論 文

Analyzing the Importance of Cross-Cultural Learning in Modern Society: Reflection on Nepal-Japan Exchange Program 2016 from Nepali Participants' Points of View

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ABSTRACT

In August 2016, a Nepal-Japan student exchange program（NJEP）was conducted in Nepal. This paper aims to unravel the impacts of cross-cultural learning on Nepali students who participated in the program. It reviews cross-cultural communication and argues that intercultural exchanges among people from different cultures are beneficial. The paper also aims to measure the success of the NJEP as an effective learning platform for Nepali participants and its cross-cultural learning approach.

The information gathered from this research describes the high motivation and willingness to learn English among the young people in both countries. It also notes that the demand for cultural exchange is very high. The data gathered from this study will be beneficial for future programs in boosting young adults' motivation to learn English and to help them connect with other people from different countries and cultures.

Keywords: cross-cultural learning, Buddy Model, English learning

1. Introduction

Increased global mobility has made people familiar with almost everything in the world. The ever-increasing transit of people is not only limited to travel, but rather a fundamental desire to learn and see more. Through globalization there is now a permanent demand for almost every product, service and facility from every edge of the world. Globalization has created oneness among people of different countries.

Among many other fields, education has also been globalized. As education has an important place in shaping society, education is inherently connected and, thus, global

student initiatives have a deep impact on learners（Abdelhadi, 2015）. Currently students across the world have the fundamental right to move to any countries they wish to, in order to achieve any educational goals. Students are, thus, more connected to each other than at any previous point in history, having access to unlimited global education and communication opportunities through exchange programs, projects, institutions, and even social media. These opportunities have created a platform for students to create, or participate in programs that help them learn beyond the bounds of their textbooks. Students now seek to be educated in ways that are more practical, explorative, and real.

International education is on the rise as the demands of an ever-globalized world require students to understand broader global issues. Our students, and future business leaders of tomorrow, have become more mobile than ever. They search for global experiences and job opportunities（Pennisi, 2012）. By exploring beyond textbooks, students are willing to interact with real world problems, where they can see, experience, learn, and grow more than their predecessors could have imagined. As such cultural exchange programs continue to increase in populatity, these programs provide students with the chance to travel to other countries and learn about new cultures, practices, traditions, and more.

Cross-cultural communication itself is a dynamic process during which people on both sides of the cross-cultural communication exchange their information and message through the medium of language. This non-trivial process occurs through the steps of information encoding, information transfer decoding, and retroaction link（Zhou, 2015）. Cultural exchange has been a way for students to experience diversity, learn and share from one another, and build meaningful relationships, both personal and professional for now and the future.

2. Transition of cross-cultural learning in the history

2-1. Definition of 'Culture'

Geertz（1973）explained the idea of culture as "a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life." Tylor（1871）, who was the first to recognize that culture is a learned behavior and not an inherited factor, explained culture as "complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."

Culture, therefore, is a way of life and a learned behavior by which individuals develop themselves by learning, understanding, and practicing the same. Culture is also an identity and a symbol of that collective group's belief, values, and understanding of living life.

2-2. Cross-cultural learning in ancient and medieval periods-travel education

In a world full of diversity, cross-cultural learning has been a common phenomenon since time immemorial. However, cross-cultural learning has been described in various ways. One of the interpretations, which is deeply related to the present research, is *education travel*. The words education and travel are different concepts. The adjective education means the acquisition of knowledge and the noun travel implies the dynamic process of migration (Metraux, 1956). However, when used together, the term education travel has a unique meaning.

Education travel has been a well-studied concept since ancient times, and no one denies how human beings have developed modern societies through the appropriation of knowledge, skills, and technology from other communities, societies, and cultures. One classical example lies with Marco Polo (1254-1324), a confidant of Kublai Khan. Marco Polo traveled throughout Asia, reaching Mongolia after 24 years. Polo was the first European to travel that extensively through Asia, returning with stories of culture, new experiences, and understandings, which later helped him become a confidant of one of the most powerful leaders in history, Kublai Khan.

The Romans used to travel to Greece for formal education. It wasn't until much later when Rome, along with the rest of Europe, created its own formal education system. These education trips to Greece rapidly decreased, and people started to study in schools of their own region. These examples show how education travel had already been used in formal schooling in ancient times. Even though education travel historically was required due to the lack of formal schooling in certain regions or areas, the importance of education travels is being promoted more now than ever before.

The value of education travel was not only recognized in Europe, but was observed as a common tendency throughout the world. For example, it was common for the *Brahman,* the clan placed at the top of the Hindu hierarchy, to go to distant places, away from home to learn from their *gurus* (teachers) on various matters such as mathematics, economics, or politics. Students would go to their *guru*'s shelter where knowledge would be imparted. In this process, students would have to work with their classmates, many of

whom were unknown to each other. In order to gain knowledge and to advance their education, many *Brahman* children chose to go to *gurus* instead of hiring a private tutor to come to their palaces or homes.

2-3. Cross-cultural learning in modern society

Cross-cultural learning, in the present context, refers to "the process of adaptation to a new environment and its requirements through obtaining necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Hannigan, 1990). Similarly, intercultural learning is "the acquisition or modification of the representations of intercultural situations" in the learning process. Educational institutions such as schools and universities, therefore, have become the best places to develop these skills in present society.

A lot of universities, colleges, and schools offer a cross-cultural medium of learning in various ways. They conduct cultural exchange programs, utilize an inclusive form of classroom with people from all over the world, invite schools and students from foreign nations, and even establish credit-gaining courses that make the study of cross-cultural learning mandatory. Most schools today practice and apply cross-cultural learning methods. Even the governments of many countries have been allocating budgets for international student exchange programs.

3. Why is cross-cultural learning necessary?

3-1. Importance of cross-cultural learning

Studies have suggested the need for socio-cultural exchange, as an essential means of survival in an ever-globalizing society. Thus, socio-cultural exchange is not only a matter of additional need, but a core value that people maintain for their survival. However, the need to connect with individuals is not only due to the need for human interaction, but is also essential to the process of thought or development of cognition. There are many theories which explain how socio-cultural exchanges among people add to the development of cognition.

Vygotsky (1930) developed a theory in the twentieth century called the *sociocultural theory of cognitive development* in which he explained how social interaction plays an important role in the development of an individual. The transmission approach used in traditional classrooms by schools to teach is the classic method of learning employed by most societies around the world. But Vygotsky offered a different analogy of learning.

According to his explanation, the approach used by most classes, therefore, is not effective. Classes should be structured to allow students to better interact among themselves, and for teachers to facilitate and guide learning.

Cross-cultural learning gives a personal cultural competence to an individual. Cultural competency for this study can be defined as "a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enable that system, agency, or those professions to work effectively in cross-cultural situations "(Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria, 2006). Cultural competence means much more than cross-cultural awareness, as it "focuses on the capacity of the health system to improve health and well-being by integrating culture into the delivery of health services" (Cross, 1989). Culturally competent individuals project positivity, a trait required by their workplaces, institutions, and societies.

3-2. Advantages of cultural exchange program

The previously mentioned researchers found evidence that intercultural exchange programs have had mostly positive impacts on the participants because they enhance their cultural competence, foreign language skills, and help participants build mutual responsibility. The significance of cultural exchange programs in academic study and career building are many. They play a significant role in fostering individuals on different levels.

(1) **Personal level:** On a personal level, by attending exchange programs individuals can foster their outlooks towards society as well as develop their personalities. Cultural exchange is a unique way to broaden students' understanding of community and human behavior. Through culture exchange programs, they get to take a break from their daily lives and can return with new ideas about the host culture and more creativity. Programs like culture exchanges can help individuals to move out of their comfort zones to explore, experience, and grow in, their personal and professional lives.

(2) **Academic level:** On an academic level, students can learn a lot about a host country's culture, history, present issues, economic condition, education system and much more. Knowledge gained in the host country can be beneficial for increasing students' general knowledge as well as helping them with studies.

（3）Professional level: On a professional level cultural exchange programs can be beneficial for individuals as they introduce people from different walks of life. A program like this is a great opportunity for anyone to meet new people with the different mindsets. Such connections can be beneficial for people in their professional careers.

In addition to those benefits mentioned above, there is an even more significant advantage of intercultural exchanges （especially international exchanges）, which is, through the development of English language skills. Participating in an exchange program with an English-speaking country is a great way to improve English proficiency. However, an exchange program between two countries whose native languages are not English, can still give the participants great experience in self-reflection and monitoring. Learning a new language through an exchange program has proven to be an extremely effective driving force for students from different nations to improve their speaking skills and increase their awareness of intercultural issues and develop mutual understanding. The students themselves are able to reflect on their English ability and share language learning tips. Thus, participants returning from exchange program tend to have more motivation to improve their English skills.

4. Buddy Model

When it comes to the general psychological process of learning about a new culture, there are many theories, such as Lysgaard's *U-curve model* （1955）, Shaules's *Deep culture model*, （2007）and Seki's *Buddy model* （2016）. However, the the Buddy model proposed by Seki （2016）is the most relevant to this research.

According to the model, when you travel to a new place or meet people from a new culture, in many cases, excitement is the first phase for students. It is often known as the *honeymoon* period （Lysgaard, 1955）where participants enjoy everything they see and are exposed to.

As everything is a novelty for these new arrivals, the curiosity and desire to know more fill participants with excitement about the language, people, and food in their new surroundings. However, the feeling of excitement only remains intact until students' progress to the next stage, which is the *comparison*. In this stage, students compare everything they see and everyone they meet with counterparts in their own cultures. Some might find the differences positive and worth experiencing. Others find them
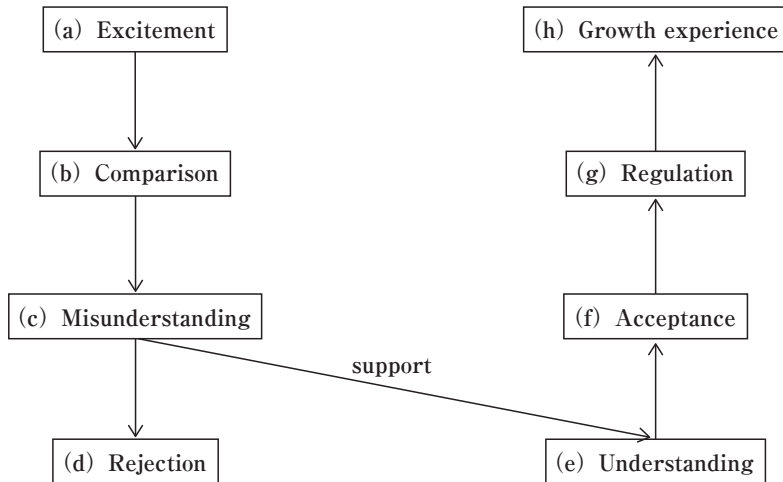
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(a) Excitement                          (h) Growth experience
      |                                          ↑
      ↓                                          |
(b) Comparison                          (g) Regulation
      |                                          ↑
      ↓                                          |
(c) Misunderstanding                    (f) Acceptance
      |         \                                ↑
      |          \ support                       |
      ↓           ↘                              |
(d) Rejection      (e) Understanding
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Figure 1. The Buddy model in international student exchange（Seki, 2016）

negative and start to feel depressed. This process then might lead to the third stage which is called *misunderstanding*. This stage arises when students interpret the meaning of everything they see, or are exposed to, according to their cultural point of view. Because of this, there is a great chance that students may misinterpret things in their own ways. In addition to this, participants will have to face the biggest obstacle in understanding people from another culture, that is, the language barrier. Not knowing each other's languages can sometimes create serious problems, and, thus, cause misunderstandings in many cases. In this stage, participants tend to stick to their own culture and *resist* the new culture（Shoules, 2007）. Nothing students experience any longer makes them feel good. Instead, their surroundings start to depress them.

However, this stage can be worked through if the people from both cultures remain patient and try to teach and learn from one another. Equal support and effort from people of both cultures can lessen the chance of creating misunderstandings. Once misunderstandings happen among students, they progress to the next stage which is *rejection*. The misunderstandings create a certain fear and sense of disappointhers' ways of life and culture, as students begin to disagree with and reject the values and worth of the host culture. The rejection stage might create tension among students of both cultures. Symptoms exhibited during this period include homesickness, anxiety, sadness, and anger. However, as time passes and as students continue to engage in cultural exchange activities, including teamwork and icebreakers, they get increasingly comfortable with each other and develop deeper understandings of each other's cultures.

Understanding each other's ways of life and cultures helps students to accept the environments they are in.

Once students help each other to work through different issues, it is more likely that students from both cultures feel safe and accept each other, and the culture they are exposed to. Acceptance of the culture and its values helps students enjoy the program.

5. Nepal - Japan exchange program 2016（NJEP 2016）

5-1. Outline

In August 2016, the Nepal-Japan Student Exchange Program（NJEP）between university students from Nepal and Japan was held. The program was coordinated by Asia Association of Education and Exchange, a Japan-based general incorporated association, working together with a team of Nepali organizing members. The program took place in three different districts of Nepal, i. e., Kathmandu, Palpa, and Pokhara. The purpose of the NJEP was to provide cultural learning for students from Nepal and Japan through different kinds of activities to foster intercultural understanding. Moreover, motivating students to learn English is also an important purpose of this program through which participants from the two countries can reflect on their English levels and try to improve them.

The program included 21 participants（10 Nepali and 13 Japanese）. The exchange program gave students insight into several areas of socio-cultural and economic significance. Japanese participants had the opportunity to experience a typical rural Nepali lifestyle, which was completely different from their own. The program also tried to promote understanding of the cultural differences, and boost English learning motivation.

5-2. Program details

The purposes of the program were twofold：

（1）Cultural learning

Cultural exchange is the main purpose of this program. The program aims at giving students new cultural experiences. Through the cultural exchange program, students are able to gain a deeper insight into the other country's culture, learn how to adapt to it, and overcome difficulties once they have been completely immersed.

（2）Promoting English learning motivation

Nowadays, English has become increasingly important, both in developing and developed countries. Due to globalization, in order to find well-paid jobs or get full scholarships, English language skills are the top criteria. Knowing this, NJEP aims not only to expose students to a new culture, but also to provide them with opportunities to communicate with others in English, thus, boosting their motivation to learn this language. English is not the native language of Japan or Nepal, but it is used as the main communication method during this program. Therefore, by talking with each other in English, Japanese and Nepalese can each reflect on their levels of English proficiency. They are also able to learn from their partners learning strategies and adopt techniques that can help them master English more effectively.

6. RESEARCH

6-1. Aims

This study reflects on the efficacy of the NJEP program 2016 in Nepal, especially from the Nepali students' perspectives. The author has conducted the similar research in the past from the perspective of Japanese participants（Seki, 2017）. This was due to the availability and simplicity of data collection, with the author being based in Japan. This study focuses on the voices of local Nepalese particpants.

6-2. Methodology

The research uses traditional field experiment methodology. Ten Nepali and 13 Japanese students, from various universities participated in the program for twelve days. In order to meet the requirements of the program, all participants had to be able to speak English at a minimum level. Most of the participants had never participated in an exchange program before.

A survey was conducted after the program, with the questions designed by the author. Most of the questions focused on the expectations of the program, the experiences of the participants throughout the program, and the lessons learned from the program. However, to understand the true feelings of the participants, the researchers conducted a focus group with all the participants present.

6−3. Limitation of the research

Seki's culture learning model was used as the main analysis model to reflect on the success of the program. The reason for this focused analysis was due to the limited data collected during the program. Due to time limitations, the author was unable to conduct individual interviews with all the participants. Therefore, in this study the analysis is based largely on a focus group, secondary sources, and observations.

7. Result & Discussion

7. 1. Expectations of Nepali participants before the program and result

7. 1. 1. Findings

For Nepali students, having a chance to interact with students from Japan is a great opportunity. Japan is a country known for its technology, innovation, and creativity, yet a blend of traditional and contemporary culture. However, most students in Nepal only know Japan from what is available on the Internet or in newspapers. As such participants' expectations were largely shaped by these sources. The table below summarizes the main preconceptions of the Nepali participants towards their Japanese counterparts based on their words, and what they discovered through the program.

No	Expectations	Result	
		Correct	Incorrect
1	Interested in technology（robots, high-tech devices, etc.）	○	
2	Fluent in English		○
3	Detail oriented（paying attention to every little detail）	○	
4	Conservative		○
5	Insular（not wanting to go abroad）		○
6	Self-centered		○
7	Hard-working	○	
8	Punctual	○	

Table 1. Preconceptions of Nepali participants about Japanese people before the program and results

7. 1. 2. Analysis

（1）Japanese people are interested in technology.

As Japan is famous for its cutting-edge technology, most Nepalese students believed that the Japanese participants would be interested in high-tech devices such as electric dictionaries, bluetooth device, and the newest smart phones. And this turned out to be true among the participants in this program.

（2）Japanese people are dedicated to working hard.

After 12 days of interaction with Japanese students, Nepali participants found their Japanese peers to be dedicated to each task given to them. For the Nepalese students, this characteristic was seen as contributing to the development of Japan as a whole. Therefore, they thought that it would be important for all Nepalese people to be diligent in their duties in order to better develop their country.

"I like their dedication and hard work. Japanese have that attitude of "work comes first" which I really admired. Moreover, I also like how much they contribute towards the development of their country and never wait for others to do their work."

（3）Japanese people are excellent at time management.

Nepali participants felt that the Japanese participants were better able to manage their time. They develop a very detailed schedule before they do anything, and then they follow that schedule strictly. This helps a lot of them in managing their time to make sure work or projects are going according to plan. Therefore, once the Japanese participants say that they will do something, they finish it on time and go over deadline.

"I like their way of managing the time which makes me respect them the most"

（4）The English level of Japanese people is not very high.

Nepali participants believed that living in a developed country, Japanese students would have more opportunities to learn English than their Nepalese counterparts. They were certain that the Japanese's English proficiency would be higher than their own. However, during the program, the Nepalese participants found that the English proficiency of the Japanese participants was not as good as expected. Some of the Nepali participants even claimed that they were annoyed because some Japanese participants were very quiet in English. This has been described extensively in language learning literature, as Japanese people's limited English proficiency remains an active area of research.

（5） Japanese people are not conservative or self-centered, and they want to go abroad.

Before the program, Nepali students believed Japanese people to be conservative and self-centered, as they come from the third most developed country and are, thus, highly regarded by most other nations. It was believed that this would result in an overly inflated sense of self-worth. However, during the program, the Nepalese students described Japanese students as neither conservative nor self-centered. Instead, they judged them to be very open, generous, and cooperative. The Nepali students observed these characteristics in Japanese students during all the joint activities the two groups participated in the program.

Furthermore, the Nepali students initially believed, as Japan is a developed country, that there would be no need for students to go abroad. However, this thinking quickly changed with all Japanese participants commenting on how they were very interested in discovering new places outside Japan, either for travel or academic purposes.

（6） Japanese people are very hard-working, punctual and detail oriented.

As seen In Table 1, *hardworking* and *punctual* are among the top 8 words used by Nepali students to describe Japanese people. These were also the preconceptions of Nepali students towards Japanese students in the program. These were also the expectations. According to one of the Nepali students,

"Japanese participants are always on time, and they strictly follow the schedule during the program. I think this is a very good characteristic. I should learn from them."

Moreover, Japanese people's attention to detail is quite good. They pay attention to everything, even the smallest detail. This expectation was also confirmed after interacting with Japanese participants during the program.

（7） Japan is a mono-cultural, and mono-lingual society.

Many Nepalese participants pointed out the following:

"Since people from Nepal live among people with diverse ethnic backgrounds, we are quite open to change and different cultures and traditions. This might be quite difficult for Japanese people because they are from a country that is mono-lingual and mono-cultural.

It was observed that Japanese participants were uniform in their thoughts and actions. They exhibited similar values, culture, and choices. In other words, there was unanimity in their actions. Generally, due to this uniformity, the pattern of their choices and beliefs

could be analyzed. In contrast, there were vast differences in choices, values, and beliefs among Nepali participants.

7. 2. Changes in Nepali participants after the program
7. 2. 1. Change in perception about Japanese people.

Prior to the program some Nepali students considered Japanese to be conservative and self-centered. After the program, all of these perceptions changed. Below are the adjectives that Nepali participants used to describe the Japanese students after the NJEP.

7. 2. 2. Changes in Attitude and Knowledge
（1）Attitudes：

Prior to the program, Nepali participants seldom paid attention to education issues. It was noted, however, that after the program, their attitude towards the value of education was changed. They wanted to contribute more to education in order to be good educators in the future.

"*After the program and visiting Maidan Village, I am thankful to be able to afford education. Also, I guess I have become more hardworking. This experience also made me want to study and work for my country.*"

Moreover, some Nepali participants were initially quite introverted and shy when communicating with Japanese people. However, after the program, they found themselves more open and confident. They also noted that their interpersonal skills had improved.

"*I have become more open to new people which* was *not the case in the past. I can now happily accept or at least acknowledge something new and unfamiliar. Also, I feel more confident* talking *with tourists.*"

（2）Knowledge

During the 12-day interaction with Japanese students, Nepali participants learned a lot about Japanese culture and their working styles, which in turn helped them broadening their perceptions.

"*I did not only learn about the value of friendship but also about Japanese culture and Nepalese culture as well.*"

"*Of course I got to know about Japanese and the culture itself*"

Ranked by Frequency of Use	Adjectives Used to Describe Japanese Participants
1	Friendly
2	Enthusiastic
3	Humorous
4	Cooperative
5	Knowledgeable

Table 2. Nepali people's impressions of Japanese participants after the NJEP 2016

7.3. Influence of the program on Nepali participants:

(1) Improvements on skills:

Through the NJEP 2016, Nepali students realized that they had improved various skills, especially interpersonal communication. They recognized clear improvement, largely due to interactive activities with not only Japanese students, but also with other local people. These activities helped Nepali participants to enhance their communication skills generally, and subsequently to pass on this learning to others.

As seen from the pie chart below, around half of the Nepali participants admitted that their communication skills had improved significantly. Other skills, such as English proficiency and interpersonal interaction with surrounding people, also had improved. Only a small number of students thought that their skills had not improved after the program.
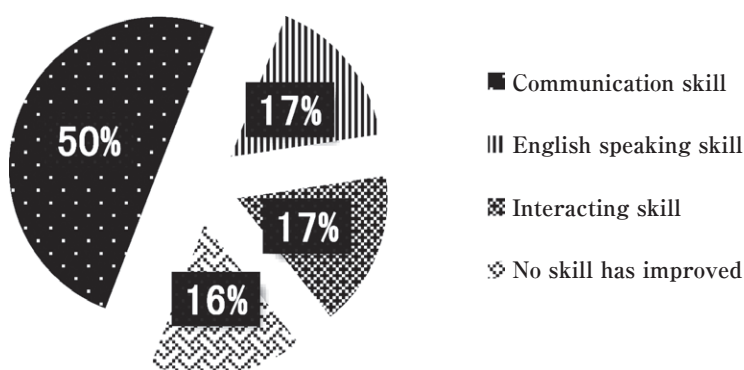

Figure 2. Improved skills of Nepali participants

（2）Positive change in characteristics

Before the program, some Nepali students rated themselves as reserved, shy, and lacking in confidence. However, after the program, they became more open and confident in their abilities.

The chart below shows that Nepali participants considered themselves to be more open and social after the NJEP experience. They became increasingly more confident and more interactive with others. In Nepal such characteristics are considered to be very important, and could help increase their career and life prospects.
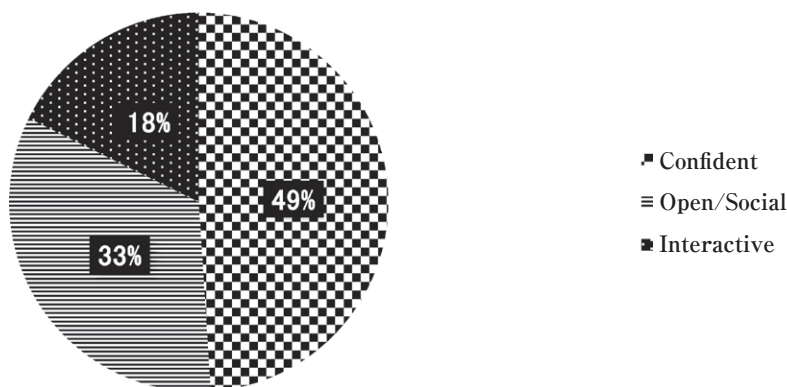
Figure 3. Change in Nepali students' perceptions of themselves

7. 4. Analysis of NJEP 2016 using the cooperative culture learning model

We can conclude that the cultural adaptation process of Nepali participants corresponds to the Buddy model（Seki, 2016）which was already mentioned.

（a）Excitement: It is obvious that the students were very excited before the program, and they expected a lot from Japanese culture, Japanese people, and all the activities they were going to participate in.

（b）Comparison: Nepali students notably compared the behavior of Japanese students with their own. Some Nepali students were not happy because some Japanese students were silent and did not talk much. There were a lot of difficulties and differences in culture and behavior that made the Nepalese feel uncomfortable or confused.

（c）Misunderstanding: Misunderstandings among Nepalese and Japanese participants were inevitable due to the language barrier and the differences in culture and thought

processes. Nepali participants also felt that it was hard to understand their Japanese peers. They sometimes failed to read each other's feelings and had difficulty deciding what they wanted to say.

（d）**Rejection**: When misunderstandings happened, the Nepali participants had to choose between rejecting or accepting the particular cultural difference. However, none of the Nepali participants rejected the Japanese due to these misunderstandings. Instead, they all adapted themselves to these situations and became more interested in the Japanese culture and people.

（e）**Understanding**: Because these misunderstandings were met with empathy, all participants were able to understand each other more deeply, and adjust to the new culture.

（h）**Growth experience**: After all the misunderstandings and the difficulties in understanding their Japanese counterparts, Nepali participants judged themselves to be more mature and knowledgeable thanks to their many cross-cultural experiences.

8. CONCLUSION

With globalization, an increasing number of students will continue to travel abroad for culture exchanges. Through short-term exchange programs, students can learn many lessons that are not taught in school or in textbooks. Exchange programs provide students with the opportunity not only to explore and adapt to a new culture, but also to interact with different kinds of people. Through these interactions communication and interpersonal skills are also improved.

Moreover, as English proficiency is critical to communication throughout such programs, participants develop their English and become more confident about their abilities as well.

Finally, the core conclusion of this research on NJEP 2016 is that cross-cultural learning is an essential part of modern students' education and preparation for life. The world needs programs like NJEP to strengthen the bond between different cultures for the betterment of the world as a whole.

Acknowledgements

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