

A Pilot Study on Stereotypes among Japanese University Students in a Global English Course

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Abstract

This pilot study explores the impact of a Global English course on the stereotypical perspectives of Japanese university students towards different countries. Stereotypes, cognitive generalizations about social groups, play a significant role in shaping intercultural perceptions and interactions. The study hypothesizes that the course, designed to enhance students' cross-cultural competence, would lead to changes in their stereotypes.

The research involved 34 Japanese students who participated in the Global English course during the Spring term of 2023. Data were collected through pre-course and post-course surveys measuring stereotypes related to warmth (friendliness, kindness, trustworthiness) and competence (talent, efficiency, skillfulness). The findings revealed that while the course had a statistically significant impact on dimensions related to warmth, resulting in more positive perceptions, it had less pronounced effects on competence dimensions.

These results highlight the complexities of stereotype change, with interpersonal experiences and cultural insights contributing to altering warmth-related stereotypes, while competence-related stereotypes showed resistance to change. The study's findings contribute to the field of cross-cultural education, providing insights for curriculum development and fostering greater cross-cultural awareness among Japanese university students. However, the study acknowledges limitations, including the self-reported nature of the survey and the need for further research with larger and more diverse samples.

Introduction

Stereotype refers to a cognitive process wherein individuals categorize and ascribe specific characteristics, attributes, or behaviors to a particular social group. These generalizations, often oversimplified and based on limited information, can influence individuals' perceptions, judgments, and expectations of individuals belonging to that group. Stereotyping, while a natural cognitive

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tendency, can perpetuate biases and reinforce social inequalities. Stereotypes often oversimplify complex cultural identities and can lead to misunderstandings, prejudice, discrimination, and the perpetuation of harmful biases. In this pilot study, we hypothesize that after completing the Global Englishes course, Global Career Studies students change their perception towards foreign nationalities after acquiring additional information about the culture, people, language, and everyday life activities, to name a few.

In academic research, generalization refers to the process of extending findings or theories from a specific sample or context to a larger population or broader set of circumstances. It involves making inferences and drawing conclusions beyond the specific data or observations collected to generate broader insights or principles. Generalization is closely connected to stereotypes, as stereotypes often involve making generalizations about a group of people based on limited information or preconceived notions. Various social categories such as age, gender, race, nationalities, social class, culture, and religious groups may be subjected to the phenomenon of stereotyping.

As David Schneider writes, ‘it is hard to escape the notion that cultures provide much of the content of stereotypes; they tell us what to think’ (1996, p. 432). Indeed, culture is a fundamental, pervasive environment that influences how people feel, think, and behave (Fiske et al., 1998). Another view is when stereotypes are formed individually as a psychic process, including personal experience (one may think that Russians are unfriendly and scary as he/she encountered some Russians who did not smile or heard some related stories about it). It is also essential to consider context’s role in stereotype formation.

Literature Review

Foreign stereotypes in Japan

In Japan, stereotypes toward foreigners can not be viewed without the discourse of the “theory of the Japanese,” Nihonjinron. This discourse emphasizes Japan’s racial and ethnolinguistic uniqueness and homogeneity by formulating foreigners as others who are inept in the Japanese language and culture. In other words, the ‘Japanese’ Self necessitates ‘foreign’ (or ‘non-Japanese’) Others to establish and maintain ethno-national identity (Creighton, 1997). Main theses of the “theory” claim a notion of uniqueness of race due to long period of isolation; uniqueness due to geographical features (島国, shimaguni), unique climate (風土, fūdo, 四季, Shiki) that reflects in Japanese peoples` nature and behaviour; uniqueness of Japanese language with a unique

grammatical structure and native lexical corpus, often being vague even for those who speak it fluently; uniqueness in psychology of self and its alter ego and, finally, unique Japanese social structures where groupism prevail over individuals.

Such “otherness” or “othering” is also manifested verbally. Usage of the word *gaijin*, which literally means outsider or plural personal pronouns such as `wareware` to emphasize the contrast between us “we Japanese” and you (you foreigners), which mainly refers to Caucasians foreigners who have distinctly different phenotypical features than the Japanese. According to Fukuda (2017), stereotyping of foreigners is dual in nature in Japan. While the attitude towards Caucasians, foreigners from Europe, West Asia, the Middle East, and European Americans is uncritical and esteemed, on the other hand, as Brewer (2011) argued, mass media may also use “non-recognition, ridicule, and regulation” strategies to construct a lesser image of people of color in Japan by depicting foreign nationals of Asian descent as less educated, Africans as poor, and Muslims as the dangerous other in society.

To oppose *nihonjinron*, scholars indicate that the “otherness” of foreigners revealed in foreigner stereotypes is necessary to form and maintain Japanese self-identity.

The Stereotype Content Model

When opposing out-group members, people tend to worry if they intend to harm and if they are capable of harming. From Sumner (1906) and Allport (1954) onward, intergroup relations theory has assumed that people have positive emotions towards their in-groups and consequently feel negative about out-groups. Goodness and badness are the main core categories we consider when encountering an outsider or a group.

However, the stereotype content model SCM developed by Fiske (2002) provides a more detailed view, proving that out-groups can be liked (even respected) or respected (even liked). The in-group can learn that out-groups have some positive characteristics.

The two core dimensions of general stereotype content are warmth (e.g., friendly, good-natured, sincere, and warm) and competence (e.g., capable, competent, confident, and skillful).

When first described, SCM showed that mixed clusters combine high warmth with low competence (paternalistic) or high competence with low warmth (envious), and (c) distinct emotions (pity, envy, admiration, contempt) differentiate the four competence-warmth combinations. Tested upon social group categories, SCM can be applied in different areas of social studies, politics, etc. Related

dimensions also describe national stereotypes and prejudices towards specific groups. Thus, SCM can also serve as a pancultural measure of differences across cultures.

Global Englishes

Due to the transformative effects of rapid globalization, Japanese higher educational institutions have reformed their language education policies, emphasizing active learning, learner autonomy, and learner engagement through English medium instruction (EMI) (Egitim, 2022a; Inaba, 2020). MEXT's English education reforms Thus, many universities have introduced new EMI courses into their curricula, which are primarily taught by FETs. (Rose & McKinley, 2017).

At Bunkyo Gakuin University, the course of Global Englishes was introduced as a part of the Global Career Institute curriculum in 2017. The course aims to foster globally competent students with communicative English language skills and create critical cultural competence (CCC), which is defined as the ability to show acceptance, tolerance, and respect for different cultures (Puckett & Lind, 2020).

The first step towards developing CCC involves enhancing cultural knowledge, skills, and understanding (Campinha-Bacote, 2011). It allows students to examine their cultural beliefs, values, and assumptions, enhancing critical cultural awareness (Byram, 2008). When a person develops critical cultural awareness, they perform critical and reflective evaluations independently. As a result, individuals can learn to confront their biases and develop a perspective beyond static preconceived notions (Egitim, 2021).

Since 2017, teachers from 14 different countries and three continents representing diverse cultures, religions, and traditions have used learner-centered approaches to raise the critical cultural competence of Japanese students.

With great success among GCI students, the course continues to improve pedagogical strategies as the demand for highly skilled workers for international companies who work in multi-ethnic teams rises.

The unique format of the material delivery and access to students' feedback on knowledge about foreign countries gives an exclusive opportunity to examine the shift in the perspectives towards countries studied.

This article researches the question of to what extent Japanese university students change their

stereotypical perspective about certain countries after completing a Global English course.

Methodology

This study aims to investigate the extent to which Japanese university students change their stereotypical perspectives about certain countries after completing a Global English course. The research question guiding this study was: “To what extent do Japanese university students change their stereotypical perspective about certain countries after completing a Global English course?” By collecting and analyzing data, this study aims to contribute to our understanding of the impact of educational interventions on cross-cultural perceptions.

Participants

A total of 34 Japanese university students participated in this study. Participants were enrolled in the Global English course for Spring term 2023. The course focuses on enhancing students’ understanding of different countries. The participants were chosen using convenience sampling, ranging in age from 19 to 21. All participants had a basic proficiency in English, which was a prerequisite for enrolling in the Global English course.

The context

The Global English course consisted of six modules dedicated to a specific country. The countries covered in the course were Egypt, Syria, China, Russia, Brazil, and Thailand. A native teacher teaches each module, and comprises ten lessons, with 60 lessons throughout the year. The lessons were designed to provide cultural insights, historical background, and societal information about the respective countries.

Data Collection

Data were collected using a self-reported survey administered before and after the participants completed the ten lessons of the Global English course about one specific country. The survey aimed to assess participants’ stereotypical perspectives about the countries they were learning about. The survey consisted of two parts:

First, demographic information about participants’ background, including age, gender, academic

year, and prior exposure to international experience, such as the number of international friends, whether one of their parents is non-Japanese, and their experience traveling abroad.

Second, stereotypical perspective assessment. The second part utilized a 5-point Likert scale to measure participants' perspectives on various dimensions related to the countries. The items assessed were:

- 1- How friendly people from the country are.
- 2- How kind people from the country are.
- 3- Trustworthiness of people from the country.
- 4- Perception of talent in people from the country compared to others.
- 5- Efficiency of people from the country.
- 6- Skillfulness of people from the country.

The first three items (friendliness, kindness, and trustworthiness) are related to the fundamental dimension of warmth, and the second three items (talent, efficiency, and skillfulness) relate to the second dimension of competence.

Participants were asked to rate each item on a five-point Likert scale, with response options ranging from “Not at all” to “Extremely.” The researchers adjusted certain words in the survey items to make them more understandable to Japanese students while keeping the same intended meanings—this modification aimed to improve comprehension and ensure that participants could respond more accurately.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the surveys were subjected to a rigorous analysis to answer the research question. The analysis consisted of the following two steps:

First, descriptive statistics were calculated for demographic variables and the six items assessed. Mean and standard deviation values were computed to understand the initial perspectives of participants.

Gender	Male	female	Total
	8	24	32

Traveling abroad	Traveled before	No experience	Total
	18	14	32

Foreign friends	Foreign friends	No foreign friends	Total
	18	14	32

Parents nationality	Japanese parents	Non-Japanese parents	Total
	28	4	32

Second, a paired samples T-Test: To determine whether there were significant changes in participants' perspectives after completing the Global English course, a paired samples t-test was conducted using IBM SPSS version 23.0. This involved comparing participants' pre-course and post-course scores on each item. The significance level was set at $p < 0.05$. Before the T-test, the normality test was conducted on all items' pre-course and post-course scores to ensure that the data was suitable for the paired samples t-test. From the Shapiro-Wilk test, the data was found to follow a normal distribution before $p = .120$ and after $p = .039$, indicating that the assumption of normality is met for further analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their rights, and the voluntary nature of their participation. All responses were kept confidential, and the data were anonymized for analysis. The study was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines and regulations.

Findings

The findings of this pilot study are interesting trends in the extent to which Japanese university students change their stereotypical perspectives after completing the Global English course. The results of the paired sample t-test revealed that for the overall perspective change, the difference between pre-course and post-course scores was not statistically significant ($p = .013$). This suggests that, on average, the Global English course did not result in a significant alteration in participants' overall stereotypical perspectives (Table. 1)

Table 1: Paired samples Statistics

	Mean	N	SD
Before the course	3.59	32	.880
After the course	3.97	32	.673

Table 2: Paired samples Test

	Mean	SD	p-value
Before and after the course	-.385	.831	.013

When analyzing each item separately, as seen in Tables 3 and 4, we found that for the first item, “How friendly people from the country are,” the difference between pre-course and post-course scores was statistically significant ($p = 0.009$). This suggests that the Global English course significantly altered participants’ perceptions of the friendliness of people from the country, resulting in a positive shift in perspective.

The second item, “How kind people from the country are,” also showed statistical significance, with a p-value less than 0.003. This indicates that participants’ perceptions of the kindness of people from the country changed significantly after completing the course, with a notable positive shift in perspective.

In contrast, the third item, “Trustworthiness of people from the country,” exhibited a p-value of 0.017. While this p-value is below the typical significance threshold of 0.05, it is worth noting that it is on the borderline of significance. This suggests that the course had a somewhat borderline significant effect on participants’ trustworthiness perceptions toward people from the country.

The fourth item, “Perception of talent in people from the country compared to others,” showed a p-value of 0.115, which is above the usual significance threshold of 0.05. This indicates that the course did not lead to a statistically significant change in participants’ perceptions of talent in people from the country compared to others.

Both the fifth and sixth items, “Efficiency of people from the country” and “Skillfulness of people from the country,” demonstrated insignificance with p-values of 0.229 and 0.063, respectively. These results suggest that the Global English course did not result in statistically significant changes in participants’ perspectives on the efficiency and skillfulness of people from the country in question.

Table 3: Paired Samples Statistics

		<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
Item 1: Friendly	before	3.63	1.008
	after	4.09	.777
Item 2: Kind	before	3.63	.976
	after	4.16	.808
Item 3: Trustworthy	before	3.47	1.047
	after	3.88	1.008
Item 4: Talent	before	3.59	1.073
	after	3.91	.856
Item 5: Efficiency	before	3.53	.983
	after	3.75	.803
Item 6: Skillfulness	before	3.72	1.085
	after	4.09	.734

Table 4: Paired samples Test

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>P-value</i>
Item 1: Friendly	-.469	.950	.009
Item 2: Kind	-.531	.950	.003
Item 3: Trustworthy	-.406	.911	.017
Item 4: Talent	-.312	1.091	.115
Item 5: Efficiency	-.219	1.008	.229
Item 6: Skillfulness	-.375	1.100	.063

Lastly, by combining each of the three items under one dimension separately, as seen in Tables 5 and 6, we found that for the first dimension, “warmth,” the difference between pre-course and post-course scores was statistically significant ($p = 0.003$). This suggests that the Global English course significantly altered participants’ perceptions of the friendliness, kindness, and trustworthiness of people from the country, resulting in a positive shift in perspective.

In contrast, the competence dimension demonstrated insignificance with p-values of 0.081. These results suggest that the Global English course did not result in statistically significant changes in participants’ perspectives on the talent, efficiency, and skillfulness of people from the country in question.

Table 5: Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	Std. Deviation
Warmth (friendly, kind, trustworthy)	before	3.57	.924
	after	4.04	.779
Competence (Talent, Efficiency, Skillfulness)	before	3.61	.987
	after	3.91	.718

Table 6: Paired samples Test

	M	SD	P-value
Warmth (friendly, kind, trustworthy)	-.468	.824	.003
Competence (Talent, Efficiency, Skillfulness)	-.302	.947	.081

Discussion

The findings of this pilot study suggest that the impact of the Global English course on altering stereotypical perspectives varied across dimensions. While the course had statistically significant effects on dimensions related to warmth, it had less pronounced effects on competence. These findings highlight the complexity of perspective change in response to educational interventions. The most typical approach to changing people’s stereotypes about a social group is to expose them to group members who disconfirm the stereotype. (Wyer, Sadler, & Judd, 2002) While in Global Englishes courses, we are limited to 1 real person from the group - teachers; with the course structure, it is still relatively easy to influence the “warmth” of the focal group by demonstrating materials of everyday life activities, interpersonal communication, values, and beliefs. Furthermore, during five weeks of the program, native teachers successfully created a friendly atmosphere in the classroom, which apparently led to a change in the personal experience of interaction with members of the groups studied.

However, there is apparent resistance to change in perceptions of competence. There exists a lack of evidence-based information and activities showing “competence” in classroom activities. Skillfulness, efficiency, and talent are qualities that are challenging to evaluate. They are often subjective, highly context-dependent, difficult to measure without specific goals and circumstances, and multifaceted. It often involves a combination of qualitative assessments, self-reflection, peer

feedback, and performance metrics when available. The creator of SCM, Fiske et al. (12, p. 77), state that “warmth judgments are primary: warmth is judged before competence, and warmth judgments carry more weight in affective and behavioral reactions.” The dimension of warmth serves as an indicator for anticipating the emotional tone of interpersonal judgments, indicating whether the impression leans toward being favorable or unfavorable. Meanwhile, the competence dimension predicts the intensity or degree of that impression, determining just how strongly it leans in either a positive or negative direction. As seen from above, our pilot study results confirm this statement.

Limitations

It is important to note that this study’s findings may be limited by the self-reported nature of the survey, potential biases in participant responses, and the use of a single course structure. Additionally, the course’s influence on participants’ perspectives may interact with other external factors that were not controlled for in this study. While this pilot study offers valuable insights into the potential impact of a Global English course on changing stereotypical perspectives among Japanese university students, the outlined limitations underscore the exploratory nature of the research. Future studies with more extensive and more diverse samples, more extended observation periods, and more comprehensive methodologies could build upon these preliminary findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Contribution

This pilot study significantly contributes to the field of cross-cultural education and our understanding of stereotype change among university students. Firstly, it offers preliminary insights into the potential of educational interventions, specifically the Global English course, in shaping stereotypical perspectives. By examining dimension-specific effects, the research provides a nuanced understanding of the course’s influence, with statistically significant shifts observed in some aspects (e.g., kindness and friendliness) but not in others (e.g., efficiency and skillfulness). Additionally, its focus on Japanese university students adds a unique cultural context, contributing to the broader literature on stereotype change. Lastly, the findings have practical implications for curriculum developers, educators, and institutions seeking to enhance cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity, as they can inform the design of more effective courses and educational interventions

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