How inbound international students can help shape the classroom environment through successful interaction with Japanese students

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1. Introduction

According to estimates provided by the Japan Student Services Organization (Japan Student Services Organization, 2017), the number of international students in Japan reached almost 240,000 at the beginning of May 2016, an increase of approximately 31,000 from the same time in the previous year. Of the almost 240,000, more than 171,000 were studying at higher education institutions and the remaining students, numbering more than 68,000, were studying at Japanese language institutes. Certain particular areas have focused on encouraging inbound international students. One area, Oita Prefecture in Kyushu, has, "since fiscal 2016 ramped up efforts to help international students start their own businesses or work locally. With the largest proportion of students from overseas for every 100,000 in population, the prefecture hopes this will help revitalize its economy." ('Oita hopes international student entrepreneurs', 2017)

This trend appears to be in contrast to the situation with outbound international students from Japan. While Japan's Education Ministry (M.E.X.T.) has acknowledged its importance in discussing 'Trends and Development in Education, Science and Technology Policies', it has also indicated shortcomings in reporting that, in order to develop human

resources that are able to work in global society, it is important to cultivate not only language skills but also the creativity that can lead to new values, as well as the ability to actively communicate one's own ideas in the international community. However, the recent "inward-looking" trend of young people demonstrated by the recent decline in interest in going abroad to work or study has become a key issue.

While JASSO, which is the major body for providing scholarships, indicated that there were almost 85,000 Japanese students studying at overseas universities in 2015, up from 36,000 in 2009, the increase appears to be largely due to more students studying for short periods. In contrast, MEXT has indicated that the number of Japanese students enrolled at overseas universities fell from a peak of almost 83,000 in 2004 to just over 53,000 in 2014. During these years, demographic change was leading to a declining young population and continuing deflation was making it financially more challenging to study abroad. (McCrostie, 2017)

The two strands of inbound and outbound international students do not necessarily need to be seen as mutually exclusive. Given that there may be reluctance or limitations for Japanese students to study abroad, it might be hypothesized that Japanese students studying in their home country could gain certain benefits from interaction with inbound international students in their home educational environment.

1.1.   International Students at the University

One such educational environment is the location which is the subject of the present study. With a total student body of approximately 3,800, the international component is typically modest, at fewer than 100 students. They include students from overseas universities which have formal links and whose students usually stay one or two semesters. Such universities number 23 institutions from 13 different countries. In addition, there are other international students in the form of groups such as experienced

teachers who spend three semesters in Japan, including two semesters at the present institution. Finally, there is a small number of students who enroll on the same basis as the local (i.e., Japanese) students for completion of undergraduate and graduate studies. The total number at the end of November 2018 was 56.

1.2. The Nature of Involvement of International Students

Such international students are obviously keen to maximize study opportunities during their period of study at the university. On arrival at the university, they have the chance to decide classes, provided that a host faculty member will accept them. They may have the opportunity to receive a credit for the class. It is their contrasting roles in classes the first author taught which is described below in 2.1. and which was influenced by the desire among some international students, who felt that they were facing a lack of acceptance in some other classes, for greater study participation and involvement. In addition, with regard to the present study of international students' participation in an English Communication class, their roles were also influenced by a long history of participation in classes by visitors (see Robins, 2010; 2011).

1.3. Previous Research

The present study aims to explore the impact of inbound international students on home students, in contrast to the far more typical focus on study abroad programs involving outbound students. While many such studies have found positive effects, failings have also been identified, as in Drake (1997), which identified that, for example in group study abroad programs, such programs, "may fail to meet the linguistic and cross-cultural expectations of the participants due to reclusive tendencies of the homogenous group itself." (p.7)

However, writers who have previously explored the area we are

focusing on have found positive as well as less positive effects. Kamiya and Nakagawa (2007) documented a long-term change in attitudes of international and local students towards each other through extracurricular collaborative activities. They interviewed eight local and eight international students as well as collecting a questionnaire from a larger body of local and international students. In order for both groups of students to accomplish a task, they reported that the students not only learned cultural differences but experienced some conflicts between them derived from different cultural perceptions as well as ways to handle the issues. Through these aspects of interaction, the students were believed to establish a firmer relationship. However, they attributed the cause for these developments in students' understanding to the fact that both groups of the students had started the activities on an equal footing. As Straker (2016) argued, international students can end up with just being 'visitors' in a negative sense, due to various reasons such as their language competence and cultural background. However, we would argue that international students' active participation in the local campus community would seem to greatly benefit both local and international students in handling cultural differences.

Although a questionnaire (see Appendix A), the basis of this paper, covered a wide range of points, we have decided to focus particularly on questions concerning motivation and emotional feelings, including feeling bothered, excited, happy or intimidated. Many authors have considered the role of emotions. Harmer (2001) reports on studies that have led to the idea, "that the learner's state of mind, his or her personal response to the activity of learning, is central to success or failure in language learning has greatly influenced teaching methods and materials writing." (p.74), while Brown and Larson-Hall (2012) indicate that, "Language learning is an intense, personal, often emotional experience. Individuals naturally bring their personalities to bear on their learning." (p.127).

While Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) list eight features of personality in relationship to second language acquisition: self-esteem, extroversion, anxiety, risk-taking, sensitivity to rejection, empathy, inhibition and tolerance of ambiguity (p.184-192), Ehrman (1996) concentrates on anxiety and its links with motivation, when she describes how, "Motivation, self-efficacy, and anxiety are closely linked. Satisfactory self-efficacy contributes to maintenance and even enhancement of motivation." As she indicates, it is necessary to make a distinction between debilitating (negative) and facilitating (positive) anxiety. (p.148) Moreover, Ohata (2005) argued that Japanese learners of English tended to feel a great personal and interpersonal anxiety which may influence their language learning due to their internal value of "fear of negative evaluation or losing 'face' in front of others." (Ohata, 2005;14) and their "lack of self-confidence in language proficiency and the subject matter." (ibid.)

1.4.　Hypotheses for the present study

Thus far, the discrepancies between the ideals and the realities concerned with internationalization have been referred to. Despite the inward-looking tendencies of potential outbound students, which has been referred to, there are still various modes in which local students could potentially interact with international students. In our pilot study which was conducted between April and July 2017, we investigated whether different ways of interaction could invoke different attitudes in local students. It explored how local students' attitudes towards sharing a class with international students and towards speaking English in the presence of them contrasts according to different modes of interaction between them. Based on the pilot study, our research design has been improved so that homogeneity of the subjects at the two time points was ensured. Furthermore, we have decided to focus on just one way of interaction (see

below) between the local and the international students. The research questions for the current study are:

1. Are there any changes in the local students' attitudes related to their emotions over time?
2. In what aspect do the local students' attitudes change most?

2. Methodology

In order to capture the longitudinal attitudinal change in local students' attitudes over a certain timespan, a survey was conducted twice using two variations of a questionnaire at an earlier and at a later stage in the first semester in 2018 at the location we are focusing on. The first survey was conducted in April (Q1), and the second in July (Q2) in a weekly third year English Communication class taught by the first author.

As indicated above, an initial questionnaire (Q1) was developed and distributed to the local students in order to investigate their attitudes towards having international students in the classroom with the following two aspects: 1) students' attitudes towards speaking English in the presence of international students in the classroom, and 2) students' attitudes towards having international students in the classroom. The students gave ratings to eight statements on a Likert scale of seven, from 1 being 'Strongly disagree' to 7 being 'Strongly agree.' Other questions which are not reported here were also included, with no less than twenty others in Q1 and five others in Q2. We intend to return to focusing on these in the future. (See Appendix A for the full form of the questionnaires). Both questionnaires were modified based on the pilot study in the previous academic year. In particular, Q2 was made shorter to avoid repetition of questions where the answer would be expected to be unchanged.

2.1.　Participating students and the classes they were involved in

All the students involved in this study were Japanese university students majoring in language and culture, in which students aim to gain English teaching positions or other employment related to English or other foreign languages. In the present study, the 34 students (8 male and 26 female) were aged between 20 and 21 years old (mean 20.15 years) at the time of Q1. They were taking part in a third-year class.

The role of the international students in the class was based on experience with two classes in the previous academic year, when we carried out the aforementioned pilot study. Those classes had involved the same specialization of Japanese students, but one was a fourth-year class (EC1) and the other was a third-year class (EC2). At that time, four international students who were studying at the location were involved. Table 1 summarizes the classes concerning the mode of interaction between the local and the international students.

Table 1.

Basic information on the international students and their participation in classes.

	Gender	Age	Major	Participation	
				EC1	EC2
ID1	F	21	T	☐	☐
ID2	M	23	NT	☐	☐
GE1	F	23	NT	☐	☐
TW1	M	22	T	☐	

Note. Age = at the time of the second survey (July, 2017).
Major; T = Teaching-oriented, NT= Non-teaching oriented.

In EC1, the four international students were amongst the regular members of the class. Therefore, they were sitting together with the local

Japanese students, dealt on the same basis with tasks given during the class, including exchanging opinions and role-plays, and sought a credit. Therefore, there were frequent and regular interactions between the local and the international students. In other words, both the international and the local students shared the same status of being members in the class so that collaborative activities, as described in Kamiya and Nakagawa (2007), could happen on an equal footing during the class.

On the other hand, the nature of the three international students' participation in EC2 was different from that in EC1. In EC2, they played a role purely as visitors who could even be considered as assistant teachers who taught about their own culture. Due to the large number of local students enrolled in the class, for such activities, this class was divided into a few groups with the aim of enhancing opportunities for communication. On each occasion, each international student joined a group of the local students and talked about topics related to their own country. This was methodical in that their role on each occasion was to exchange conversation concerning six topics in the students' coursebook (Hartmann, Douglas and Boon (2014), on respectively: food, festivals, cities, jobs, music and journeys (travel). The international students joined the class once every two or three weeks and the exact frequency of visits by each student varied depending on their availability.

In contrast, in the academic year we are focusing on in the present study and based on experience and results from the above study, five international students were full members of the class throughout the semester (as in EC 1 above), with an additional three joining later in the semester. However, they also played the role of 'assistant teachers' (as in EC2 above), focusing on the coursebook topics (the same as in EC2 above) and interacting in this role with small groups, with some variation in size, approximately every other class. Table 2 shows the basic information for the five.

Table 2.

Basic information on the international students and their participation in classes in the present study.

Nationality	Gender	Age	Major
BR1	F	23	NT
BR2	F	28	T
GE1	F	22	T
KO1	M	21	T
TH1	M	22	NT

Note. Age = at the time of the follow-up survey (July 2018)
Major; T = Teaching-oriented, NT = Non-teaching oriented
Nationality; BR = Brazil, GE = Germany, KO = Korea, TH = Thailand

3. Results

3.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire aimed at capturing two aspects of the participants' attitudes; 1) towards speaking English in the presence of international students in the classroom, and 2) towards having international students in the classroom; which they indicated on a Likert scale of seven. Table 3 below shows the descriptive statistics (Mean and SD) of the participants' responses for the questions in the two aforementioned categories. Note that 1 on the scale indicated 'Strongly disagree' and 7 'Strongly agree', which is consistent across the questions. Therefore, decrease in the negative attitudes (i.e. 8. nervous, 9. frustrated, 21. intimidating, and 23. bothersome) corresponds to a smaller negativity, and vice versa.

Table 3.

Descriptive statistics of the students' ratings of the eight aspects at two time points (Q1 and Q2)

		Q1		Q2	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
When I speak English, I feel … .	6. happy	5.09	1.22	5.32	1.15
	7. confident	3.65	1.45	4.12	1.39
	8. nervous	4.82	1.19	4.53	1.13
	9. frustrated	4.88	1.30	3.85	1.56
Having international students in a class is … .	20. exciting	5.97	.94	6.15	.78
	21. intimidating	2.82	1.42	2.53	1.67
	22. motivating	5.65	1.07	5.85	1.05
	23. bothersome	2.24	1.05	2.29	1.47

Although the differences between the ratings of Q1 and Q2 seem marginal across the eight items, one of them, 'When I speak English, I feel *frustrated*' experienced a rather significant drop from 4.88 to 3.85, meaning that the participants came to feel less frustrated at the later stage. Paired t-tests were conducted in order to confirm the difference statistically. The participants' ratings were coded as dependent variable, whereas the two time points of the surveys were coded as independent variable. The analysis was carried out using a statistical software: R Studio Version 1.0.153 (R Core Team, 2016). As anticipated, amongst the eight categories, only the *frustrated* ratings showed a statistically significant difference ($t(33) = 3.83$, p = .0005). No statistical differences were found for other categories; *happy*, $t(33) = -1.07$, $p = .29$; *confident*, $t(33) = -1.85$, $p = .07$; *nervous*, $t(33) = 1.22$, $p = .23$; *exciting*, $t(33) = -1.23$, $p = .23$; *intimidating*, $t(33) = 1.20$, $p = .24$; *motivating*, $t(33) = -1.36$, $p = .19$; *bothersome*, $t(33) = -.25$, $p = .80$. As a result, it was found that the longer the local students interacted with the international students, the less frustrated they came to feel.

3.2 Post-hoc analysis

Based on the aforementioned results that frustration ratings saw the greatest change over the course of the semester, we further conducted a post-hoc survey in order to explore possible reasons for the change. Another set of questions were distributed to a subset of the students ($N=$ 20) to whom the authors still had access at the time of the survey (in the middle of the second semester). The questionnaire (see Appendix B for details) consisted of 20 statements with the students indicating the degree to which they agreed with them. The first and the third groups of statements investigated the reasons why they had felt frustrated at the earlier and at the later stage of the semester respectively. On the other hand, the second and the fourth groups of statements attempted to identify the factors contributing to their lower degree of frustration at the earlier and the later stages.

Table 4 summarizes the responses to the post-hoc survey from the students.

As can be predicted, there was a higher degree of agreement with the statements in the third group (i.e., possible reasons for feeling less frustrated towards the end of the semester). Such higher ratings for the third group of statements suggest that the student felt less frustrated towards the end of the semester.

At the beginning of the semester, the students felt frustrated because they did not know how to express their ideas in English (statement a; $M=$ 5.86, $S.D. = 1.55$). On the other hand, the enjoyable nature of the activity helped them gain relief from frustration (statement h; $M = 6.00$, $S.D. = 1.01$), as well as the many chances of speaking English with them (statement j; $M = 4.57$, $S.D. = 1.37$).

Table 4.

Descriptive statistics of the results of the post-hoc questionnaire (N = 20)

Statements	Mean	S.D.
At the beginning, I felt frustrated because …		
a. I didn't know how to express my ideas in English.	5.86	1.55
b. I didn't know much about the international students.	3.14	1.71
c. I wasn't interested in the activity.	1.86	0.63
d. I didn't have a chance to speak during the activity.	2.71	1.49
e. I couldn't understand what they said.	4.29	1.75
At the beginning, I didn't feel frustrated because …		
f. I was already confident in speaking English	3.00	1.41
g. I was able to understand what they said.	4.43	1.69
h. It was an enjoyable activity.	6.00	1.01
i. I already knew them quite well.	3.71	1.75
j. I had many chances to speak during the activity.	4.57	1.37
Towards the end of the semester, I felt less frustrated because …		
k. I felt my English skills had improved.	4.43	1.14
l. I could communicate with them better than before.	4.57	1.20
m. I got to know more about them and their cultures.	6.00	1.12
n. The activity became more interesting.	5.57	0.73
o. I could make myself understood.	4.71	0.96
Towards the end of the semester, I felt more frustrated because …		
p. I didn't feel my English had improved.	4.29	1.80
q. I wanted to communicate with them better.	5.71	1.27
r. The activity wasn't interesting.	2.14	1.09
s. I couldn't make myself understood well.	4.29	1.12
t. I couldn't get to know a lot about them and their cultures	2.43	1.11

Towards the end of the semester, they felt that they got to know the international students and their cultures better than before (statement m; $M = 6.00$, *S.D.* = 1.12). Other factors included that the activity became more interesting (statement n; $M = 5.57$, *S.D.* = 0.73) and that they could communicate with the international students better than before (statement l; $M = 4.57$, *S.D.* = 1.20). For the language aspects, they felt

that they could make themselves understood (statement o; $M = 4.71$, *S.D.* $= 0.96$). At the same time, however, it was found out that the students had felt that they had wanted to be able to communicate with the international students better from the ratings to the statement q; ($M = 5.71$, *S.D.* $= 1.27$).

To sum up, the overall tendency followed the results from the earlier questionnaire that the local students became less frustrated towards the end of the semester. However, the post-hoc survey focusing on more precise factors suggested the students' mixed feelings about frustration.

4. Discussion and Implications

Our results from the current study suggested that the effect of the experience with the international students on the local students' emotional states changed mainly in terms of frustration, which was backed up by the statistically significant differences between the beginning and the end of the semester. In other words, the more time they spent with international students, the less frustrated the local students became.

Regarding implications for teaching and developing such classes with local and international students in the future, as can be seen from Table 4, the following results were particularly prominent. The subjects felt early on that the activity was enjoyable (h) and felt that by the end they came to gain cultural knowledge (m). In addition, by the end, they were largely still interested in the activity (r). Regarding a central issue of English skills, participants initially showed low confidence in expressing their ideas in English (a) or their English skills (f). Although they showed some increased confidence in their English skills (k and p), they still show room for a greater potential increase in this area.

These results suggest therefore that such interchange activities should include more preparation for the local students with additional language support and scaffolding and possibly greater structure to the exchange activities. However, at the same time, this should be balanced by retaining,

and even enhancing, the positive effects gained from exchange being carried out in an informal and relaxed mode, as well as with a continuing central aim of sharing cultural knowledge and experiences, which appears to be highly valued.

A challenge to address is the availability of international students as participants, given the low number of international students at this location, as described above. Numbers may vary from year to year, both based on the geographical intake and their interest in engaging in classes involving a third language (English), which may be greater when they do not want to prioritize the second language (Japanese). One way to allow a degree of interaction of this kind is through ever developing technology, such as international exchange through low-cost video conferencing. This was explored in Robins (2007) and has been continued by the author after that time. Numerous writers, such as Sung and Lin (2010) and Kelsen and Flowers (2017) have described other modes for such interaction. We intend to continue our studies in this area and address the development of interaction between local and international students in the future, including through the use of technology.

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Appendix A: Earlier questionnaire

[Internationalisation in classroom with international students]

Your age: (   ), Your gender: male / female / prefer not being specified

[1] Please circle an item which is most appilcable to you:

#	Questions	Describe your attitudes towards English classes;						
1	Did you study English at elementary school?		Yes		·		No	
2	At elementary school, I ( ) English classes. (Only if you chose 'yes' in the question 1.)	loved	liked	had no special feelings about			disliked	hated
3	At junior high school, I ( ) English classes.	loved	liked	had no special feelings about			disliked	hated
4	At high school, I ( ) English classes.	loved	liked	had no special feelings about			disliked	hated
5	At university, I ( ) English classes.	love(d)	like(d)	have (had) no special feeling about			dislike(d)	hate(d)

#	Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly agree	No special feeling	Slightly disagree	disagree	Strongly disagree
6	I feel happy when I speak English.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
7	I feel confident when I speak English.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
8	I feel nervous when I speak English.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
9	I feel frustrated when I speak English.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
10	I have been to a foreign country.		Yes		·		No	
11	I have been to an English-speaking country.		Yes		·		No	
12	I have studied English overseas for at least two weeks.		Yes		·		No	
13	I have studied English overseas for six months or more.		Yes		·		No	
14	I am interested in working overseas in the future.		Yes		·		No	
15	I take part in university activities with international students, such as the international cafe or trips		Yes		·		No	
16	I have one or more friends from another country.		Yes		·		No	
17	I have one or more friends from an English speaking country.		Yes		·		No	
18	I use internet capability such as Facebook or Skype to contact people in another country at least once a week.		Yes		·		No	
19	I use internet capability such as Facebook or Skype to contact people in another country at least once a month.		Yes		·		No	
20	Having international students in a class is exciting.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
21	Having international students in a class is intimidating.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
22	Having international students in a class is motivating.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
23	Having international students in a class is bothersome.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
24	I have a good friend/good friends among international students now.		Yes		·		No	
25	I have had a good friend/good friends among international students in the past.		Yes		·		No	
26	I would like to have a friend/friends among international students in the past.		Yes		·		No	
27	I am not interested in a friend/friends among international students. (Yes = you're interested, No = you're not interested.)		Yes		·		No	

[2] Do you agree or disagree with the statement? Why? Why not?

28 A university like this one would benefit from a greater number of international students.

Appendix B: Follow-up questionnaire

Your experience with international students in last semester's Thursday English Communication Class

Student ID: _____

In the first semester, you have experienced communicating with international students in small groups in the 3rd year class on Thursdays. Please reflect on the experience and answer the following questions (2 and 3) in one or more sentences.   * Remember; Frustrating = 「うまくいかないと感じること」 in Japanese.

1. To what degree do you agree with the statements? Please write the most applicable number in the brackets.

> 7: Strongly Agree   6: Agree   5: Slightly Agree   4: No Special Feeling
> 3: Slightly Disagree   2: Disagree   1: Strongly Disagree

At the beginning, I felt frustrated because …
   a. I didn't know how to express my ideas in English.   (   )
   b. I didn't know much about the international students.   (   )
   c. I wasn't interested in the activity.   (   )
   d. I didn't have a chance to speak during the activity.   (   )
   e. I couldn't understand what they said.   (   )

At the beginning, I **didn't** feel frustrated because …
   f. I was already confident in speaking English   (   )
   g. I was able to understand what they said.   (   )
   h. It was an enjoyable activity.   (   )
   i. I already knew them quite well.   (   )
   j. I had many chances to speak during the activity.   (   )

Towards the end of the semester, I felt **less** frustrated because …
   k. I felt my English skills had improved.   (   )
   l. I could communicate with them better than before.   (   )
   m. I got to know more about them and their cultures.   (   )
   n. The activity became more interesting.   (   )
   o. I could make myself understood.   (   )

Towards the end of the semester, I felt **more** frustrated because …
   p. I didn't feel my English had improved.   (   )
   q. I wanted to communicate with them better.   (   )
   r. The activity wasn't interesting.   (   )
   s. I couldn't make myself understood well.   (   )
   t. I couldn't get to know a lot about them and their cultures   (   )

2. Did you have any difficulties when communicating with the international students? How did you cope with those difficulties?

3. What was the biggest change in your communication skills that you felt by the end of the semester?