

# The Possibility of Culture Training in the English Classes at Japanese NIT - The Case of Culture Assimilator-

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the possibility of introducing culture training, referred to as “Culture Assimilators”, into standard English classes at Japanese NIT. In this trial, students are supposed to acquire intercultural communication competence as well as English proficiency when instructors implement this method properly. This trial is predictably effective. However, there are not many materials on cultural training for the English classes and the teachers may require considerable preparation for the classes.

This is a comparative controlled study that consists of both quantitative and qualitative parts. As a result, in the quantitative study, English competence and ethnocentrism scale tests showed statistically significant differences in each post-test as to the year-round program. On the other hand, it was proven that there was no difference in improvement as to the half-year period. In the qualitative survey, generally positive and favorable responses were observed on those three categories: classroom observation, questionnaire survey, and semi-structured interview. These results lead us to the conclusion that this method on English classes would be effective, at least in some parts. A further direction of this study will be focused on the materials; it should be updated and reorganized to suit current situations.

*Keywords:* Culture Training, Culture Assimilator, English Education

## 1. Introduction.

Various pedagogical approaches have been employed by English instructors at the National Institute of Technology (referred to as “NIT” from here on). Despite this, few studies have looked into using culture training as an alternative. If this study proves successful, students will, not only further develop their English competence, but also improve their intercultural communication skills. The author of this paper uses the quantitative portion of this study in order to report on the results of a comparative controlled study.

## 2. The purpose of this study

The purpose of this study is twofold: the first is to discern whether a form of cultural training called “Culture Assimilators” (referred to as CA from here on), can be used as a viable teaching approach in Kosen English classes, while the second is to investigate this method’s potential contribution to English education, in general.

In particular, as CA is currently recognized as only subjectively effective, the author aims to learn whether CA can provide objective evidence of its effectiveness as an educational approach. I would like to root out any potential problems with this method, as well as engage on how such potential problems could be solved. I feel that using CA in English classes can become very beneficial if it can be developed into an effective teaching methodology.

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### 3. CA in cross-cultural training.

We should first define the meaning of CA. It is a cultural assimilation training method developed by Fred E. Fiedler, Terence Mitchell, and Harry Triandis in 1971 (Fiedler, Mitchell, and Triandis. 1971). Using this method, students first read stories which consist of misunderstandings and errors which were a result of cultural differences between two parties. The students must then determine the cause of said misunderstandings and choose an appropriate solution from one of four multiple choice answers. Finally, students discuss among themselves the reason for their answers.

## 5. Method.

### 5-1. Participants.

Two different groups of second-year students participated in this study over 2 academic years (2017 and 2018). The first year of the study (2017) involved 168 students who participated for the whole 10-month academic year. The second year of the study (2018) involved 172 students who participated in a half-year period of 5 months each. Each academic year involved different students.

### 5-2. Method of implementation.

Data was collected from the participants both in and out of the classroom. The students for each academic year were divided into a control group and an experimental group.

#### 5-2-1. In class.

The control group received standard lessons involving passive learning. The experimental group, on the other hand, dedicated one third of the class time to using CA materials such as “Culture Riddles” (published by NAN’UNDO) with a more active learning approach. These sessions were conducted carefully so as not to deviate from the syllabus. The portions which used the CA materials were also observed and recorded.

#### 5-2-2. Out of class (Qualitative study).

A semi-structured interview was conducted by the researcher at the end of each academic year through 15-minute interviews for 15~20 students.

### 5-3. Quantitative study.

For the purposes of determining English ability as well as intercultural communicative competence, pre-tests and post-tests were conducted at the beginning and end of the school term. Each testing session included three tests: the STEP, Eiken, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade test, the Ethnocentrism Scale, and finally the International Understanding Scale 2000 or “IUS2000”. The STEP Eiken 3<sup>rd</sup> grade test was used as it was considered appropriate for checking their English level. The latter two tests were used as the criteria for measuring ethnocentrism and international understanding. The selected tests are widely viewed as reliable and validated exams for judging the necessary criteria (Neuliep, J. W., and McCroskey, J. C., 2013, Suzuki, et al., 2000).

The data in the tables below were analyzed using the two-way ANOVA method. Instances of the word “Experimental” represent results from the CA experimental group whereas “Control” denotes results from the control group. Dependent variables were observed using scores from the STEP, Ethnocentrism Scale and IUS2000 tests. Between-subject designs were split into Experimental and Control groups. Within-subject designs were observed through pre and post-tests. The software used to analyze the data presented in the tables below was Bell Curve for Microsoft Excel.

## 6. The results.

### 6-1. Post-test results (Quantitative study):

The results of the quantitative study showed significant differences in the post-tests in regards to English competence and the ethnocentrism scale with the 10-month (full academic year) program. However, no signs of improvement were found in the 5-month (half year) program. On note “*ns*<sup>1)</sup>”, in Table 7, a difference between groups can be seen in the Ethnocentrism test, however it is difficult at this point to determine whether this was a result of the effectiveness of the CA method. Further differences between groups can be seen with the IUS2000 test (on note “*ns*<sup>2)</sup>”, in Table 8). As this difference can be seen for both the control group and the experiment group, the difference is most likely a result of the English lesson itself, rather than teaching methodology.

Regarding the IUS2000 scores over the 2-year experiment, no noticeable effects could be found. This seems to be a result of the nature of the test itself as the test has limited answer choices which gives students a higher

probability of scoring high on the test resulting in a ceiling effect in the short run. The lack of noticeable effects could also be due to needing more time than what this current experiment allotted before we could see significant results from the test.

Table 1

*Post-Tests Results 2017 (STEP)*

Group	N	Test-1: STEP			
		M	SD	p	d
Experimental	83	75.33	16.64	.001 < .05	.36 Small
Control	83	78.86	14.53	.000 < .05	.75 Medium

Table 2

*Post-Tests Results 2017 (Ethnocentrism Scale)*

Group	N	Test-2: Ethnocentrism Scale			
		M	SD	p	d
Experimental	83	35.87	6.61	.002 < .05	.42 small
Control	83	38.43	9.09	.316 > .05	.12 Little

Table 3

*Post-Tests Results 2017 (IUS2000)*

Group	N	Test-3: IUS2000			
		M	SD	p	d
Experimental	83	117.31	17.76	.357 > .05	.08 Little
Control	83	120.86	20.16	.894 > .05	.01 Little

Table 4

*Post-Tests Results 2018 (STEP)*

Group	N	Test-1: STEP			
		M	SD	p	d
Experimental	89	70.10	17.33	.191 > .05	.13 Little
Control	83	69.42	15.49	.000 < .05	.55 Medium

Table 5

*Post-Tests Results 2018 (Ethnocentrism Scale)*

Group	N	Test-2: Ethnocentrism Scale			
		M	SD	p	d
Experimental	89	37.07	9.17	.819 > .05	.03 Little
Control	83	37.80	10.38	.887 > .05	.02 Little

Table 6

*Post-Tests Results 2018 (IUS2000)*

Group	N	Test-3: IUS2000			
		M	SD	p	d
Experimental	89	124.25	18.48	.199 > .05	.11 Little
Control	83	125.48	22.92	.077 > .05	.15 Little

Table 7

*Results of Inferential Statistics in 2017*

2017 (Full-Year)	English Proficiency	Ethnocentrism Scale	IUS2000
Normal	**	**	<i>ns</i>
English Proficiency Upper half	**	<i>ns</i> <sup>1)</sup>	<i>ns</i>
English Proficiency Lower half	*	**	<i>ns</i>

Table 8

*Results of IUS2000 in 2017*

2017 (Full-Year)	IUS 2000
Items 1-6 (sensitivity to people other nations)	<i>ns</i>
Items 7-12 (sense of equality)	<i>ns</i>
Items 13-18 (interesting sympathy to other cultures)	<i>ns</i>
Items 19-24 (interesting to common challenges of humankind)	<i>ns</i>
Items 25-29 (showing a cooperative attitude to international cooperation agency)	<i>ns</i>
Items 30-35 (Understanding of and interested in foreign language)	<i>ns</i> <sup>2)</sup>

Table 9

*Results of Inferential Statistics in 2018*

2018 (Half-Year)	English Proficiency	Ethnocentrism Scale	IUS2000
Normal	△	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>
English Proficiency Upper half	△	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>
English Proficiency Lower half	△	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>

Table. 10

*Results of IUS2000 in 2018*

2018 (Half-Year)	IUS 2000
Items 1-6 (sensitivity to people other nations)	<i>ns</i>
Items 7-12 (sense of equality)	<i>ns</i>
Items 13-18 (interesting sympathy to other cultures)	<i>ns</i>
Items 19-24	<i>ns</i>

(interesting to common challenges of humankind)	
Items 25-29 (showing a cooperative attitude to international cooperation agency)	<i>ns</i>
Items 30-35 (Understanding of and interested in foreign language)	<i>ns</i>

\*\* :  $p < 0.01$  \* :  $p < 0.05$  (Only if there are significant differences of Interaction effect and Effect size)  
*ns*: not significant

### 6-2. Results (Qualitative study):

The results showed positive and favorable responses on these three categories: classroom observation, questionnaire survey, and semi-structured interview. The students tended to deliver their opinion more actively when using the CA method, and they felt that they learned how their opinions were not always considered standard when encountering different cultures. Some students expressed how they gained more confidence in speaking with people of different cultures.

### 7. Conclusion

The results revealed that the CA method can prove effective if we employ the method over the course of more than one year. This is especially true in regards to reducing the feeling of ethnocentrism among students. The qualitative data shows that students showed higher levels of cross-cultural tolerance than predicted. A very significant discovery from this experiment was how employing the CA method didn't interfere with the goals of the English lessons.

Further studies on this subject should delve into materials used for the CA method. Currently, the materials used for CA training is simple enough for both instructors and students. The materials, however, should be updated to align itself with the changing times. A more detailed qualitative study should also be conducted using KJ and grounded theory approaches.

### Notes:

1. This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number JP19K00843.
2. This paper was presented at the 3rd NIT-NUU Bilateral Academic Conference 2019, Miaoli, Taiwan, on 5 September, 2019.
3. This survey went through the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Shikoku regional Kosen bioethics committee.

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