

タイトル	A Case Study of an International Exchange Programme in Japan:A Pilot Study
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引用	北海学園大学学園論集(163): 37-52
発行日	2015-03-25

# A Case Study of an International Exchange Programme in Japan: A Pilot Study

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## Introduction

Young Japanese people are increasingly demanding educational experience that will help them function in an international context. This is due to the growing necessity for the internationalisation of education (Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 2012 and 2013). This research focuses on one of the international exchange programmes operated by the Cabinet Office, called Ship for World Youth (hereafter SWY) that I experienced as an instructor of intercultural communication and am currently helping as an advisor for program assessment. The Japanese government's expectation of this programme is to let Japanese participants have experience as *kokusaijin* (Cabinet Office of Japan, 2013). *Kokusaijin* is simply a combination of the root words *kokusai* (international) and *jin* (person), and hence literally means 'international person'. I designed a small-scale pilot study of Japanese participants of the SYW programme to understand the government's view of *kokusaijin* and that of the participants, and to understand the participants' experience of the programme. This paper starts by examining the Japanese government's perspective of being a *kokusaijin* or 'international person' and an empirical study about *kokusaijin* as literature review.

## Japanese government's view of 'international person', or *kokusaijin*

'*Kokusaijin* is another noun that represents Japan's untranslatable world view', Horvat (2000, p.107) states. In popular use, *kokusaijin* is someone who is internationally active and expert in English (Sugiyama, 1992), which describes an individual who is internationally competent. The word *kokusaijin* has been used since the *Miji* era (late 19<sup>th</sup> century), referring to a Japanese elite person with knowledge about the world and foreign languages, especially English (Watanabe, 1992).

Recently, in Japanese government documents, *kokusaijin* is often interchangeably used with the phrase *gurobaru jinzai*, meaning 'global human resource' (Fujiyama, 2012). This is

someone who has a strong awareness of being Japanese, possessing knowledge about Japan and other countries, and ability in English with a work-oriented mindset<sup>1</sup>, which is due to demands from industry that developed a strong ‘industry-government-academic relationship’ (Fujiyama, 2012, p.127). Therefore images of *kokusaijin* have been shifted from ‘the elite’ to ‘an international workforce’ with English ability, knowledge about Japan and other countries and awareness of being Japanese.

### **An empirical study of *kokusaijin***

A study by Yoneoka (2000) discussed how the concept of *kokusaijin* was seen by Japanese students in 1989 and 1999. The Japanese students in her research belonged to a middle-ranking local university, who seldom had the opportunity for first-hand intercultural experience such as studying abroad or interacting with people from other countries (Yoneoka, 2000, p.13). She used a questionnaire in which the main question asked students to describe three necessary conditions to be *kokusaijin*. She translated the word *kokusaijin* as an ‘internationally oriented person’ (Yoneoka, 1993, p.81), and asked the same question to non-Japanese students<sup>2</sup> in Germany, India and the USA (Yoneoka, 1993). She compared her Japanese research data with those taken from students of other countries.

Using two taxonomies of educational objectives - the taxonomy of Steinaker and Bell (1979) and that of Bloom (1956, 1971) - Yoneoka described that a *kokusaijin*, or ‘internationally oriented person’, possesses three types of attributes: the *cognitive*, the *experiential* and the *affective* (Yoneoka, 2000). She found that more than half of Japanese students believed the *cognitive* attribute, such as ‘(English) language ability’ and ‘knowledge of Japan (or one’s own country) as an integral part of a *kokusaijin*’ and the most important (ibid, p.12). This result was similar both in 1988 and in 1990; however, it was very different from German, Indian, and American students’ images of an ‘internationally oriented person’. More than 70 percent of those non-Japanese respondents viewed the *affective*, such as ‘tolerance, lack of prejudice, volunteerism, interest in foreigners and foreign countries’ (ibid, p.12) were the most important conditions for becoming an ‘internationally oriented person’. Interestingly, in contrast, Japanese students placed the *affective* as having the lowest importance.

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<sup>1</sup> Those mind-sets are the ‘ability to step forward, ability to think through and ability to work in a team’, which are advocated by METI (Ministry of Economics, Technology and Industry).

<sup>2</sup> The same questionnaire survey was conducted in 1989 and 1999 in Japan. The survey also asked students their experiences of travel overseas, interest in becoming *kokusaijin* or influences in expanding their international mindset and so on.

Yoneoka found that the Japanese respondents' understanding of *kokusaijin* differs significantly from students of other countries. She also pointed out that the Japanese image of *kokusaijin* kept stressing *cognitive* attributes over *affective* and had not changed in 10 years and concluded 'although, this may not be an irreversible situation' (Yoneoka, 2000, p.12), which signifies that favouring *cognitive* attributes over the *affective* is a problem for Japanese students. What is interesting is this image of *kokusaijin* by Japanese students being closely related to that of the aforementioned Japanese government's idea in stressing English language ability and knowledge of Japan.

Then what about the participants of the international exchange programme, Ship for World Youth, operated by the Japanese government? The following describes the brief characteristics of the programme, which all the research participants in this empirical study experienced.

### **Ship for World Youth**

As previously mentioned, Ship for World Youth (hereafter SWY) is an international exchange programme operated by the Cabinet Office of the Japanese Government that I have been involved in for the past five years and for which I have worked on-board three times as an instructor.

Every year, approximately 240 participants, aged 18 to 30, from 13 different countries, are chosen as 'national delegates' or representatives of their countries for the SWY programme. Half of them are Japanese, selected from all regions of Japan. All Japanese participants are supposed to possess at least minimum English communication skills required for discussion and seminars. They go through a screening process with a short essay, English test, and test of knowledge about Japanese culture, history and economy. Unlike Yoneoka's (2000) students who were rarely exposed to an international environment, most of the SWY participants have at least one month's international experience, such as studying English abroad. Setting sail from Tokyo, all participants live on board for approximately 40 days of the programme. During this time, participants engage in different activities while sharing a cabin with three other participants of different nationalities. Except for two ports of call, for three or four days each, they are at sea the rest of the programme, which could be a very intense intercultural experience for many participants.

SWY started as a Japanese Youth Goodwill Mission Programme back in 1959 when it took young Japanese government officials to overseas destinations in five continents to broaden their views as *kokusaijin*, which gave young Japanese people dreams, hopes and pride

to be selected (Center for International Youth Exchange, 2009). In those days, it was very difficult for a young Japanese to go abroad individually; therefore, the participants back then were treated as ‘elite’, like a *kokusaijin* in Watanabe’s (1992) description ‘a Japanese elite person with knowledge about the world and foreign languages, especially English’.

Since then, the Cabinet Office has continued to run SWY directly. The recent SWY programme aims are ‘to cultivate mutual understanding, friendship and the spirit of international cooperation’ and ‘to broaden global views’ of Japanese participants (Cabinet Office of Japan, 2006). Recently, in a Cabinet Office document, the programme was explained as a ‘good occasion to let Japanese participants gain experience as *kokusaijin* in their international coordination skills, English discussion skills, [and] specialist knowledge to compete effectively with other *kokusaijin* of other countries’ (Cabinet Office of Japan, 2013).

## Research Questions

The aim of this pilot study is to explore participants’ SWY experiences and learn how they see themselves as *kokusaijin*, or an ‘international person’ through interviews. I will see how the participants’ images of *kokusaijin* are similar to or different from those of the Japanese government, since it is a government programme. At the same time, images which emerged from Yoneoka’s study will be used to compare images from my research participants.

Unlike Yoneoka’s research participants whose international and intercultural experience was limited, my participants have gone through an intense international exchange programme with certain previous international and intercultural experiences. The differences in their experiences will produce differences in views not only on images of *kokusaijin*, but also regarding who they are as *kokusaijin*. Therefore, the importance of contextual elements of individuals should be considered when exploring participants’ intercultural experiences (Paige, 1986) and interviewees’ attitudes and beliefs toward international and intercultural interactions will be taken into account. Additionally, for this pilot research, participants’ observations of other participants were included to understand the nature of Japanese participants. The research questions are stated as follows:

1. What were the interviewees’<sup>3</sup> experiences of the SWY programme?
  - 1.1 What are the interviewees’ thoughts on international and intercultural interac-

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<sup>3</sup> ‘Interviewee’ is used instead of ‘participant’ to distinguish the participants of this research (interviewees) and other participants of SWY programmes (participants).

tions?

1.2 What were the attitudes and views they had towards other participants?

2. What are their images of *kokusaijin*, and how do they see themselves in regard to *kokusaijin*?

## **Methodology and Method**

The epistemology of this research is constructivist as it explores participants' experiences or 'the meaning-making activity of the individual mind' (Crotty, 1998, p.58) - in my case, SWY participants' meaning-making activity of their experience. It is also therefore an exploratory study (Robson, 2011, p.60) employing an interpretive approach to research. The focus is on 'a set of individuals to explore possible causes, determinants, factors, processes, experiences etc., contributing to the outcome' (Robson, 2011, p.138). Therefore, the method of study I employed was case study. It is best suited 'to have in-depth understanding of the case [...] to understand specific issues' (Creswell, 2012, p.98). Which means, unlike Yoneoka's study (2000), which was to see the tendency of Japanese students by collecting large number of samples, I am interested in individual participants' experiences. It is suited for this research as I wish to have an in-depth understanding of SWY participants' (the case's) idea of *kokusaijin*.

### **Procedure for data collection and analysis**

In late July 2014, in order to gain a detailed account of the participants' SWY experiences, individual semi-structured interviews lasting approximately one hour over Skype were conducted. The interviews were carried out in Japanese because the participants have different levels of proficiency in English; therefore, conducting the interview in their mother tongue allowed them to express a higher degree of in-depth thought. Another reason for conducting the interviews in Japanese was to avoid possible language bias through translation of questions about *kokusaijin*, a concern which came from examining Yoneoka's (2000) study. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for the use of this research. Translated comments were incorporated into Tables 1 to 4 based on different themes and put in the Appendix section at the end of this report.

### **The research participants (the interviewees)**

I chose six interviewees who were former SWY participants who joined the programme twice, and particularly those who were selected directly by the Cabinet Office of Japan for

the second round.

During the second participation, their duties were as Japanese National Leaders (hereafter NLs) or Facilitators (FCs) and they were very aware of how other Japanese participating youths (hereafter JPYs) were doing, which served to answer my research question 1.2. Most importantly, the Cabinet Office considered these second-round participants, Japanese NLs especially, to be the role models for the JPYs. In other words, they were supposed to fulfil the Cabinet Office's presumed idea of *kokusaijin*.

I interviewed the following six interviewees.

- Four Japanese NLs (two males, two females) and two FCs (both females).

The reason for choosing both NLs and FCs was to see if their duties in the programme affected their images of *kokusaijin* and how they see themselves in regard to *kokusaijin*, as well as their views toward other JPYs. NLs are considered to be one of the 'participants' (hereafter PYs). Once a person joins as a PY, s/he is not qualified to rejoin the programme as a PY, but can be selected as an NL. However, FCs are not categorised as PYs. They are former PYs who re-join a programme as 'volunteer helpers' to support discussion programmes and do some administrative chores on board, so they can rejoin the programme as FCs more than twice.

All of the six interviewees were in their mid-30s to early-40s at the time of interview, and none of them were students.

### **Considering research bias**

There are several possible biases that I needed to be aware of regarding the selected interviewees.

The interviewees are *selected* participants by the Japanese government, which will have 'selection bias for overstating the relationship with the "cases"' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p. 314), which is, in this case, the relationship between the interviewees and the Japanese government as the programme operator; I had to be careful that interviewees could be representing Japanese government's idea.

Another selection bias would be the relationship with the researcher (me) and the interviewees in terms of 'insider research' (Mercer, 2007). The benefit of having interviewees from the same batch of SWY programmes that I joined has some benefits, but also has disadvantages.

One of the disadvantages would be that interviewees may tell me what I want to hear (ibid, p.8), by recognising the researcher (me) as an instructor from the same batch. Similarly, as I was in the same programme with all of the interviewees, they may skip telling me their experiences in detail as I shared the same experience, although the time I was physically with them was very limited; in other words, there may be a lack of data. Additionally, I may take things for granted (ibid, p.9), thinking I share the same context with the interviewees. These are negative aspects of 'insider' research.

However, on the other hand, a benefit is being able to understand shared contexts from being in the same programmes. Interviews with 'a greater rapport, as a result of shared experiences' plus good accessibility of data are some positive aspects of 'insider research' (ibid, p.5). It was necessary to think through the 'double-edged sword' nature of insider research (Mercer, 2007) and to reduce biases as much as possible.

### **Ethical and moral considerations**

The necessity for confidentiality of the interview content and the participants' anonymity (Robson, 2011, p.208) was taken into consideration. This necessity is especially relevant considering the participants' roles in the SWY programme. All of them were national representatives and the NLs were recognised as role models; accordingly, they might have found it difficult to make negative comments about the programme or the Cabinet Office if confidentiality was not assured. Anonymity helped assure the interviewees that they would not be put in a compromising situation; therefore, in this research all of the interviewees' names were changed to numbers, such as NL1 and NL2, or FC1 and FC2. Secondly, the content of the information included private details about other participants on the ship, which was also information that needed to be protected. The participants received written information about the aims of the research and their rights and risks as participants prior to the interviews. All government documents used in this research are available through the public domain; therefore, no special permission of usage is required.

### **Research Findings**

In this section, the research findings will be given following the order of the research questions. Although this is an exploratory study, some research findings refer to those of the Japanese government's idea, which is taken as normative perspective, and to Yoneoka's (2000) study, seen as factual perspective.



### **1. What were the interviewees' experiences of the SWY programme?**

Some of the interviewees' comments about their SWY experience portrayed the characteristics of the interviewees themselves and the nature of the programme. In general, interviewees' comments showed their rich intercultural experiences, as the interviewees had lived abroad for periods ranging from a few months to nine years prior to the programme. This type of background is not typical for Japanese young people, including the participants in Yoneoka's (2000) study. Some examples that showed the interviewee's ease in handling the multicultural environment of the programme include: 'SWY was an occasion where I found myself in my element' (NL1), or, 'I didn't have shackles I had in Japanese society. For me, SWY was my freedom' (NL4).

For her first participation, NL1 mentioned that 'she wished to have had more knowledge about Japan', since she wished to talk about it with overseas participating youths (OPYs). It is understandable that in discussions during the SWY programme where all participants are national delegates they often explain the situations of their countries they represent. Therefore, stating the importance of 'knowledge about Japan' could be seen as situation- or programme- specific rather than as a general answer. Another interviewee's comment illustrated the unique characteristics of the SWY programme: 'For my first round, all participants of SWY were so good-willed, positive, welcoming, smart people and it was even a bit of a culture shock for me' (NL3). It describes the characteristics of the SWY programme where all participants are selected national delegates with a friendship-oriented environment.

It was observed that their second participation was experienced differently from the first one and the experiences were reported differently between NLs and FCs, which reflected the differences of their roles. NLs, in general, felt more responsibility for Japanese participants by being role models of *kokusaijin* than FCs. In other words, NLs' behaviour reflected their ideas about *kokusaijin* and trying to be *kokusaijin* themselves. For example, NL2, who lived in the USA for seven and a half years, decided to test himself to be trusted in an international environment as a leader, 'which is a rare chance to be given as a Japanese in the world' (NL2). Another duty that all NLs mentioned accomplishing was becoming mediators between NLs of other countries and Cabinet Office officials. These roles could be interpreted as behaviour of *kokusaijin* according to the NLs' definition. On the contrary, FCs mostly reported the busyness of their administrative work during the second round.

1.1 What are the interviewees' experiences of, attitudes toward, and thoughts on international and intercultural interactions?

As mentioned above, interviewees' richness and flexibility in international and intercultural interactions exceeded. This aspect would be the biggest difference from Japanese students that Yoneoka investigated (2000). Most of the interviewees' attitudes were established prior to their SWY participation, and the programme gave them opportunities to see how effective their prior experiences were.

For example, NL1's prior experiences in the UK made her say, 'living among English-speaking Caucasians was not really a multicultural experience like SWY for me' (NL1). She mentioned studying abroad in the UK, living among 'only' Caucasians, was not enough for her to gain confidence in intercultural interactions in the SWY programme. Another example showed an interviewee's excitement in a multicultural environment. 'I was very used to Asia-Pacific people, but interacting with people from Arab countries were exciting experiences' (NL3). It almost sounds as if they felt the more versatile and multicultural their challenges are, the better.

The programme similarly gave participants opportunities to use the multicultural environment for their new challenges. For example, for NL2, 'just doing things in an intercultural environment itself was not a fresh experience for me', so he took up the challenge to be a leader among NLs as mentioned in section 1.

Also, some explained the definition of 'culture' differently from the ordinary categorisation of 'culture'.

For me, culture is not necessarily related to foreign countries. Going to any new domestic places and meeting people with different viewpoints is intercultural communication for me. It does not matter if they are Japanese or foreigners (NL4).

NL4's experience of living abroad is limited to one month, which is much shorter than other interviewees. However, he claimed his 'intercultural interaction' happened when he had to transfer to different cities and schools in Japan, due to his family business. This experience worked for him during his SWY participation as he was not intimidated by cultural differences, he claimed. His definition of culture is different from the Cabinet Office's idea of culture where they always refer to it as a country, hence their image of *kokusaijin* has always been in relation to other countries.

Similarly to NL4, FC2 saw all participants, regardless of their nationalities, equally

appreciative. She commented, ‘there are always people who helped me and supported me with my weak points. It does not matter what background they have and I felt those people exist across the world’ (FC2). These two examples display that their ways of intercultural interaction were not just focused on groups from one culture or country.

All in all, these comments reflect on how they see themselves in regard to *kokusaijin*, which will be reported in Section 2.

### 1.2 What were the attitudes and views they had towards other Japanese participants?

The interviewees’ comments about other Japanese participating youths (JPYs) were on their challenges, especially in communication. Their comments and advice given to JPYs were based on both their prior intercultural experiences and their first round of participation.

Most of those JPYs who had difficulty with communication during the programme claimed their English was not good enough<sup>1</sup>, but that was not necessarily the case according to the interviewees who kept encouraging the JPYs. NL1 commented, ‘there were many participants, including overseas participating youths (OPYs), with minimum English skills who could contribute largely to the programme.’

All interviewees expressed frustration about those JPYs who did possess English skills but who were reluctant to participate in discussion. Some commented, ‘they should stop worrying about English’ (NL3), or ‘they shouldn’t compare [their English ability] with others’ (NL1). NL2 pointed out that lack of flexibility in communication was a problem, saying, ‘JPYs should put one step forward by changing their ways of thinking if one way of communication does not work’ (NL2). However, there seems to be other reasons why they were reluctant to use English during discussion, even when they possessed some language skills. NL4 stated that it is the problem of Japanese education in general:

Japanese education trains children to find ‘the right answer’ as if there is always one, like you find in a workbook. [...] We also never discussed international matters, even in Japanese, even though we learned by textbooks. [...] It does not work that way in an international environment (NL4).

It seems that JPYs tried to look for ‘the right answer’, but they could not find it. Rather, ‘low confidence in themselves was reflected in their English (not the other way around)’ (NL3). These comments may have come from those interviewees who had already gained their confidence in English and though intercultural experience. Also, they themselves may

have had to go through confidence issues when they first studied abroad. However, most of them claimed it was a problem of Japanese education and they wished they had been taught differently before going abroad.

These are comments produced by interviewees who have very rich intercultural experiences. So how different or similar are their images of *kokusaijin* are compared to those of Yoneoka's study (2000) or the Japanese government?

## **2. What are their images of *kokusaijin* and how do they see themselves in regard to *kokusaijin*?**

Regarding the images of *kokusaijin*, the interviewees seem to have mixed ideas, partly coming from how they have been working to function well in the world, and partly from conventional given images described by the government (which were related to their role expectations on the SWY programme).

### **➤ Images of *kokusaijin***

Summarising their answers, the most important aspects for a *kokusaijin* to possess was the willingness to communicate and an appreciation of diversity. For example, 'having good intention and attitude and willingness to communicate regardless of race or nationality' (FC1), 'no attitude change whether they are communicating with Japanese or foreigners' (NL1), 'appreciation of diversity, empathy and acceptance' (NL4). Their comments mostly belonged to the category of *affective*.

Although putting 'intention of communication' as his priority, NL1 also mentioned that knowledge, or the *cognitive* aspect is also important, such as, 'good education and understanding about other cultures, including history and religion', which reminds me of an old image of *kokusaijin* as 'a Japanese elite person with knowledge about the world and foreign languages' Watanabe (1992). However, this comment may be influenced by the expectation as an NL. As described as selection bias (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p.314), NLs were given roles as national representatives who were supposed to have a good knowledge about their own country; it is the characteristic of this government-led programme.

### **➤ *kokusaijin* and English**

Regarding the language aspect, the interviewees' image of *kokusaijin* is someone with the ability to communicate in multiple languages. English skills may be important, but they are not the priority. Rather, it is more important to have a willingness to communicate, (also

mentioned in Section 1.2), and therefore the lack of this attitude among JPYs frustrated the interviewees. This attitude is also different from Yamaoka's (2000) samples or the Japanese government's claim of *kokusaijin* focusing on English skills. Still, it cannot be forgotten that these interviewees already possess certain skills in English.

➤ Should *kokusaijin* be Japanese?

Some of the interviewees' comments reflected on the nature of the word *kokusaijin*. For example, FC2 clearly commented that *kokusaijin* are those 'who can go beyond their national identity, but possess vision and sense and act as a "global person"'. She said it does not matter whether *kokusaijin* is Japanese or not. This is very different from the Japanese government's idea of *kokusaijin* which is people 'possessing strong identity as Japanese and who have knowledge about Japan' (MEXT, 1998). In the government's mind, *kokusaijin* is Japanese.

In addition to 'willingness and attitude to communicate' as an important element of *kokusaijin*, interviewees stated 'acceptance and willingness of communication is the most important'. Further, 'appreciation of diversity, empathy and acceptance,' were placed as very important - these can be categorised in the *affective* category of Yoneoka's (2000) study. It should be also noted that this resembles the results from the non-Japanese participants' answers, who also placed the importance in the *affective* category, such as 'tolerance, lack of prejudice, volunteerism and interest in foreigners and foreign countries' (Yoneoka, 2000).

The similarities in both the interviewees' comments above and the non-Japanese students in Yoneoka's (2000) study is that both groups did not see *kokusaijin*, or an 'internationally oriented person' as traits for a Japanese person. This is the fundamental difference in images between the Japanese government and the interviewees.

➤ *Kokusaijin* as a 'category'

All participants but NL4 answered regarding their images of *kokusaijin* without challenging the word *kokusaijin* itself. NL4 took a different approach, saying that she does not like the idea of labelling people terms such as 'returnee' or '*kokusaijin*'. Being a returnee herself, she commented:

I am a returnee, but there is this image related to this category, which is always associated with English skills but nothing else. I don't like that simplification, so I don't want to be categorised into *kokusaijin*. If you ask me if I can function well in an international context, I guess I can.

I would rather be called a Global Citizen. I like the image of 'citizen', that we all collaborate and do something for the world. On the other hand, *kokusaijin* or something-*jin* is just about a category. I feel isolated. (NL3).

She pointed out that *kokusaijin* is a category given to a person different from the rest of the 'ordinary people'. Although it used to have a positive 'elite' image in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, as Watanabe (1992) described, NL3 claimed that by putting a person into a special category, the 'ordinary people' try not to really understand her/him as an individual. Her comment, 'I feel isolated', also contrasts the image of the first SWY participant 60 years ago being so special that they 'gave young Japanese people dreams, hope and pride to be selected'. Nowadays, she indicated, being a returnee is not a big deal and she is tired of that 'special' image still projected on her.

➤ Are you *kokusaijin*?

In regard to whether interviewees see themselves as *kokusaijin*, their short answer was 'yes', except for NL3 above. NL1 said 'especially as an NL, I was aware of trying to be *kokusaijin*'. In other words, NLs' images of *kokusaijin* was what they wanted to possess and were trying to show during the SWY programme. Their characteristics of *kokusaijin*, their strong beliefs (including those of the FCs), were in the *affective* category, and having the *cognitive* or knowledge, especially about English, was not enough for *kokusaijin*. All in all, the interviewees' image was quite different from Yoneoka's (2000) result from Japanese students as well as the Japanese government's image of *kokusaijin*.

## Discussion

The study aimed to explore the experiences of particular Japanese participants in the Ship for World Youth programme and their ideas about *kokusaijin* in the light of the Japanese government's view of *kokusaijin* and Yoneoka's (2000) findings of the Japanese view of *kokusaijin*. Some characteristics from the findings can be summarised as follows. Unlike Yoneoka's (ibid.) findings regarding Japanese students', and the Japanese government's, perceptions of *kokusaijin*, placing special importance on English skills and knowledge about Japan, the interviewees perceived such skills to be important but not sufficient; rather, willingness to communicate and demonstrating empathy, acceptance and appreciation of diversity are more important. Some criticism of Japanese education emerged among interviewees in terms of not helping Japanese young people to be *kokusaijin*. Lack of discussion,

even in Japanese, or not being tolerant or flexible towards different values or ideas, were highlighted as some of the reasons why JPYs were not actively participating in an intercultural environment.

As an intercultural communication educator, my challenge is to find how to change the above practice, or conversely, to learn how interviewees, especially those with limited previous overseas experience, developed their flexibility, ability to communicate in international contexts and belief in ‘empathy, acceptance and appreciation of diversity’. These qualities are considered to raise people’s intercultural communication competences, which are important for those who work and live in diverse contexts (see Bennett, M., Bennett, J., and Allen; Fantini, 2009; Deardorf, 2009). Hence, this should be important for internationally active persons, or *kokusaijin* for that matter. Nevertheless, those qualities have never been mentioned in Japanese government documents describing *kokusaijin*, or the aforementioned *gurobaru-jinzai* (global human resources) as a current term.

This may be due to the Japanese government’s views of *kokusaijin* reflecting a lack of true international interest or overlooking young people who have intercultural competence. In fact, Japanese words related to *kokusai*, or ‘international’, such as *kokusaijin* or *kokusaika* (‘internationalisation’ as a direct translation), may not actually refer to international matters, but rather merely the interest for the Japanese. Research has pointed out that ‘internationalisation’ is, in fact, ‘Japanisation’ (Hashimoto, 2000), saying that ‘internationalisation is a process of reconfirming the Japaneseness of individual citizens who have a mission to be “trusted” in the international community’ (Hashimoto, 2000, p.49). This would be the case for *kokusaijin* and *gurobaru-jinzai* from the government’s viewpoint, as the perception is solely about the Japanese. However, from this research, ‘reconfirming Japaneseness’ was not found to be the interviewees’ interest in *kokusaijin*.

The interviewees are nonetheless considered by the Cabinet Office of Japan for the SWY programme to be ‘role models’ of *kokusaijin* for JPYs. As an advisor for the programme assessment, I suggest that if the Cabinet Office can shift their focus from their conventional views of *kokusaijin* towards characteristics of our interviewees and examples of their success, young Japanese people will benefit and become interculturally competent persons - or *kokusaijin* with a new definition.

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