

研究ノート

Teaching about local ethnic diversity
in the EFL classroom in Japan

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The major goal for English language education at the post-secondary level has been to provide students with the linguistic knowledge and training in the English language in order to prepare them for their future careers at an international level. With the current globalizing society, university students are also expected to develop their abilities in skills such as intercultural communication, critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving and collaboration. However, it may be argued that in order for the effective attainment of these type of skills, it cannot be achieved through the study of language education alone, but also by the study of cultural education, and will continue to be necessary to truly attain the internationalization of Japan. (Okada, 2004). According to Yamada (2015), due to the advance of globalization in Japan, in the classrooms of primary, secondary and post-secondary educational institutions, "Japan will come to have an increase of students from diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds". As a result, education in Japan must start to reflect this new generation of Japan in belonging to an acknowledged multicultural society. Yamada further states that curriculum developers in Japanese education "must embrace the domestic and regional diversity..." and that by "incorporating a multicultural perspective in EFL instruction thus enables its teachers and students to open conversations about diversity that are usually neglected in their classes" (p. 119). "Adopting a multicultural perspective in turn heightens EFL students' awareness and understanding of ethnic and linguistic diversities within their country and among other countries" (pp.123-124).

Global competence

Post-secondary institutions in Japan are under constant pressure to produce students who are globally competent. Educators such as Gutierrez (2000) mentions that global competence may be explained by someone having the skills listed below:

- awareness and understanding past and current global issues
- understanding racial and ethnic diversity

- tolerance and respect for others with different beliefs and perspectives
- ability to communicate and collaborate with both native and non-native English speakers
- ability to judge appropriately and with respect
- ability to approach problems and find mutually beneficial solutions
- ability to take responsibility for one's actions anywhere in the world

Mansilla (2016) states that “global competence is no longer a luxury, but a necessity” (p.12). Globally competent students are curious and engaged in the world. They are able to investigate the world beyond their immediate surroundings, understand their own and other’s cultural perspectives, communicate across differences, and take action to improve conditions. Globally competent students have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that will help them thrive within diverse and multicultural communities. They have the ability to investigate the world, recognize and weigh perspectives, communicate ideas and take action (Jackson, 2016, p. 19). However, producing globally competent students is not an easy task for educators. University teachers constantly find themselves asking questions such as, “How can we effectively teach global competence to mainstream Japanese students, who of which the majority of them have no awareness of current racial or ethnic diversity within their own country?” and, “In what ways can teachers deepen our students’ understanding about why global competence is required for their futures in Japan? One of the ways that educators can nurture global competence in their classrooms is by teaching students about the local ethnic diversity in “their own backyard”.

Awareness of “ethnic local diversity” in Japan

The majority of mainstream Japanese university students too often think that the topic of ‘diversity’ has nothing to do with them; that it is something that exists outside of Japan, a ‘foreign entity’, and has no relation to their identity, social groups or country. There is still the belief that diversity is something related only to minorities, and not to mainstream

Japanese students. On the contrary, this is not necessarily true, and building awareness of this fact is a challenge for university educators. It may be argued that by teaching the relationship between students’ individual lives and their surrounding community is vital in becoming truly global competent. Yamada (2015) views that students’ awareness of local or domestic issues are essential to communicate inter-culturally, and with close attention to the world that students live in, allowing them to reexamine their cultural practices and attaining a deeper understanding of their home country. This is an important process because it is connected to one’s construction of self-identity (p. 117). Willis (2002) argues that “we can no longer view education and culture as having a meaning and form linked simply to territory or of the people of that land as necessarily linked to it culturally” (p. 27).

Teaching about local ethnic diversity in the EFL classroom enhances students understanding of various issues of education, culture, diversity, and therefore deepens their understanding of how these issues have affected their own lives, communities and society within Japan, and have a better understanding of knowing how to appropriately think about and approach issues of diversity, have respectful dialogue about issues, problem solve, and be responsible for their actions and decisions. Yamada (2015) argues that “students who study only in their home country may reproduce unfair attitudes and treatments on the basis of their class, gender, race, ethnicity, language, religion and so forth” (p. 127). In this sense, the discussion of possible issues that students will face when they speak English with others of different cultural backgrounds needs to be included in EFL classes. By

understanding how diversity currently affects their own lives and society, students will have a deeper understanding of the diversity issues in other countries, making them have a heightened perspective and understanding of the world, making them more globally competent and global-ready for the workforce after graduation which will benefit them in their future careers where ever they are in the world. Through understanding domestic ethnic diversity, students can enhance their understanding about what diversity means in order to be able to inquire about the world, understand different perspectives, take part in respectful dialogue and be responsible for their actions whether they are in Japan or in another country. This knowledge provides them with the skills and knowledge needed for their survival and success in a rapidly changing world.

Benefits of teaching local ethnic diversity in the university EFL classroom

It is not difficult to find “diversity” even within a so-called racially and ethnically homogeneous society such as Japan. In first teaching the concept of diversity explicitly to students they more easily understand the concept of multiculturalism being existent in their own communities, the concept of local diversity, and how that can heighten and deepen their understanding of diversity around the globe which can further develop their global competence. Okada (2004) says that when students learn about cultural diversity, they can learn how to respect individuals including accepting and valuing differences, and being tolerant of others (p. 4). Through developing English proficiency skills (reading, listening, speaking, writing) teachers need not search so far to encourage their students to

learn about the diverse global society around them. As a result, it can enrich their understanding and development of their global competencies.

Some benefits of teaching about domestic ethnic diversity to Japanese university students may include, but not limited to the following:

- encourages critical thinking about the current social issues in Japan
- increased awareness of their own citizenship and identity in Japan
- help to prevent prejudice and discrimination, helping combat stereotypes and prejudicial behavior
- teaches students multiple historical perspectives
- strengthens students’ intercultural awareness and cultural consciousness
- encourages students to have multiple perspectives and ways of thinking
- encourages students to inquire, seek new information and new perspectives beyond their familiar environments
- learn to reflect and think critically (how does this topic or issue affect you? Your community? Your society, Japan?)
- learn how to engage in respectful dialogue
- learn how to take responsibility for one’s actions and be accountable
- raises students’ intercultural sensitivity
- recognize spheres of influence at personal, local and global levels and ways in which they influenced things to be the way they are in the world
- develops the students’ skills to prevent intercultural conflict before it occurs
- prepares students for interdependence and diversity both locally: at their schools, their neighborhoods, community, town, city, nation and abroad

Ideas for teaching about local diversity to enhance students' global competency

Although Japanese EFL students are encouraged to be global citizens by learning English, they are not given opportunities to learn experiences in social contexts where English is used in a diverse culture to which individual speakers of the language belong. (Yamada, 2015, p. 127). Acknowledging individual thoughts and experiences helps students reflect on their own roots. Thus, the discussion of Japan's minority groups and issues may be a possible topic in the EFL classroom, but topics can be explored and examined from broader perspectives and multiple aspects. To address social justice issues and reduce prejudice and discrimination, teaching the racial and ethnic diversity that exists within one's own country should be integrated into EFL classes. The full acknowledgement of domestic ethnic and linguistic diversity is important for Japanese EFL learners and will further help them recognize that they will likely communicate with other non-native speakers within that context. Some suggestions for teaching local ethnic diversity in the EFL classroom may include the following:

Beyond-the-textbook

Teachers can no longer depend on textbooks to teach about globalization. Going 'beyond-the-textbook' approach opens up many more different ways to encouraging discussion in class such as with current events in the local newspapers, media coverage of certain topics, and movies and documentaries that focus about particular social issues. This is an excellent idea for not only increasing English language proficiencies, but for enhancing knowledge of both local and global ethnic

diversity issues. Beyond-the-textbook approaches to teaching diversity will enhance students' understanding of diversity within their own communities.

Fieldwork

Taking students out into the community by exploring global-local connections and seeking information beyond their students' and teachers' familiar environments. Some examples of fieldwork involve interviewing people, conducting surveys on campus or around the city, doing field work within the city or neighboring towns and cities with ethnic minority communities, inviting special guests to come speak to the class about diversity issues, etc.

In-class activities

Intercultural communication activities that can be done in class such as role plays, games, debates, and discussing case studies in groups in class, etc. By sharing our experiences and discussing its content, students and teachers can help one another understand its content, discuss conflict resolution, with recognizing not only the differences of each other's opinions and perspectives but also the similarities.

Conclusion

Because societies have become globalized, Sooner or later, all Japanese will be required to deal with challenging issues regarding their nation's internal diversity. Because societies constantly evolve, students need to pay more attention to social movements and changes. Therefore, to engage students in learning about internal diversity in Japan will encourage them to share their own thoughts, ideas and experiences with others in the classroom, and for all students to learn from each other's perspectives and experiences. As educators teaching students in a university campus, it is

our responsibility to provide multicultural and multilingual spaces to our students and offering a socially diverse community and create opportunities to develop their intercultural competence and enhance their understanding of diversity not only in the classroom, but of the people living in their community such as domestic ethnic minority groups. Teachers can use teaching EFL at the university classroom as a tool to not only develop students' communication skills, but to encourage students to explore the global spread of English and how it has created many types of diversity, the creation of power relations around the world, about racial and ethnic stereotypes, and further to critically examine and discuss the political consequences and cultural attitudes towards race and ethnicity in Japan. Through teaching local diversity education, teachers can encourage their students gain a deeper awareness of domestic social issues affecting their lives. If students can attain an enhanced understanding of their own citizenship, their identity, and understand that diversity issues do in fact involve them, they are better equipped with the knowledge and skills for developing and maintaining a society that does not discriminate against difference.

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