

Report

Peace Project and Foreign Language Learning: Intercultural Exchange between Japanese Primary School Students and University Students from Two Countries

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1. Introduction

In order to raise awareness of thinking about peace, it is important for people from different cultures to exchange their feelings and ideas about peace. The Global Peace Path project, which began in Germany in 2018 (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, 2021), serves to demonstrate how Intercultural Service Learning can be implemented in foreign language classrooms. The project intends to contribute to intercultural understanding and jointly strives towards peace while using the foreign language in a meaningful way. This because it is essential for young people from different cultures to exchange thoughts and ideas about peace through foreign languages to raise their awareness of peace. When foreign language learning is linked to broader educational frameworks such as Intercultural Citizenship Education and Education for Democratic Competences, the “Global Peace Path” could have a multifaceted impact on Japanese students who have few opportunities to use foreign languages.

In this project, a Japanese primary school and two universities in Japan and the Netherlands, exchanged peace messages on an internet bulletin board and held an online meeting. Furthermore, the university students participated in a ZOOM meeting in 2021. This paper describes the project and examines its outcomes by analyzing students’ reflections. It was suggested that such international projects are important to raise the awareness of the younger generation about the diversity of society and to help them understand the significance of intercultural exchange.

2. Background

According to Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in Japan (hereafter, MEXT), one of

the objectives for foreign languages in the Course of Study for primary school¹⁾ is stated as follows (MEXT, 2017).

(3) To deepen the pupils’ understanding of the underlying cultures of foreign languages and foster an attitude of attempting to proactively communicate in foreign languages while giving consideration to the people they are communicating with. (MEXT, 2017, p.1)

Therefore, it is important to develop students’ communicative attitudes as well as their English language skills. To enhance these abilities, it is important for them to learn about different cultures and to develop intercultural attitudes in practice.

Several peace-related practices have been implemented in Japanese educational settings. For examples, Sakamoto (2010) argued that caring for others, having compassion, and accepting those who are different from oneself are the fundamentals of international understanding education, such as human rights education and peace education. With the goal of English classes as education for the whole person in mind, she explained how English activities should incorporate thematic learning within the frame of international understanding education. Iwasaka and Yoshimura (2012) claimed that according to the Courses of Study in Japan, it is preferable for teachers to bring lessons closer to the goals and content of international understanding education. They worked with homeroom teachers to implement multilingual activities, such as exchanges with Chinese primary school students and learning the Ainu language. Through a survey that they administered before starting the activities, they found that the pupils were not interested in foreign languages. This because they did not feel the need to use them, but they became more interested and confident in foreign languages after the lessons. Moreover,

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Abe (2020) reported that she implemented lessons for integrating international understanding education with primary English education at one primary school. She practiced lessons about refugees and used a picture book, with the title “The Peace Book”, to get pupils to discuss peace and brainstorm what is peace to each of them.

One of the authors of this paper investigated Japanese primary students’ communicative attitudes in foreign language activities (Adachi, 2012). The “communicative attitudes” are described as pupils’ attitudes towards different people and cultures, focusing on effective and positive interactions with others, and includes verbal as well as nonverbal behaviors. Therefore, four aspects of the communicative attitudes were employed based on her previous studies (Adachi, 2012, 2013) to investigate the extent to which pupils have positive attitudes towards people with different ideas and the extent to which they try to communicate with others who have different cultural backgrounds. The four aspects are the following: 1) “Make a compromise” refers to “trying to compromise when we have a conflict in the group during class”, 2) “Non-verbal communication” refers to “using non-verbal communication to a foreigner who gets lost”, 3) “Acceptance of unfamiliarity” refers to “being able to talk to an unfamiliar foreigner without caution”, and 4) “Friendly attitude” refers to “I try to make friends with foreign transfer students when they join my class”. Though the study found that the “communicative attitudes” was discarded in motivational models, it

concluded that it is important for homeroom teachers to encourage children to have positive attitudes towards communication in a much broader sense than English communication skills only. With the increase in the number of foreign residents, intercultural contact is increasing in Japan. The authors believe that fostering respectful communication with others with different cultural backgrounds will become more important in foreign language education.

3. A peace project between Japan and the Netherlands

A Japanese primary school and two universities, one in Japan and the other in the Netherlands, participated in a peace project in which pupils of the primary school and the university students exchanged peace messages on an internet bulletin board called “Padlet” (See Figure 1). The university students also held online meetings to respond to the pupils’ cards. The project proceeded as follows.

1. Sharing self-introduction videos or messages on Padlet.
2. Posting comments on the videos of others.
3. The pupils made Peace Cards around one word they associate with peace, with a picture or drawing to represent their feelings.
4. The university students responded with own cards and comments.
5. The students of the two universities met two times on

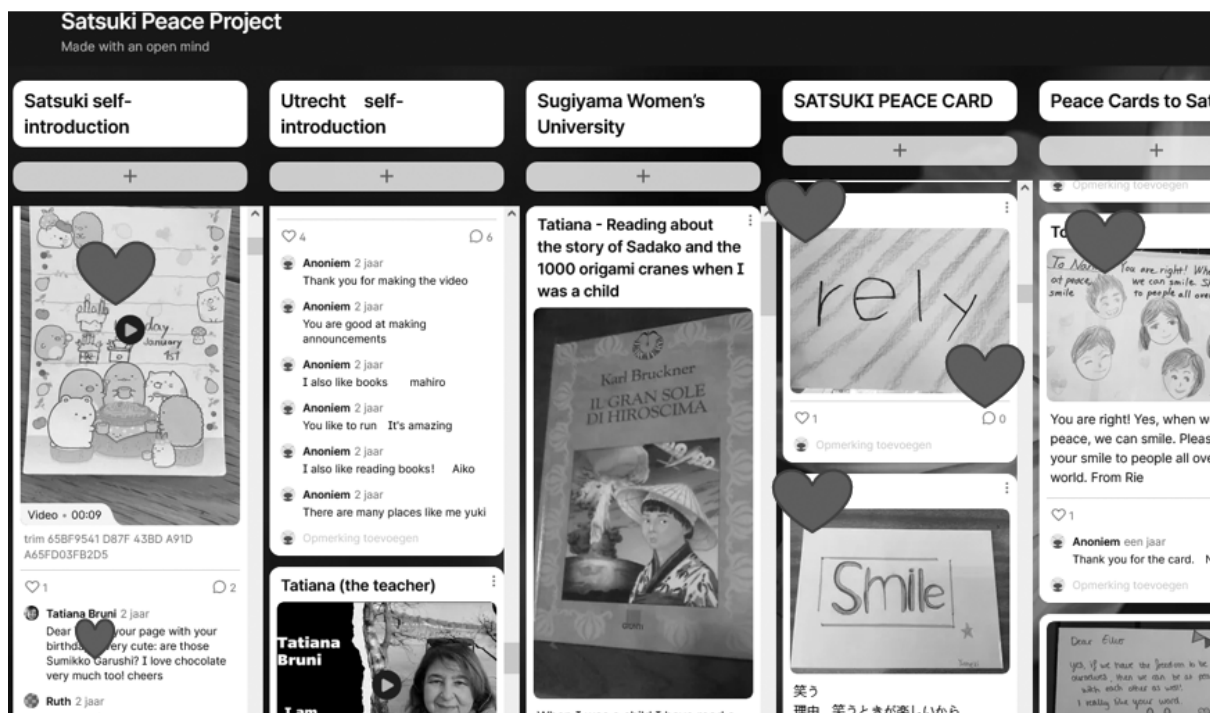


Figure 1 Padlet

Zoom to make a card for each pupil, to make sure that nobody was left without a peace message or response.

See Table 1 for all participants. After the online meetings, the primary school pupils and Japanese university students submitted their reflections on the project.

Table 1 Participants

| | Number | Age |
|------------------------------|-----------------|-----------|
| pupils | 53 | 7th grade |
| Japanese university students | 4 (only Female) | 21 |
| Dutch university students | 10 | 18–20 |

4. Study

4-1. Purpose of the Study

This study investigates whether pupils and students are able to deepen their intercultural experience through the Peace Project based on the following research questions.

- 1) Were the students and pupils able to deepen their understanding of peace?
- 2) Did they recognize the importance of understanding diverse cultures as well as English culture?
- 3) Did they broaden their perspectives on intercultural understanding?

4-2. Methodology

First, the Japanese university students (4 students) wrote reflections after each ZOOM meetings with the Dutch university students (two times) and 53 pupils wrote reflections after the end of the project. Next, the reflections were translated into English by each teacher. Lastly, the two translated text data were analyzed using an analytical method called Text Mining²⁾ (Higuchi, 2022) by the first author as follows.

- 1) A vocabulary list sorted by frequency of use was extracted from the text data.
- 2) The co-occurrence network diagrams were created with the size of the circle changing according to the number of times a word appeared, representing the relationship between the extracted vocabulary words.
- 3) Qualitative analysis was performed with KWIC (Key Word In Context) concordance to see the context of the focusing words with characteristic frequencies.

5. Results

5-1. Extracted vocabulary list by frequency

We analyzed the data³⁾ using “KH Coder 3”, a Text Mining

application. The Table 2 shows the results of the vocabulary list by frequency (only the ten most frequent words). The words “I,” “be” and “peace” appeared as frequent words in both pupils and students. Both groups seemed to have thought extensively about peace.

Table 2 The vocabulary list by frequency

| Pupils | | Japanese university students | |
|-----------------|-----------|------------------------------|-----------|
| Extracted Words | Frequency | Extracted Words | Frequency |
| be | 182 | I | 79 |
| I | 152 | be | 76 |
| peace | 83 | it | 28 |
| think | 78 | we | 16 |
| different | 54 | peace | 14 |
| people | 51 | think | 13 |
| it | 46 | able | 11 |
| we | 46 | other | 11 |
| they | 43 | very | 11 |
| everyone | 38 | have | 10 |

5-2. The Co-occurrence network diagrams

The created diagrams from the extracted vocabulary show that both groups seem to think about peace, so peace is an important key word for both of them (Figure 2 and 3). In addition, the Japanese pupils seemed also to find that although people are different, peace is important to everyone.

5-3. KWIC (Key Words In Context) of Pupils and University students

First, we extracted only those comments that contained the word “peace,” which was of high frequency and of significance in our analysis. We then did a qualitative analysis by picking up as much of the awareness behind this word as possible. Below we present some quotes from the pupils’ reflection. The underlined phrases in the quotes indicate important comments, and the extracted vocabulary, “peace,” is enclosed in a square.

I thought that in order to lead to peace, if we all think together, if we all think alike, we can lead to peace. I think that in order to lead to peace, everyone should think about peace, and if someone takes action, the country will become more and more peaceful.

I think everyone’s first priority is (should be) peace and equality, those two things.

I realized that there are many ways to look at peace.

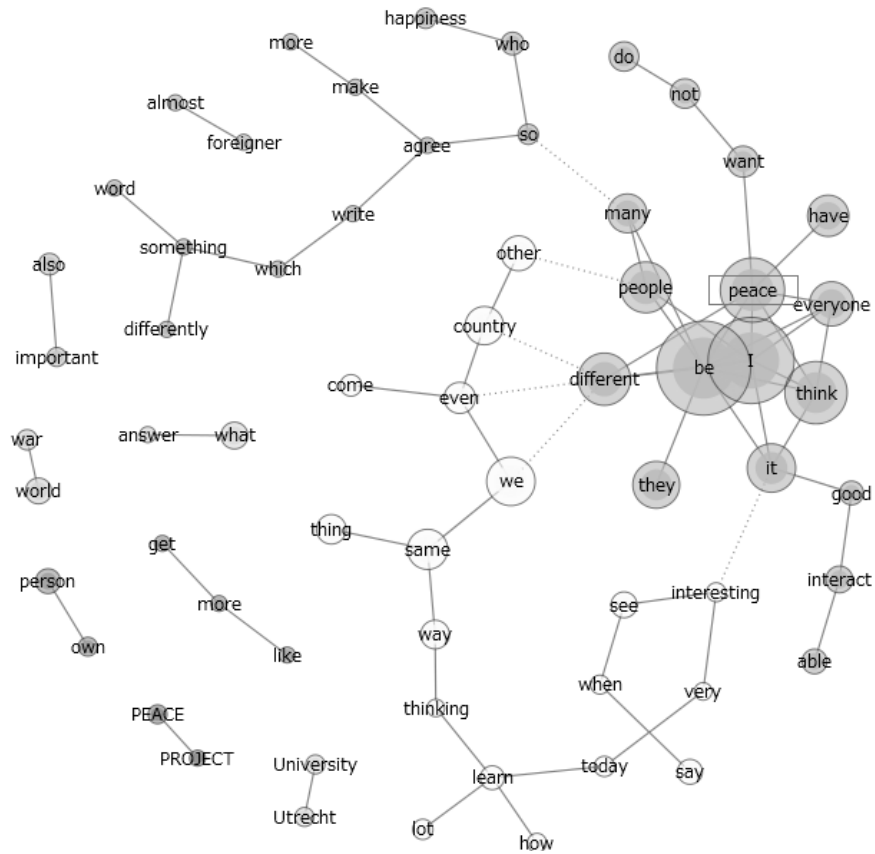


Figure 2 The Co-occurrence network diagram: Pupils

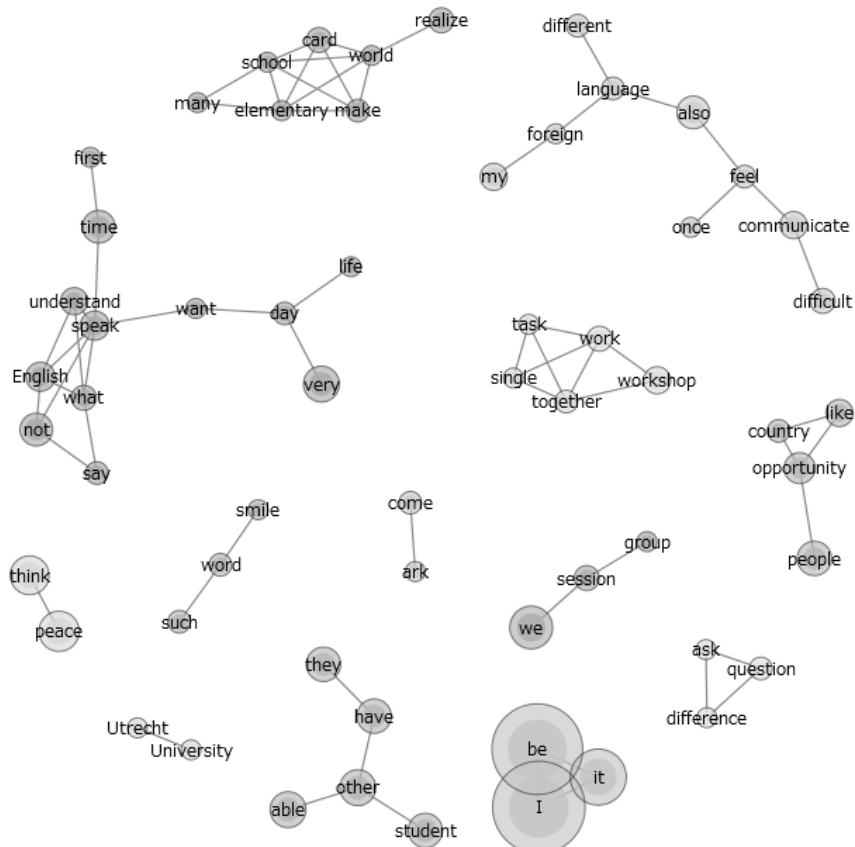


Figure 3 The Co-occurrence network diagram: University students

Different people have different opinions about peace, but the meaning is similar, so I thought it(understanding) was difficult.

About peace, I think it is difficult to achieve peace with this. But if each one of us is aware, we can do it.

I realized that all countries want the same thing, peace. There is not much I can do, but I want to do the least I can.

Based on these pupils' comments (underlined), it was found that pupils deepened their understanding of peace, gained an understanding of diverse cultures and broadened their perspectives on intercultural understanding.

Next, we extracted and discussed comments from the university students' reflections, that contained a relatively large number of "peace" again. The underlined phrases indicate extracted vocabulary.

Through the message board at Satsuki Gakuen, I was able to think again about peace. The word "peace" on the bulletin board at Satsuki Gakuen reminded me of various words such as "smile" and "family," and when I interacted with people from Utrecht University in the Netherlands, I realized that these words are common...

I also realized that although the cultures and languages of Japan and the Netherlands are different, the ideas and thoughts about peace are the same.

If many people could think about peace, and think and act in their own way, it would be a very comfortable and wonderful world.

I was surprised to hear elementary school students' ideas of peace, such as peace, smile, happiness, etc., and was amazed at how many different ways one word, peace, can be thought of.

The university students' comments (underlined) showed that they also had a deep understanding of peace and diverse cultures and have broadened their perspective on cross-cultural understanding. Therefore, it seems that both primary school pupils and university students were able to reflect about peace, both in their own lives and as an ideal, which promoted their intercultural understanding.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

The results showed that through this project, the students and pupils not only learned different perspectives but also recognized the importance of peace. The purpose of the study was as follows:

- 1) Were the students and pupils able to deepen their understanding of peace?
- 2) Did they recognize the importance of understanding diverse cultures as well as English culture?
- 3) Did they broaden their perspectives on intercultural understanding?

This study demonstrates that these research questions have been substantiated. It can be said that it is crucial that the young people who participated not only learned about peace, but also experienced the following with each other through the Peace Project:

- 1) Exchanging their opinions and thoughts
- 2) Listening to different ideas and thoughts
- 3) Understanding different opinions and views

Although further research is necessary, we conclude that teachers should introduce this kind of intercultural experiences for cultural understanding in primary school foreign language education, and that it is necessary to continue such international projects, in order to raise awareness of social diversity among the younger generation and to help them understand the real value of intercultural exchange and the meaning of peace.

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Notes

- 1) MEXT determines the Courses of Study as broad standards for all schools, from kindergarten through upper secondary schools, to organize their programs in order to ensure a fixed standard of education throughout the country. They generally have revised every 10 years (MEXT, 2018).
- 2) Text mining analysis is a method of analyzing data from ordinary text strings, separating them by words or phrases, and extracting useful information by analyzing their frequency of occurrence, correlation of co-occurrence, trend of occurrence, time series, and so on.

- 3) Since KH Coder 3 also has English as a language option, English was selected for analysis.

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