

How the Idea of International Understanding Can be Used in High School English Textbooks in Japan

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Abstract

In the global world, people with different cultural backgrounds need to work together.

Byram (2008) mentions the importance of intercultural competence (hereinafter referred to as IC) and proposed the model of intercultural communicative competence (hereinafter referred to as ICC).

Koyama (2016) analyzed three high school English textbooks in Japan and mentioned that it is important for students not only to improve their English skills but also to learn roles of culture in their English classes.

The purpose of this study is to clarify how the idea of international understanding can be used in high school English textbooks. The two top popular high school textbooks in Japan were selected in this study. The texts of each lesson are analyzed based on the three points, attitude, knowledge, and skills, which include the dimensions of IC. The results show that the viewpoints of intercultural competence are contained in English textbooks. It will give English teachers some hints about how to improve students' ICC by using English textbooks.

Keywords

English education, international understanding, Intercultural Competence(IC), high school English textbooks,

1 Introduction

In the global world, people with different cultural backgrounds need to work together to build a society in which they can live together, accepting diversity. It gives important suggestions for English education in Japan. It is important for students not

only to improve their English skills but also to broaden their horizon for international understanding in their English classes.

2. Background

2.1 Intercultural Competence and International Communicative Competence

English has served as lingua franca and there are many non-native speakers who have various cultural backgrounds.

Byram (2008) mentions the importance of IC. It consists of four dimensions: attitude, knowledge, skills and critical cultural awareness. In fact, without IC, people may cause serious misunderstandings or conflicts in communication even if they are linguistically competent in the target language. The model of ICC is also proposed. It consists of four competences: linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse and international competences. By learning ICC, people will be able to interact with people from other countries and cultures in a foreign language.

2.2 English textbooks

Nakayama and Kurihara (2016) analyzed junior high school English textbooks in Japan and shows how the IC reflect on the textbooks. Two cultural indicators: "A Frameworks of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures" (hereinafter referred to as FREPA) and "Japanese Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages" (hereinafter referred to as J-POSTL), CAN-DO lists for Japanese English teachers, are used and 11 descriptors from FREPA

(skill-2 attitude-3 knowledge-6) are selected. From this analysis, it is clarified that there are more elements which relates “surface culture” such as a descriptor of how culture works in foreign cultures.

Koyama (2016) analyzed three high school English textbooks in Japan, which are used by about 30 percent of all the high school students in Japan. There are various kinds of contents which have cultural elements.

3. The purpose of this studies

The purpose of this study is to clarify how the idea of international understanding can be used in high school English textbooks. They include topics which will increase more awareness of culture than junior high school English textbooks.

4. Procedures

The procedure adopted by this study is as follows:

1. The two top popular high school English textbooks: “All Aboard! Communication English I” and “VISTA English Communication I”, were selected. These textbooks cover more than 20 percent of all the Japanese high school students.
2. The indicators which consist of three areas and 10 descriptors (skill-2, attitude-4, knowledge-4) were defined. They are adopted from J-POSTL, FREPA and Nakayama and Kurihara(2016).
3. Three persons whose major is English education analyzed each lesson (23 lessons from both textbooks) individually and judged whether each element reflects on text. (Multiple answers allowed.)
4. The result of each analysis were compared and discussed. The indicators that three persons agree are valid and analyzed.

5. Results

The result shows as below.

Table.1 The classification of IC

No	Area	Descriptor	/23
1	A	Curiosity about various kinds of culture	5/23
2	A	Looking at one’s culture from other viewpoints	2/23
3	A	relating some cultures	1/23
4	A	Get out of cultural	1/23

		stereotype	
5	S	Can compare some cultural features and relate them	0/23
6	S	Can communicate while taking cultural differences into account	4/23
7	K	Knows that intercultural relations are influenced by each other	4/23
8	K	Knows roles of culture	1/23
9	K	Knows that there are similarities and differences between cultures	4/23
10	K	Knows that the interpretation of one’s behavior sometimes differ from culture to culture	2/23

A-attitude, S-skill, K-knowledge

6. Implication

There are many contents which relate culture in the textbooks. A lot of elements which will help students to improve ICC could be found.

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