INCORPORATING A EUROPEAN GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP FRAMEWORK IN ENGLISH AND COMMUNICATION-RELATED COURSES OF JAPANESE UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

This paper is an interim report on the 3-year grant-in-aid project which attempts to incorporate a European Global Citizenship Framework (Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture, hereafter referred to RFCDC [1]) in English and communication-related courses of Japanese Universities. RFCDC is a new European framework to prepare students to become active global citizens in democratic societies by teaching democratic values and attitudes together with knowledge, communication skills and critical understanding. Published in 2018, the framework has been used mainly in Europe in various subjects at different educational levels. This study is twofold; investigating the usability of the framework's descriptors in terms of necessity, validity and doability, and applying them to the 3 types of English and communication-related courses of Japanese universities. The 3 types of university courses used for the experiment are required English classes, specialized English classes (ESP/CLIL/EMI classes) and general communication-related classes. First, the online survey for 191 teachers about the possibility and doability of applying RFCDC descriptors to their classes showed a quite positive result as well as some challenges. Secondly, a series of preliminary piloting were conducted in order to establish the original instructional design and specifications for each course. At this stage, approximately 20 RFCDC descriptors that fit different-type classes were selected and actually operationalized in teaching 6 classes. Then, 27 English and communication-related classes were taught by 12 teachers based on this new scheme. The first, semester-long experiments in these courses went quite well; students' class evaluations were mostly improved compared to those of the same classes of previous semesters, while pre- and post-questionnaires asking students to assess their perceived abilities and confidence levels for the descriptors incorporated in each class exhibited increases to varying degrees. However, teachers reported problems such as the misfit between teaching materials and the corresponding descriptors to be achieved, as well as the cultural difficulty with developing assertive attitude and criticality leading to actions for Japanese students. So, modifications and adjustments of some descriptors and instructional models have been made, reflecting the teacher feedback. At the same time, an attempt has been made to construct more holistic and cumulative curriculums involving a multiple number of courses offered in some specific departments, so that students can acquire major RFCDC competences in a more integrated manner.

Keywords: Global Citizenship education, RFCDC descriptors, Japanese university courses, instructional models

1 INTRODUCTION

In response to the Japanese Ministry of Education's initiative to produce future "global human resources," coupled with similar demand from business sectors, Japanese universities have been creating new programs with a strong focus on English and critical thinking/problem-solving skills. However, the aimed skills are varied, and more importantly, they represent only a part of what makes a person a global citizen who can function in the globalizing society by solving problems in various intercultural situations. The authors first tried to use Michael Byram's intercultural communication (ICC) model (Byram, [2] and [3]) and applied the established descriptors of intercultural communication and the related tool to the Japanese university English curricular (Matsumoto, [4] and [5]). While doing this preceding study, we have gradually felt the need to broaden the educational aim to a more humanitarian notion of global citizenship from the rather utilitarian counterpart, that of global human resources. In the globalizing world filled with problems and conflicts, we need international-minded, active citizens who can tackle with difficult situations involving human rights, cultural diversity and environmental issues, to name a few, from a transnational point of view (Barret, [6]). Then, it seemed that a new European framework, Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (hereafter referred to as RFCDC [1]) is an ideal framework with extensive descriptors for global citizenship. It works as a basis for preparing students to become active global citizens in democratic societies by teaching democratic values and

attitudes together with knowledge, communication skills and critical understanding; it consists of 4 sections as shown in Fig.1. Published in 2018, the framework has been used mainly in Europe for various subjects at different educational levels. After studying the detail of the framework by many
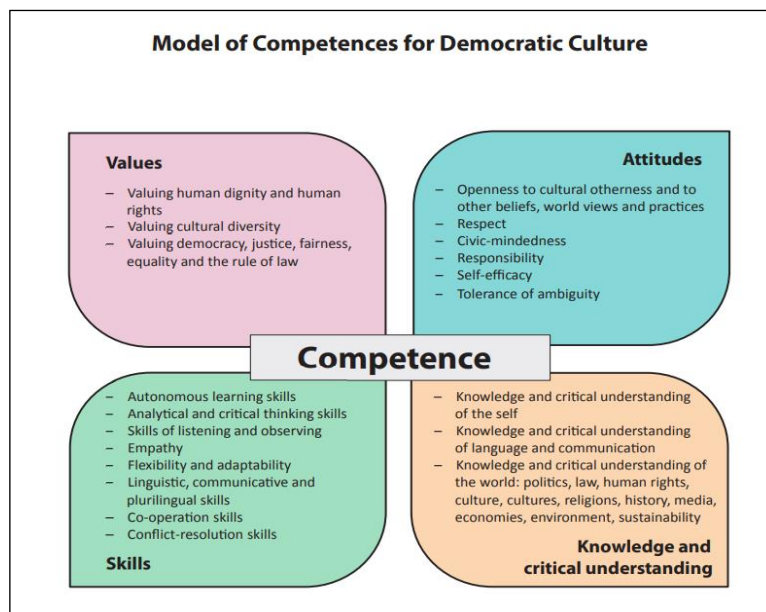

Figure 1. Four sections of RFCDC Descriptors

documents and reports made public on the Council of Europe's website and attending related workshops and conferences, a 3-year grant-in-aid project was launched in April, 2021. Its aim is to incorporate major descriptors of RFCDC in various English courses and some applied linguistics courses of Japanese universities, with a future prospect of including global citizenship education in wider-range liberal arts subjects.

The original source book of RFCDC has 3 volumes, and Volume 2 ([1] has mainly been referred to. It is not possible to list its 135 descriptors (divided into approximately 40 items for each of the 3 levels – Basic, Intermediate and Advanced), so one example from each of the 4 sections is shown below (Fig. 2) in order to give readers a feel of what the descriptors are like. The entire source book can be downloadable from the Council of Europe's website shown in the reference. In this paper, the "Skills" section is often referred to as "communication skills" section because most of the descriptors in this section are communication-related and the term "skills" is sometimes vague when used in various contexts. Later, the descriptors which don't seem to fit Japanese students will be discussed as problems we have encountered. The Council of Europe is very generous and lenient about the use of their resources, and we have been reporting the modifications of descriptors as they arise to Dr. Byram and Dr. Barett, main creators of this framework.

Values

1. Valuing human dignity and human rights

1	Argues that human rights should always be protected and respected	Basic
2	Argues that specific rights of children should be respected and protected by society	
3	Defends the view that no one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment	Intermediate
4	Argues that all public institutions should respect, protect and implement human rights	
5	Defends the view that when people are imprisoned, although they are subject to restrictions, this does not mean that they are less deserving of respect and dignity than anyone else	Advanced
6	Expresses the view that all laws should be consistent with international human rights norms and standards	

Attitudes

4. Openness to cultural otherness

21	Shows interest in learning about people's beliefs, values, traditions and world views	Basic
22	Expresses interest in travelling to other countries	
23	Expresses curiosity about other beliefs and interpretations and other cultural orientations and affiliations	Intermediate
24	Expresses an appreciation of the opportunity to have experiences of other cultures	
25	Seeks and welcomes opportunities for encountering people with different values, customs and behaviours	Advanced
26	Seeks contact with other people in order to learn about their culture	

Skills		
10. Autonomous learning skills		
58	Shows ability to identify resources for learning (e.g. people, books, internet)	Basic
59	Seeks clarification of new information from other people when needed	
60	Can learn about new topics with minimal supervision	Intermediate
61	Can assess the quality of his/her own work	
62	Can select the most reliable sources of information or advice from the range available	Advanced
63	Shows ability to monitor, define, prioritise and complete tasks without direct oversight	

Knowledge and critical understanding		
18. Knowledge and critical understanding of the self		
106	Can describe his/her own motivations	Basic
107	Can describe the ways in which his/her thoughts and emotions influence his/her behaviour	
108	Can reflect critically on his/her own values and beliefs	Intermediate
109	Can reflect critically on himself/herself from a number of different perspectives	
110	Can reflect critically on his/her own prejudices and stereotypes and what lies behind them	Advanced
111	Can reflect critically on his/her own emotions and feelings in a wide range of situations	

Figure 2. Example descriptors from each of the 4 sections

2   PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

The goal of this study is, first, to create a manageable, abbreviated framework of global citizenship education for language (mainly English) education, considering the results of both the online survey and actual piloting of the instructional models that incorporate major RFCDC descriptors. Secondly, we will create a special website where many kinds of RFCDC-based instructional models linked to the related descriptors are posted so that teachers who teach different courses can freely use them for their courses in future.

The methodology to accomplish the first experimental part of the above goal is twofold. The first phase is conducting an online survey on the RFCDC's 135 major descriptors in terms of 1) necessity for our students, 2) validity for the present curricula, and 3) practical doability. Each question was asked by 5-point Likert Scale (for necessity, for instance, whether each descriptor is: 1. Not necessary, 2. Not so necessary, 3.Not sure, 4. Probably necessary and 5 Necessary). While doing this survey with 191 teachers, 21 teachers who showed interest in participating in the experiment were recruited. The second phase is construction of a multiple number of instructional models for different types of courses that these teachers teach, based on careful piloting. In creating the instructional models, the 3 project members cooperated with each teacher in the monthly feedback meeting, which included teacher training based on the Council of Europe's teacher self-reflection tool ([7]). One important point that we have stressed is the consistency among the RFCDC descriptors used as course objectives, course content and their valuation methods.

So far, we have created and piloted RFCDC-based instructional models for 27 courses, mostly covering one semester, which are divided into the following 3 types, with different-level descriptors being applied.

Type 1: 9 Required courses (using Basic-level descriptors)

Type 2: 13 Specialized English courses (EAP/ESP/CLIL/EMI classes) (using Intermediate-level descriptors)

Type 3: 5 Various communication-related or applied linguistics courses (using Advanced-level descriptors)

Due to the limitations posed on required courses in teaching content and method, the instructional models for them mainly focused on the issues surrounding cultural diversity, while applying quite a few descriptors from the sections of communication skills and attitudes. As for specialized English courses, various descriptors were selectively chosen from all the 4 sections of values, attitudes, communication skills and knowledge and critical thinking, depending on the theme dealt in each course. The areas covered ranged from international affairs and civilization studies to information technology. Though most of the advanced-level descriptors were more easily incorporated into communication-related or applied linguistics courses such as "language and culture" and "communication theories", these courses, due to their advanced nature, are often taught bilingually, thus, the effectiveness of RFCDC descriptors in terms of English education can be smaller than the other 2 types of courses.

3   RESULTS

3.1   First-phase results

The first-phase online survey elucidated which descriptors we should prioritize in application and which could be either simplified or eliminated. The following Table 1 summarizes the overall results of the survey. It shows, in percentage, how many of 191 teachers who teach different types of courses felt positive about the necessity, validity and doability of all the RFCDC descriptors (Here, the 2 positive answers in each Likert Scale, such as "valid" and "probably valid" in the case of validity, were counted as positive). If one teacher teaches 2 or 3 types of courses, he or she evaluated the corresponding multiple levels of descriptors. It is natural that the validity and doability ratios for Type 1 courses (required courses) were a lot smaller than the other 2 types due to the limitations explained before. A pleasant surprise was that many teachers think that most of RFCDC descriptors are necessary for our students to become future global citizens.

Table 1. The ratios of teachers who responded positively in each category of the online survey

	Type 1 (Basic) n=175	Type 2 (Intermediate) n=118	Type 3 (Advanced) n=64
Necessity	84%	88%	93%
Validity	43%	58%	71%
Doability	29%	48%	66%

3.2   Second-phase results

The second-phase experiment is still ongoing, but we have arrived at a few prototypical instructional models for each type of classes. For Type 2 and 3 classes, teachers had to select different descriptors, especially in the sections of values and knowledge and critical understanding, depending on the themes of their courses. In the monthly meeting, the problems and challenges that each teacher experienced were shared and discussed, which often led to the modifications and adjustments of not only the instructional models brought to discussion, but those of other teachers as well.

Some statistical analyses were done to the obtained data. First, most teachers' class evaluation results were improved after the experiment was conducted for a semester. The typical universities' class evaluation uses 5-point Likert Scale (1. Poor, 2. Needs improvement, 3. Fair, 4. Good, and 5. Excellent), and the average class evaluation points of 23 experimental classes (with no data obtained for 4 classes) improved by within the range of 0.3 to 1.2.

More significantly, pre-and post- student evaluations were conducted in 11 classes, representing all the 3 types, which asked students to self-evaluate the competences concerning the descriptors chosen and used for respective classes they studied in. A similar 5-point Likert Scale was used for self-evaluation after changing the form of each descriptor to that of Can-do list item (1. Cannot do so, 2. Cannot do so well, 3. Not sure, 4. Can probably do so, and 5. Can do so). In general, students reported their abilities having been raised (in the range of 0.1 to 1.1 after all the scores were averaged for each descriptor. It is hard to do further statistical analysis since the descriptors used were different for different classes and the total data volume is still small. One noteworthy tendency was that students found their abilities related to the descriptors in the sections of communication skills and attitudes improved more than those in the sections of values and knowledge and critical understanding. It implies that changing their values and nurturing critical thinking competence takes a longer time compared to communication skills and attitudes.

3.3   Problems and challenges

Though most teachers agreed to the necessity of all the competences represented by RFCDC descriptors, they also commented that these competences should be covered by other subject classes in an integrated manner, and hopefully at different educational levels accumulatively. There were several

particular problems about the original descriptors reported by teachers, which we have been trying to scrutinize and reconsider in the effort to modify or adjust some descriptors, making them more manageable. The following are major examples.

1. Some descriptors are too abstract and inclusive. (e.g. Advanced Item #131: Can reflect critically on the evolving nature of the human rights framework and the ongoing development of human rights in different regions of the world.)

2. Some descriptors encourage taking actions for unfair and inequal views and treatments, which can be difficult to Japanese students who have a culturally-influenced mindset of refraining from raising voice. (e.g. Intermediate Item #35: Expresses commitment to not being a bystander when the dignity and rights of others are violated.)

3. Some descriptors use strong expressions such as "argue" and "defend", which Japanese students may find too aggressive. (e.g. Basic Item #2: Argues that specific rights of children should be respected and protected by society.)

4. Some descriptors deal with religious notions and ways of thinking, which are too complex to incorporate in actual classes over a limited time. If treated simplistically, they could facilitate students forming shallow, stereotypical views. (e.g. Intermediate Item #127: Can reflect critically on religious symbols, religious rituals and the religious uses of language.)

4 CONCLUSIONS

This year, more experiments are being conducted, some with modified descriptors. After all the experiments are done, we will further analyse the appropriateness of the RFCDC descriptors applied to different types of courses, together with the effectiveness of all the instructional models experimented. All the results will be posted on our website with our suggestions for the proper selection of descriptors and several representative instructional models for the 3 types of classes. It is hoped that the website will become a platform for exchanging ideas about improving instructional models and further piloting while promoting the use RFCDC descriptors for better global citizenship education.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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