

Virtual exchange to increase students' ICC

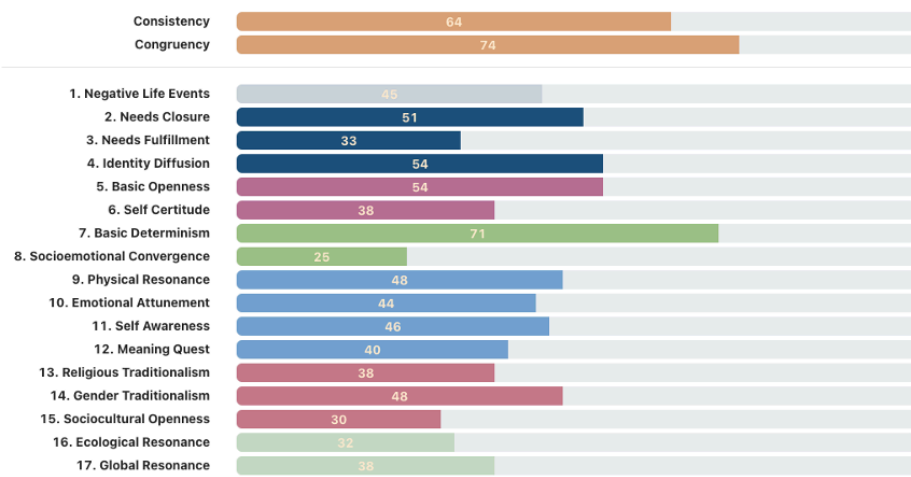
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While the University of Shimane, has been active in the field of Virtual Exchange (VE) for over ten years, we have relied heavily on individual teachers and specific courses for VE. This poster explains an Action Research project conducted earlier this year. We had two goals (i) to evaluate our different modes of VE to find out which ones were most impactful and (ii) to find which VE programs were more scalable, e.g. part-time teachers could also be asked to facilitate. The programs were evaluated quantitatively by BEVI-j, the Japanese version of the Beliefs, Events, and Values Inventory, and qualitatively using student reflection papers and presentations. Through our action research, we found what we knew instinctively: who students are before they take course has a great influence on the outcomes, and our most impactful programs may not be the easiest to scale. In this poster and the accompanying video presentation we will evaluate four VE projects and then talk about the implications for our future VE.

Asynchronous VE in a required course

45 Japanese and 37 American students shared four videos on Flipgrid over one month: self introduction, learning to read and write in Japanese, being polite in Japanese, and a reflection. In one month, these 82 students generated nearly 100 hundred hours of engagement on the platform, 632 comments, 9776 video views, and 312 videos. Prior to VE, 30 Japanese students took BEVI-j. (Participation was voluntary.) Results for these 30 students showed that they scored high on Basic Determinism (preferring simple explanations for complex issues), scored low on Global Resonance and Sociocultural Openness, and held fairly Gender Traditional views. Post VE implementation showed little change on these scales for a smaller number of students who took the survey. However, in the final reflection video students 60 out of 61 students who completed the task wanted to do asynchronous VE again. Students mentioned gaining foreign language skills, and confidence, and struggling to speak their own language to learners. The instructors felt that the bilingual nature of this VE was successful; students interacted a lot; and it was easy to evaluate. While this VE is easy to scale it may not be the most impactful.



Screenshot of the BEVI-j aggregate profile of 30 students before asynchronous exchange (May 2021)

Synchronous voluntary VE

Seven Japanese students joined an intensive week-long synchronous VE with 9 North American students. They reported that they became sensitive to their own cultural values. They realized the Japanese way of expressing their emotions was more reserved than their counterparts': "Americans showed their emotions positively, while we Japanese were reticent". They also showed responsibility as community members: some students wrote that they would like to promote this type of exchange to other students. The week-long English discussion boosted student motivation to practice speaking English

All Japanese students took BEVI-j before and after voluntary VE. Although the number of the respondents is not large enough to make any generalizations, the Global Resonance score of this group was very high; namely 72 and 69 compared to the baseline score of 38 obtained for 30 students in a required English class (see above). It is clear that the participants in this voluntary exchange were deeply interested in cross-cultural exchange.



Longitudinal comparison of the seven students doing voluntary synchronous VE (August 2021)

Synchronous VE in an elective course

14 Japanese students partnered with 14 students in China then 17 students in Taiwan to compare their experiences of college life, family and cultural traditions, stereotypes and prejudice, and the meaning of life. Students had three 90-minute synchronous links with each partner institution, and were required to contact either individual partners to follow up on classroom discussions and create a project together.

After six synchronous links, students spoke about their experiences in small groups and used Padlet to share their reflections on the exchange. Through Padlet, students shared what surprised them, what had upset them, and what actions they wanted to take after this VE. A common theme was students' lack of confidence in their own English, and gratitude to partners who supported them when they struggled to communicate.

In interviews after VE, students reported that they learned about their own abilities to communicate and the importance of effort in virtual exchanges. Students were able to critically evaluate their own stereotypes of other cultures and identified gaps in their own knowledge of their home culture. Increased confidence in communication was also reported, both for communication in general and specifically communicating with people from different backgrounds. While this exchange requires more teacher training and facilitation, it seems to be more impactful according to qualitative data.

Difficulties

- Time difference
There are 13 hours time difference between Japan and America
- Being respectful
Everyone have their own culture and perspective

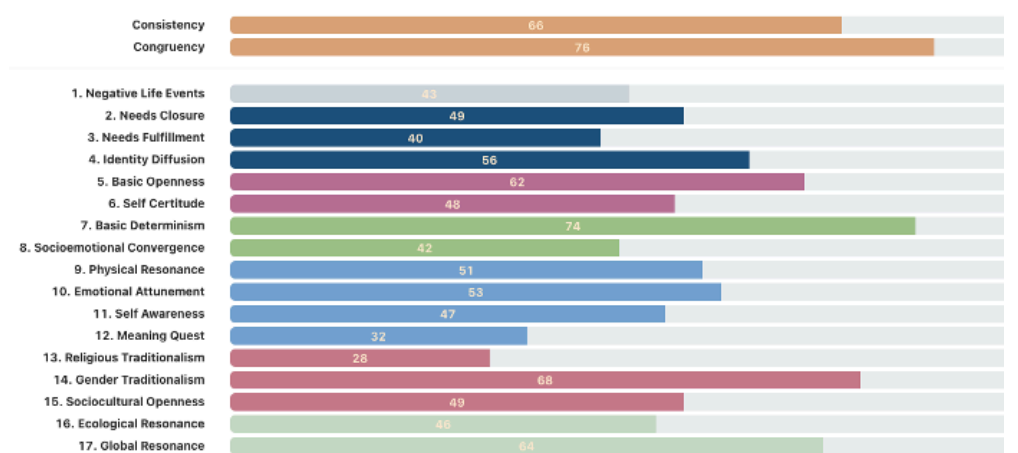
What surprised me about working with people from other countries

- The Existence of Stereotypes
 - Japanese people eat Sushi every meal
 - All Japanese people like anime
- I realized that I also had a Stereotypical Image of people living in other countries
- The importance of getting to know them by facing and interacting with each other

Student video reflections on this VE can be seen in the accompanying presentation

Asynchronous VE in an elective course

Eleven Japanese students partnered 17 American students in mixed groups of about seven students, using Canvas to share video presentations on set topics. Four students took BEVI-j prior to VE. BEVI-j results showed that these students had much higher Global Resonance scores (64 compared to 38) and Sociocultural Openness scores (49 compared to 30). Even before VE, they were a very different group of students who had selected a course where they would be collaborating with overseas students. This VE was challenging for students in terms of language, content, and ICT skills to use a new platform and to record and edit video presentations. More teacher training was also necessary but the short duration (one month) makes it scalable.



BEVI-j aggregate profile of 4 students in an elective VE class after synchronous exchange and before asynchronous exchange (June 2021)

Conclusion

This preliminary research has shown instructors what we instinctively knew: who students are before they undertake a class greatly influences the outcomes. Students who self-select to take challenging courses centered around VE already have higher ICC skills. Future courses hope to make use of BEVI-j data to alert students to differences between students in the group and to provide material for discussion and reflection on how to meet course goals of VE and students' own personal goals. Through this action research, the instructors also learned how to use a new instrument and discussed how to obtain more complete data for our students taking part in VE. The data we analyzed showed that our most impactful VE may not be the most scalable.

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