

0. Title: The Impact of English Learning Environment on 21st Century Skills

1. Introduction: MEXT has been dramatically reforming its Education systems for 2020. The revised Course of Study describes three domains of aimed competences: 1) knowledge and skills, 2) ability to think, to judge, to express themselves, and 3) attitude of proactive learning and students' individuality (MEXT, 2018). From the author's own experience of learning English in Japan and US, she has been interested in the relationship between the English learning environment and the progress of acquiring those competences. In the paper, the learners' changes through intercultural experience (study abroad) and its reasons are focused and then the author will discuss how to apply the findings to English education in Japan.

2. Literature review:

- 1) Learner competencies and teacher instruction required by MEXT
- 2) 21st Century Skills and *Ikiru Chikara*
- 3) Intercultural experience and its impact on learners.
- 4) Research questions: 1. Does studying abroad help develop students' 21st century skills?
2. What are the elements of high school foreign language classes that help develop 21st century skills?

3. Method

1) Participants consisted of convenience samples from 25 Japanese people who have experienced study abroad in English speaking countries, 11 regularly enrolled students of Iwate University, 2 regularly enrolled students of universities in Japan, 6 regularly enrolled students of North Central College in US, and 6 college alumni.

2) The researcher conducted an Excel questionnaire by email to each participant from October 12th to October 31st, 2019. The questionnaire was designed to capture participants' change through study abroad and the relation with English education, organized along three thematic blocks. The questionnaire was composed of multiple-choice questions and open-ended questions.

4. Findings:

1) The questionnaire consisted of a list of 28 21st century skills. About 74% of participants on average answered they improved or newly acquired each skill. The most acquired skills were: 1. "the ability of trying to understand other languages, cultures and races", 2. "the ability to think from multi-aspects", 3. "the curiosity and questioning mind towards learning". On the other hand, 3 participants answered they declined in the skill of "cooperativity or teamwork".

2) Participants' reasons for improvement can be categorized into 4 aspects: language, culture, education. Main reasons are "English has the function that makes convey the message directly", "the country has the culture that accept people with different background", and "there are a lot of opportunities to discuss in class".

3) The questionnaire consisted of a list of 15 items about active learning. About 83% of participants on average answered they strongly agreed or agreed to each item. The items with the strongest agreement were "there is a good relationship in class", "there are a lot of questionings and discussion in class" and "there is effective feedback from a teacher".

4) Compared to Japanese education, participants thought the following two things were problematic in classes they experienced: "there were too much discussion to follow the point", and "students with less enthusiasm could be left behind by others with higher enthusiasm".

5. Discussion

1) English learning environment influences learners' 21st century skills. Especially it has big impact on the ability to think, and learners' individuality.

2) The features of English, the country's culture, and education system help the learners' progress of acquiring 21st century skills.

3) There are relations between the triggers of acquiring 21st century skills and the elements of active learning. In addition, participants who feel their improvement of 21st century skills also feel their class during study abroad included the elements of active learning.

4) Those findings would be able to be applied to English education in Japan.

6. Further work

1) Work on more findings in details of each block such as by purpose, span, and individual tendency.

2) Find the connection between results from questionnaire and teaching methodologies.

3) Discuss how to apply the finding to English education in Japan.

7. References:

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