool to measure how the creation of these questions affected participant development in intercultural competence.

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Appendix

Categorized Student Questions

Impressions of Japanese Education

- What do you think about Japanese education?
- What do you think about Japanese school?
- What do you think about the education system in Japan?
- What do you think about English education in Japan?
- It is said that many students can't speak English fluently. What do you think about English education in Japan? What should teacher in Japan do to teach their students English?
- What are some differences between Japan and your country in education?
- Any trait of your schools that may be strange to Japanese students (culturally)?
- What parts of Japanese education do students in your country consider great?

English Instruction

- When do you start English study?
- What was your English class like?
- What skill of English was focused on in your country?
- Were there any Assistant Language Teacher in your school?
- What do you think about students' motivation of learning English as a second language?
- Please tell us how to teach English.

Primary/Secondary School

- How was your break time in your elementary school?
- How long did you study in your home for a day when you were elementary school student?
- Are there any playground equipment in elementary school?
- What subject do students study in elementary school?
- Did you have the opportunity to learn Japanese until high school?

Student Life

- Did you wear school uniform?
- What kind of school lunch did you like?
- What subject is the most popular?
- What kinds of club activity do they have?
- How do they go to school?
- How about the relationship of school and parents?
- Is there a break time that children can play outside?
- Is there a system that children clean their classroom?
- What do children do/play after school?

- Did you have any homework in your school?
- What kind of school events did you have?
- What do children do something to learn music in their own home?
- Are there any music club activity in the school?
- Are there students who walk to school?
- What about vacations?
- How much independence is there?

Statistics

- How many holidays for a week did you have?
- How many students are there in a class?
- What kind of subjects did you learn?
- What time does your school start and finish?
- Are there club activities in your school?
- Do they go to cram school?
- How many classes are there?
- How much is the fees? School expenses
- Are there health center or library?
- How often do the students have music class in the school?
- How long compulsory education should they taken?
- Are there kindergarden?
- How many classes do students always have?
- Do teachers teach all subjects?
- Are there separate schools in your country?
- The percentage of students in elementary school? Advancing to higher education?
- What is the most popular second language?
- How long is each class?
- What language do students learn in your country?
- How long did you work at school a day?
- How many teachers are in a school?
- Which countries do the students come from?
- What is the school attendance rate?
- The rate of race?
- What is your country's teacher image/social status/income?

General Administration

- What kind of homework did you have?
- How did you study your native language in your school?
- Did you have school lunch?
- Are there school rules in your school? And how was?
- Can you eat something during taking a test?
- How do students learn with?
- Are there class of moral or home economics?
- Are there any policy of school?
- Is there a system of provision of meals?
- Is there a system of scholarship?
- How do teachers evaluate?

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- Is there homeroom? Morning meeting?
- In Japan, we must study Japanese and classical Japanese. How about your country?
- Are there any classes about computer?
- Did you study other subjects in English?
- What is education system in your country?
- Did you use Information and Communication Technology (ICT)?
- How long students learn music in the school?
- Please tell me the exam to enter in university.
- Interesting school roles?
- How did you do classes? Are lectures main?
- What time does the school starts?
- What is the class schedule?
- How do you teach leadership?
- What are the goals of education?
- Do you use blackboards or white boards? Any use of technology?

Other

- Who was your admirable teacher and why?
- If you came back to the good old days, which period would you come back, elementary school, junior high school, high school, university?
- What languages have you learned?
- What do you think about your teacher?
- Were your teachers busy? Why do you think?
- When did you start to use SNS?
- What is grade skipping?
- What is the issue of your country's education?
- Is music education regarded as important?
- What kind of music skills do they focus on?
- Are there any cram schools?
- Which is popular private school or official school? Why?
- How do you deal with bullying? (If any)
- Please tell me about Japanese language education in your country.
- Are there a lot of people who want to be a teacher in the future?
- What are classes which are not done in other countries?
- What is the happiest experience in your teacher life? In Japan?
- What is the hardest experience in your teacher life? In Japan?
- Was it hard to be a teacher?
- What subject did you teach?
- What is the feature of specific education in the country?
- Do you have monster parents?