Global Communicative Competence in Japan: Learner Needs and Pedagogical Implications

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Abstract
Globalisation and advancements in communication technologies have brought a dramatic increase in the frequency and complexity of intercultural interactions. In addition to linguistic skills, foreign language (FL) learners today need the ability to deal with cultural differences. This has implications for language learners and teachers. In recent years, the Japanese government have implemented several nationwide “global” projects aimed at reforming the higher education system, and at cultivating in learners the skills necessary to become effective global communicators. While intercultural communicative competence (ICC) has been widely researched and discussed over the past thirty years, global communicative competence (GCC) remains relatively unexplored in FL learning circles. To establish effective pedagogies for GCC in FL classrooms, it is important to characterize its component skills, knowledge or attitudes, and to consider student needs. The researcher undertook a preliminary qualitative study that used a survey instrument to investigate Japanese FL learner (n=23) ideas and needs related to GCC. Participant responses were coded according to Byram’s 1997 model for ICC. Findings showed that participants believed attitudinal factors to be of primary importance in the development of GCC. In addition, many learners identified challenges for ICC development that lay outside the scope of Byram’s ICC model. These included issues of language anxiety, low self-confidence and a focus on linguistic accuracy at the expense of communicating meaning. In this paper, the researcher discusses student responses, their correlation with Byram’s model for ICC, and pedagogical implications for foreign language educators in Japan.

Keywords: Global communication competence, intercultural communication competence, EFL in Japan, learner needs, language anxiety

Introduction
Globalization has increased movement across national boundaries, and this, together with today’s advanced technology, has given rise to a dramatic increase in the opportunities for and frequency of intercultural interactions (Chen, 2005; Kramsch & Thorne, 2002). As a result, foreign language (FL) learners need to be able to communicate with individuals from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds (Fritz, Möllenberg & Chen, 2002). This necessitates more than linguistic skills; learners need global communicative competence (GCC), simply defined as “the abilities needed to achieve effective and appropriate communication as global citizens” (Sakamoto & Miyatani, 2017, p. 297). To create effective pedagogical approaches for cultivating this type of competence in FL learners, it is important to identify the specific skills, attitudes and knowledge necessary for GCC, and to customize teaching according to learner needs. The researcher undertook a preliminary investigation in the context of Japanese FL education. She carried out a survey of FL learners to gain insight into their
perceptions of GCC, and their needs related to its development. Results were analyzed using Byram’s model for intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997). This paper outlines the results of the study, and considers the pedagogical implications for language educators.

Research Questions
Specifically, the researcher sought to answer two questions:
1. What do Japanese FL learners perceive as necessary for GCC?
2. What personal challenges or needs do Japanese FL learners have pertaining to the development of GCC?

Theoretical Framework
The concept of GCC is relatively new, and the researcher was unable to find any pedagogical models for GCC in FL learning and teaching. Essentially, GCC can be considered an updated version of the concept of intercultural communication competence (ICC), created to account for the additional requirements (e.g. computer literacy) for effective communication in today’s globalized world. ICC has been widely discussed in FL circles over the past 30 years. The dominant ICC framework for language educators is Byram’s 1997 model (Matsuo, 2015).

Byram’s model for ICC was the first in the FL field to move from an idealized native-speaker to the idea of an intercultural speaker. His model can be divided into two parts: foreign language competences; and non-language competences, which he collectively labels intercultural competence (IC) (see Figure 1). Within IC, Byram identifies three main factors: knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The knowledge dimension comprises knowledge of cultures and of interactional processes (how to act). The skills aspect Byram divides into two parts: a) skills of interpreting and relating (being able to understand an event or document and relate it to one’s own culture); and b) skills of discovery and interaction (being able to find out and use information). His attitude component includes curiosity, openness to other cultures and willingness to interact.

![Figure 1. Byram’s 1997 model (researcher’s simplified representation)](image)

In this study, the researcher sought to investigate the specific needs that Japanese FL learners have pertaining to GCC development. She canvassed learner opinions, and examined the correlation (or otherwise) of responses with Byram’s framework. The model was chosen for its lasting dominance, the relative similarity to most subsequent models in terms of
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Methodology

This study used a survey instrument to gather data on learner perceptions of GCC and their own needs pertaining to its development. Participants were recruited from among first-grade students in the Department of British and American Studies at a private university in Japan. Participation was voluntary, and 23 students (3 males, 20 females) between the ages of 18 and 20 completed the anonymous online survey (Appendix A). Partially-completed surveys were not included in the results. The survey comprised eight demographic questions and six questions related to communication with people from different cultural backgrounds. The researcher used the term “intercultural communication competence” in the survey rather than “global communicative competence,” to avoid possible confusion due to unfamiliarity with the terminology. All questions were written in both English and Japanese, and participants were invited to respond in whichever language they preferred. Survey responses were translated into English (where necessary) and coded according to Byram’s model of ICC. The researcher then examined the correlation (or otherwise) of the survey data with Byram’s model.

Literature Review

In the past ten years, the Japanese government have spent considerable funds devising projects to internationalize Japan. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), have implemented three nationwide projects aimed at reforming and internationalizing the Japanese higher education system (i.e., Global 30 Project, Project for Promotion of Global Human Resource Development, and Top Global University Project) (MEXT, http://www.mext.go.jp). The three projects share similar goals, focusing on encouraging more foreign students to study in Japanese universities, and on internationalizing Japanese students so they can be mobilised abroad. Essentially, MEXT hopes to foster a generation equipped with GCC. A government report released by the Council on Promotion of Human Resource for Globalization Development (2012) identifies three key elements that learners need: (a) linguistic and communication skills; (b) self-direction, a positive attitude and a sense of responsibility; and (c) understanding of one’s own identity and of other cultures. Having identified these three types of needs, the report goes on to focus almost entirely on the first, discussing the usefulness of TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) and TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) scores to measure linguistic ability. Little guidance is provided in how to improve student test performance, and factors (b) and (c) are not discussed at all. If FL teachers are to address the government mandate for graduates with GCC, a clearer definition of what learners need and how to meet their needs is necessary.

GCC is a relatively new term, and the literature has yet to arrive at a consensus as to its definition. Though some models for GCC do exist, most of these pertain to business contexts, and there are none in the field of FL education. ICC, on the other hand, has seen extensive discussion in FL circles and models abound. The most popular and widely applied model is Byram’s (1997), but the work of Deardorff (2006) and Borghetti (2011) have also received considerable attention among FL educators. All three models include knowledge, skill and attitude components. The knowledge and
Table 1

**Comparison of 3 Models of IC**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Knowledge Dimension</th>
<th>Skills Dimension</th>
<th>Attitudes Dimension</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Developmental Order</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Model for Intercultural Communicative Competence</strong> Byram (1997)</td>
<td>(Knowledge) • own and other cultures • interactional processes</td>
<td>(Skills) • interpreting and relating • discovering and interacting</td>
<td>(Attitudes) • curiosity and openness • readiness to suspend judgement • willingness to suspend belief in own ideas</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Process Model of Intercultural Competence</strong> Deardorff (2006)</td>
<td>(Knowledge and Comprehension) • cultural self-awareness • cultural knowledge • sociolinguistic awareness</td>
<td>(Skills) • acquiring and processing knowledge</td>
<td>(Attitudes) • openness • respect • curiosity &amp; discovery</td>
<td>(Internal Outcomes) • adaptability • flexibility • ethnorelative view • empathy</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Methodological Model of Intercultural Competence</strong> Borghetti (2011)</td>
<td>(Cognitive Processes) • observation and analysis of foreign and source cultures</td>
<td>(Skills) not categorized</td>
<td>(Affective Processes) • self-awareness • empathy</td>
<td>(Awareness) • cultural • intercultural • self</td>
<td>cognitive processes affective processes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
skills aspects of Byram’s and Deardorff’s models are similar. Both focus on knowing about one’s own and other cultures (knowledge), and on the cognitive processes necessary to acquire and use knowledge (skills). Borghetti also focuses on the importance of cognitive processes, but she identifies this as a type of knowledge. She acknowledges a skills component, but does not describe the specific skills therein. The three models show consensus related to the attitudinal aspect of IC. Borghetti’s “affective processes” are closely aligned with the attitudes dimension described by Byram and Deardorff, including aspects of openness, curiosity, willingness and empathy. Borghetti also includes a fourth element, which she calls “awareness.” This comprises cultural-, intercultural-, and self-awareness. Deardorff includes an “outcomes” component in her model, where she describes behaviours that accompany the development of requisite attitudes, knowledge and skills.

Though they exhibit differences in the categorisation and naming of elements, the three models all agree on the three core components of ICC. In this study, the researcher used Byram’s nomenclature and definition of these three factors (knowledge, skills and attitudes) to code and analyze survey responses.

**Findings**

Survey responses yielded three main findings:
1. Participants placed greater importance on intercultural competence than on linguistic competence for effective intercultural communication.
2. Of Byram’s three IC dimensions, students most often cited attitudes as important for ICC.
3. Students identified language anxiety, low self-confidence and a focus on grammatical accuracy as challenges in the development of ICC.

**Finding 1**

Students were provided with five choices and asked to identify important factors for effective communication with people from different backgrounds. Selecting more than one option was permitted, as was including their own answers. Results are displayed in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th># of responses</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) language ability</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) communication skills</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>29.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) knowledge about other cultures</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>45.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) empathy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Byram’s definition of ICC, answer a) relates to linguistic ability, and answers b) through c) are all examples of intercultural competences (IC). The two “other” responses specified by students were “consideration” and “determination,” both of which can also be characterized as IC elements. Of 31 total responses then, just four participants (12.9%) named linguistic competence as important for effective communication with people from different cultural backgrounds. Students appear to place greater importance on IC than on language skills.
Finding 2
Students were asked to comment on the nature of ICC, and important characteristics or qualities for effective IC communication. In response to a question asking learners to define ICC (Question 7), one participant referred to language skills. All other responses were coded according to Byram’s model as skills, attitudes, or knowledge. Rather than coding specific keywords (and risking taking them out of context), the researcher coded items based on the whole answer given by a respondent. Some student responses mentioned more than one of Byram’s dimensions and in this case they were coded twice (or three times). Ambiguity arose when students used the word “understanding” (or “rikai” in Japanese). Where it was impossible to judge from the whole response whether the learner was referring to understanding based on knowledge, or to empathetic understanding, responses were coded as both (knowledge and attitudes). In Table 3, the number of ambiguous responses that have been coded in two categories are indicated in parentheses.

Table 3
Definitions of ICC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IC Dimension</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Attitudes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># of responses</td>
<td>8(3)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16(3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Learners showed a tendency to equate ICC with attitudinal factors. Translated examples of student answers in this category are included below. Information in parentheses indicates the gender and age (years) of the respondent.

- [ICC is] trying to understand others in spite of cultural differences. (Female, 18)
- [ICC is] being able to accept other cultures and customs. (Female, 18)

This focus on attitudes was reflected again when students were asked to identify qualities of “good” intercultural communicators (Question 8). One student mentioned linguistic skills, and the remaining responses were coded using Byram’s three dimensions.

Table 4
Characteristics of “Good” Intercultural Communicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IC Dimension</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Attitudes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># of responses</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example answers:

- They are proactive and persist in trying to convey meaning. (Female, 18)
- They are positive and willing to talk to anyone. (Female, 19)

When asked about “bad” communicators (Question 9), no students mentioned linguistic factors, and the focus on attitudes was even more pronounced.

Table 5
Characteristics of “bad” intercultural communicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IC Dimension</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Attitude</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># of responses</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example answers:

- They are indifferent, afraid and inactive. (Male, 18)
- They always think their own culture is the best. (Male, 19)
Finding 3

A number of learners identified aspects of ICC that lie beyond the scope of Byram’s model. Students explained that anxiety about using a foreign language, low self-confidence, and a tendency to focus on being accurate rather than on conveying meaning inhibited their development of ICC.

In identifying characteristics of “good” intercultural communicators (Question 8), the following answers appeared:

[They have] confidence. (Male, 18)

[They are] people who can persist in trying to say their opinions without worrying about mistakes in grammar and word use. (Female, 18)

These two answers do not neatly fit any of Byram’s categories of attitudes, skills and knowledge.

Similar themes arose when students were asked to comment on their own individual strengths and weaknesses as intercultural communicators (Question 10). The majority of students answered this question only in terms of weaknesses, and only 14 responses could be accurately coded using Byram’s model. Six individuals identified language skills as their weaknesses and 8 students commented on attitudes (3), knowledge (4) or skills (1) they felt they lacked. The remaining 9 students felt that their weaknesses were low confidence (3), language anxiety (3), or a tendency to focus on accuracy at the expense of meaning (3).

Example answers:

My weakness is being afraid of making mistakes when talking in a different language. (Female, 19)

My weakness is ... that I have no confidence in my language skills. (Female, 18)

Discussion

Survey responses from learners address the research questions thus:

1. The learners perceived intercultural skills as more important for ICC than language skills, with attitudinal factors the most important.

2. The learners identified FL ability and anxiety-related factors not accounted for in Byram’s model (focus on form, language anxiety and low-confidence) as the main personal challenges in developing ICC.

Perceptions of ICC

Tertiary institutions in Japan have been criticized for continued reliance on native-speaker models (Seargeant, 2009; Rivers, 2013) and perhaps as a result, Japanese learners have tended to covet “native-like” English language skills (Eguchi, 1998). It is surprising then, that in Question 6, the majority (87%) of learner responses identified intercultural elements as important for communication with people of different backgrounds, rather than language elements. This may be an indication that MEXT’s push for GCC is being felt and their ideas are starting to filter down through the education system to learners. The most popular response to Question 6 was “knowledge about other cultures.” This focus on knowledge, however, was not reflected in subsequent questions, where students repeatedly focused on attitudinal aspects. It may be that the wording of the question influenced participant choice in Question 6. The researcher decided to avoid introducing the term “intercultural communication competence” at this stage, as the next question requested a definition of ICC and including the terminology in the earlier question might have influenced learner definitions. The resulting wording of Question 6, however, places greater emphasis on the “otherness” of the interlocutor. This effect is more apparent in the Japanese wording than in the English, and may have influenced the answer choice that students made.
In Questions 7, 8, and 9, learners repeatedly indicated that they felt attitudes were the most important factor for ICC. Byram’s (1997) model for ICC does not specify the relative importance of the aspects of ICC that it identifies, or the order in which they need to be developed. Both Byram and Deardorff (2006), however, agree that attitudes are a fundamental starting point. Dörnyei (2001), one of the best-known researchers into FL motivation, holds that 99% of language learners who really want to learn a language will in fact succeed. Byram and his colleagues, in their practical handbook for teachers, suggest some classroom-level methods by which FL teachers can help students acquire knowledge and skills for ICC (Byram, Gribkova & Starkey, 2002), but unfortunately they have little to offer in terms of shaping learner attitudes.

**Challenges for Japanese Learners**

The most frequently mentioned weaknesses in relation to ICC fell into two categories: those related to FL ability (six responses), and those related to anxiety (fear of language mistakes, low-confidence or general shyness about using English) (nine responses). Previous research investigating Japanese learner challenges in FL learning echoes student comments about anxiety, suggesting that language anxiety hinders their attempts to develop FL ability. Eguchi (1998) claimed that Japanese learners are obsessed with speaking correct English, and that they suffer from low self-esteem related to their foreign language abilities. Todaka, in his 2009 study of Japanese EFL learner beliefs, found that they suffered from anxiety when using English to communicate and were not confident of their linguistic abilities. Gorsuch (2000) and Takanashi (2004) found that Japanese learners tended to focus on the language that they were using, rather than the message they needed to convey, and that this impacted negatively on intercultural communication. Ohata (2005) carried out five case studies to explore language anxiety in Japanese FL learners. He, too, found that learners suffered from language anxiety, and suggested that their cultural backgrounds (i.e., being Japanese) had a significant negative impact on their language anxiety and FL performance. It may be that the first and most important job of FL instructors in Japanese institutions is to try to reduce learner anxiety.

**Pedagogical Implications**

Preliminary survey results indicate the students believed attitudes to be fundamental to ICC, but the literature provides little by way of guidance in how to shape learner attitudes. Motivational strategies may be one way to influence learner attitudes. Dörnyei (2001) suggested that strategies such as providing inspirational models, increasing learner autonomy, creating a comfortable learning environment in which students can expect to succeed, and exposing learners to a wide variety of cultural values and artefacts may be effective in encouraging willingness to participate and in widening their perspectives.

Similar methods may also help Japanese learners to overcome difficulties related to language anxiety and low confidence. In an earlier study, the researcher found that establishing a comfortable class dynamic, providing low-stakes opportunities for practice, limiting formal evaluation, and restricting performance tasks to small audiences were beneficial in reducing learner anxiety and boosting confidence (Sakamoto, 2015). Using cooperative or collaborative tasks and encouraging learner autonomy may also have positive effects on confidence. As well, limiting teacher correction of language, using communicative tasks without stipulating the type of language students should use, and encouraging them to rely on their own knowledge rather than on external devices such as dictionaries, may help learners to focus more on what they want to say, and less on how they are saying it.
Limitations

Limitations exist related to the participants, survey tool and coding technique used to categorize and analyze results. The survey was completed by 23 individuals who had been taught by the researcher for 6 months prior to survey completion. The researcher’s own ideas related to ICC/GCC may have been imparted to students to some degree during that time. A wider sample across various age groups and institutions may provide a more reliable insight into Japanese FL learner opinions. In addition, as discussed above the wording of some of the survey questions, particularly in the Japanese translation, may have influenced participant responses. Finally, the researcher used Byram’s 1997 model of ICC to code and analyze survey responses. Occasionally learners gave ambiguous answers, which caused problems for coding. Requesting that participants respond in their L1 (rather than giving them the choice of English or Japanese), and following up with interviews or focus groups may have helped to reduce the ambiguity of learner responses.

Recommendations

Byram’s model, though a good starting place in considering the skills, knowledge and attitudes that FL learners need to acquire ICC/GCC, is not adequate as a pedagogical model for Japanese learners. It fails to account for the challenges that Japanese FL learners face in developing ICC. There is a need to further investigate the needs of Japanese learners, and to develop a teacher-friendly model to help educators understand those needs. In addition, addressing MEXT’s mandate for globally competent graduates requires the development of effective pedagogies that help educators overcome the challenges that Japanese learners face to help them cultivate the necessary aspects of GCC.

Conclusion

Japanese FL learners surveyed in this study viewed attitudinal aspects as the most important factor in developing ICC. They also identified several challenges (language anxiety, low self-confidence and excessive focus on linguistic accuracy) that hinder their development of ICC. This suggests the need for a new pedagogical model for ICC/GCC that accounts for the specific needs of Japanese learners, and provides educators with guidance not only in what to teach learners, but also in how to do so effectively.

Acknowledgements

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References


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APPENDIX A

Survey Questions

Part A Studying English

1. Why are you studying English?
   英語を勉強している理由は何ですか？

2. What skills do you want to acquire through your university English classes?
   大学の英語クラスで、どのようなスキルを習得したいですか？

3. Why do you want to acquire those skills?
   そのスキルを習得したい理由は何ですか？

4. How do you think you will be able to acquire those skills?
   どうすればそのスキルを習得することができると思いますか？

Part B Communication

5. What skills do you think are necessary to be an effective communicator?
   効果的なコミュニケーションをするために必要なスキルは何だと思いますか？

6. What is most important for effective communication with people who have a different cultural background to you? If you answer "Other", please specify.
   異なる文化の背景を持つ人に対する効果的なコミュニケーションをするために、一番大切な要素は何ですか？ "Other" （その他）と答えた場合、明記してください。
   a. Language ability 言語能力
   b. Communication skills コミュニケーション能力
   c. Knowledge about other cultures 異文化に対する知識
   d. Empathy 共感
   e. Other:

7. In your opinion what is "intercultural communication competence"?
   「異文化間のコミュニケーション能力」は何だと思いますか？

8. What are characteristics or qualities of people who are good at intercultural communication?
   異文化間コミュニケーションが上手な人の特徴または性質は何だと思いますか？

9. What are characteristics or qualities of people who are bad at intercultural communication?
   異文化間コミュニケーションが下手な人の特徴または性質は何だと思いますか？

10. What are your strengths and weaknesses as an intercultural communicator?
    異文化間コミュニケーションとしてあなたの強みと弱みは何と思いますか？

Part C Personal Information

11. What is your sex?
    性別は何ですか？
    a. male 男
    b. female 女

12. How old are you?
    何歳ですか？
    a. 16 and under 16歳以下
    b. 17 17歳
    c. 18 18歳
    d. 19 19歳
    e. 20 and over 20歳以上

13. Have you ever been to a foreign country? If yes, please specify country, purpose and duration of stay.
    外国に行ったことがありますか？「はい」の場合、国、目的、在留期間を明記してください。

14. Do you have regular interaction with people from other countries? If yes, please specify the situation and frequency of contact.
    外国の方と交流することがありますか？「はい」の場合、状況と頻度を明記してください。

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