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Teaching Global Leadership to Japanese Undergraduates: Issues Related to the Learning Environment, Pedagogy, and Cultural Identity

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Abstract

The higher education sector has been increasingly pressured to accommodate the demand of cultivating global-minded individuals. A similar phenomenon is seen in Japan. However, teaching global leadership has always been challenging in Japan due to the lack of exposure to international environments. The paper illustrates the implementation of global leadership courses at a Japanese university that attempted to address some of these issues: lack of intercultural exposure, opportunities for using English and learning global leadership in English. Some factors surrounding the current situation of global leadership education in Japan are also discussed, along with its future direction.

Keywords

Global Leadership Education, Higher Education in Japan, Learning Context, Cultural Identity, English Proficiency, Flipped Classroom

1. Introduction

1.1. Factors Concerning Global Leadership Education in Japan

In recent years, the higher education (HE) sector has been increasingly pressured to accommodate the demand for cultivating global-minded individuals who are capable of handling social, political, and economic issues (Hammond & Keating, 2018). A similar phenomenon is seen in Japan, where the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Japan (MEXT) has been operating a series of projects since 2012 to facilitate the internationalisation of Japanese universities and nurture globally competent individuals (MEXT, 2023a). However, teaching global issues and intercultural communication can be chal-

lenging in Japan, as the students are not well-exposed to cultural contexts other than their own. In this sense, replicating international and multicultural environments where students can learn, develop, and exert skills that are desirable for global leadership is not straightforward. Additional factors may affect Japanese students' ability to acquire and practise leadership skills. For instance, the cultural norms and behaviour do not align with the typical model of leadership understood in the West. The Japanese people are characterised as collectivistic and tend to avoid uncertainty (Hirokawa, Dohi, Vannieuwenhuyse, & Miyata, 2001; Hofstede, 2011; Luo, 2024). According to Yamawaki (2012), however, big cities in Japan, such as Tokyo and Osaka, are less collectivistic compared to less populated cities and rural areas. Also, Japan has become more individualistic in recent years as the indices of measuring individualism, such as choosing untraditional names for babies and increasing divorce rates, correlate with the growth of Japan's GDP per capita since the 1950s (Ogihara, 2017). On the other hand, collectivism persists in social values, such as respecting parents (Ogihara, 2017). This coexistence of individualism and collectivism in Japan was also reported by Luo (2024) that Japan positions at the midpoint of the continuum of individualism/collectivism values for 50 countries. Through the analysis of Hofstede's value dimensions and Minkov's cultural dimensions, Luo suggests that individualism is expressed within a frame of collectivism in Japan.

Regarding education, Japanese schools cultivate children's collectivistic values, such as harmony and cooperation, through small-scale group activities rather than addressing individual needs (Futaba, 2016). Perhaps this is why Japanese students are portrayed as quiet and shy (Afshan, Askari, & Manickam, 2015; Pritchard & Maki, 2006). Several studies reported that Japanese students' self-esteem declined after entering the school system from primary school to middle school (Ogihara, 2016; Ogihara, Uchida, & Kusumi, 2016) and middle school to adulthood (Oshio, Okada, Mogaki, Namikawa, & Wakita, 2014). In addition, Ogihara et al. (2016) found that regardless of developmental stage or gender, self-esteem decreased among older children and adolescents. They suggest that, unlike historically individualistic countries in the West where self-esteem positively correlates with individualism, Japanese people feel conflicted with rapid individualisation brought about through recent globalisation (Ogihara et al., 2014, 2016).

In addition to these environmental and cultural characteristics that may work against cultivating Japanese global leaders, students in Japan also need to strengthen their communication skills using English. Despite some criticisms designating English as a lingua franca (ELF), which bears the history of colonialism and the political and economic clout associated with anglophone countries (Salomone, 2022), it is the most spoken language in the world (Statista, 2023). As such, English monopolises scientific knowledge, giving an instant advantage to native speakers of English in terms of economic and political authority (Salomone, 2022). In this sense, proficiency in English can be a determining factor for leadership on the global stage; therefore, low proficiency in English may inhibit

many Japanese people from being perceived as global leaders.

According to Education First (2023), which publishes the annual English proficiency index based on their English proficiency test, Japan scored below the average worldwide and ranked 80 out of 111 countries in 2022. A similar report was released by ETS (2023), the organisation that runs the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC)—a major English language proficiency test widely recognised by firms worldwide. According to their data for 2022, Japan was among the lowest in the world with its mean score of 561 points, which is closer to the lowest country, Indonesia (472 points), than the highest country, Germany (823 points). Japan's neighbouring South Korea scored more than 100 points higher than Japan. To put this into perspective, even within Asia, Japan was ranked 14th among 24 Asian countries despite their high literacy and education levels. In 2016, the proficiency level dropped from moderate to low, and the level has plateaued for seven consecutive years. Despite MEXT's initiatives, the communication skills required of Japanese youths are far from sufficient on the world stage, even more than ten years after launching the projects that are supposed to internationalise Japanese universities. Myriads of factors could contribute to the lack of Japanese global leaders; however, apart from the English skills and cultural factors, there is no necessity to look outside of Japan for their job prospects due to the size of the domestic economy. Nevertheless, the Japanese government hopes to reverse Japan's downward trend of global competitiveness (IMD, 2023; MEXT, 2023b; Makita, 2022; Rose & McKinley, 2018; World Economic Forum, 2020) by producing and nurturing global-ready personnel by internationalising Japanese universities.

1.2. The Global 30 Project

While study abroad programmes may be one of the most effective ways to learn global leadership competencies (Sandlin, Odom, Lindner, & Dooley, 2012), most students do not have the opportunities to participate in such programmes. Thus, creating an educational context where Japanese students can acquire global perspectives without studying overseas has been one of the focal issues in educational innovation in recent years.

The Japanese government's initiatives to overturn the Japanese youths' inward-looking trend and foster global human resources by launching projects to internationalise universities in Japan (Rose & McKinley, 2018; MEXT, 2023a) failed to bring them to fruition. One of MEXT's such projects, the Global 30 (G30) project, was discussed by many researchers (Burgess, 2014; Hollenback, 2019; Phan, 2013; Yonezawa, 2020). Hollenback (2019), for instance, analysed the failures of the G30 project, which MEXT initiated and funded for five years from 2009, to increase the number of international students. The programme was for the thirteen most reputable universities in Japan to open new English-medium courses to lure international students and accelerate the internationalisation of Japanese universities. The programme, however, did not attract enough overseas students, and the available courses did not conform to the de-

mography of the international students who would choose Japan among other countries to study (i.e., Japanese language and culture learners). Some of these courses were also segregated from the rest of the local courses, which did not contribute to the internationalisation of these institutions. According to Hollenback (2019), by the end of the programme in 2014, all the G30 universities fell short of attracting enough international students compared to their target numbers, and their rankings dropped in World University Rankings published by Times Higher Education. This exemplifies the miscalculation by the government and these institutions on how internationalisation in education may be manifested, failing to create a learning space where both local and international students benefit from each other. However, the internationalisation of a learning space may be replicated at a much smaller scale, where individual teachers or departments can offer, if not at the university or government levels.

This paper, therefore, explores one such example of internationalising a university in response to the government's initiatives on a smaller scale to illustrate how global leadership may be taught without moving countries. Two global leadership courses were implemented in 2016 and continued until the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic at a mid-sized Japanese private university near Tokyo. The learning environment under study was put together by incorporating two main pedagogical approaches: flipped classroom and ubiquitous learning (UL). The paper looks at whether this learning setting emulated an environment similar to study abroad and if these courses sufficiently served as global leadership courses for Japanese undergraduates. Some factors surrounding the current situation of global leadership education in Japan are discussed together with the future direction of global leadership education in Japan.

2. Background of the Research Context

The university depicted in this paper (hereafter referred to as the University) was not in the G30 programmes. Still, the courses and learning environment were implemented as their response to the government's initiatives of internationalisation of higher education to foster global leaders. The University was chosen as a case study due to the researcher's accessibility, and it also represented the majority of Japanese universities unrelated to G30 but aware of the government's initiatives. Hence, the global leadership courses in this study were operated on a much smaller scale, so the observation made in this paper may be more relevant to small to mid-sized universities looking to implement leadership courses with innovation. This case study was part of a larger research project (Tanaka-Ellis & Sekiguchi, 2019) conducted with the coordinator of the global leadership courses at the University, where the author was an external researcher and observer.

2.1. Implementation of the Courses

Two elective global leadership courses, Current Affairs A (Semester 1) and Current Affairs B (Semester 2), were created for the students enrolled at three facul-

ties of International Studies, Letters, and Sociology. Upon the launch of these courses, some restrictions were imposed by the University, which subsequently caused some challenges in designing these courses. The University, for instance, did not permit the project planning team to register these courses as English language courses despite global leaders needing a high command of English.

The project planning team was comprised of three faculty members from each faculty. However, only one of them, the English language professor (Prof EN) from the Faculty of Letters, actually instructed these courses. Prof EN was an English language teacher and an educational technologist who designed the learning environment and was the course coordinator for both courses. The other professor (Prof IS), who was assigned to teach along with Prof EN, was from the Faculty of International Studies; however, she was not on the task force. Neither of them taught global leadership prior to this project.

Due to the number of students, two classes were opened and run concurrently in the same timeslot, covering identical content. As such, the professors changed class members in the mid-semester to promote interactions among different students. Apart from the students from varying faculties, they were at different year levels (first to fourth-year levels) and overseas experiences. Also, there was no requirement for minimum English proficiency to register for these courses. Consequently, their English skills varied greatly, limiting the variety of English materials used in the courses. To successfully complete these courses and attain leadership skills, having robust English skills was deemed an advantage; therefore, the courses were designed to support their English skills without explicit language instruction.

2.2. Learning Context and Pedagogies

English-medium instruction (EMI) in Europe and Asia has rapidly risen to promote internationalisation and increase local universities' international presence (Rose & McKinley, 2018; McKinley, Rose, & Curdt-Christiansen, 2023; Soruç, Yuksel, Horzum, McKinley, & Rose, 2024). Nevertheless, EMI was considered suitable for maximising students' contact with English, and a flipped classroom approach was introduced to support their learning.

The flipped classroom approach has become increasingly popular among educators in diverse disciplines in recent years (Hung, 2017; Lo & Hew, 2017). Some argue that flipped classrooms typically involve technology in that learners study the target content or concept before attending physical classes. The online learning materials, such as audio and video files on leadership, were made available to study at home, replacing in-class lectures. The physical classes, therefore, could be used for practical tasks and activities (i.e., active learning) based on the knowledge gained through online materials outside the classroom (Bergmann & Sams, 2012; Dong, 2016; Hung, 2017; Hsieh et al., 2017; Li et al., 2022). One benefit of employing a flipped classroom approach for the leadership courses was that the learning materials, all in English, could be studied at their own pace.

In this way, more time could be allocated for meaningful activities to help develop a better understanding of the target concepts and avoid teaching English in the classroom.

Regarding another pedagogical approach, the ubiquitous learning (UL) approach was also incorporated into the course design to produce even more time for students with lower English proficiency. As the term "ubiquitous" indicates, learning can occur anytime, anywhere. Compared to flipped learning, UL is more tool or device-dependent as learners study using handheld mobile devices. In Cope and Kalantzis's (2009) edited book on Ubiquitous Learning, they state that UL is associated with the affordances of "ubiquitous computing" in that mobile digital media transforms how students learn. With a handheld device connected to the Internet, Ubiquitous Learning, for instance, blurs the traditional, spatial, and temporal boundaries in education, shifts the roles of actors in the learning context, provides a broader range of representational modes for varying learning activities, and helps build knowledge collaboratively. Hence, students can access the materials without the restriction of time and space, and the learning becomes more student-centred as the traditional teacher roles may shift to facilitatory roles. As a result, students' roles can diversify from being learners to teachers, collaborators, and critics to their peers.

Regarding the devices used in the courses, students had their smartphones; however, to create a more efficient UL environment, the University loaned one tablet computer (a 9.7-inch iPad) each to all the registered students. Some of the primary roles of these tablet computers were to access online learning materials, give class presentations, and even give a small group presentation using the tablet as the presentation screen. All the learning materials, exercises, and homework were uploaded to a free content management app, Handbook (https://www.handbookx.com/en), which served as a course-specific learning platform like the Learning Management System (LMS). In other words, students could access all the necessary learning materials from the Handbook app. With the mobility of tablet computers and the app to access the learning hub, a flipped and ubiquitous learning environment was constructed to support learning through English.

The content of the courses was selected from FutureLearn, a commercially available Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), by Prof EN, the course coordinator. The FutureLearn course chosen for the first semester was "Logical and Critical Thinking", and "Developing Cultural Intelligence for Leadership" was used in the second semester. These topics were selected as the Japanese education system lacks critical thinking training and intercultural education in primary and secondary education (Okada, 2016; Egitim, 2022). For the flipped component, Professor EN, as the coordinator, selected and downloaded relevant videos and reading materials from the MOOC course pages and uploaded them to the Handbook. Some comprehension quizzes and pre-class activities were added to support their understanding of the content. Post-class reflection notes

were to be submitted after every face-to-face class to help internalise the target concept and to communicate personally with the teachers.

Another arrangement to create a more international atmosphere in these courses was inviting international exchange students to these courses. The exchange students were gathered as their tutors to further assist the students with their English and provide some opportunities to meet with someone from their own age group. These exchange students were generally from a sister university in the US and, occasionally, from Australia. On average, forty Japanese students and ten exchange students joined each semester, and they were divided into two classes. As the face-to-face sessions were reserved for discussions and collaborative work, one tutor had four to five Japanese students to look after in terms of moderating group discussions, providing some assistance with their English and the content of the MOOC materials. The tutors were native English speakers but still undergraduates like their Japanese counterparts; therefore, they could also learn the content from the FutureLearn videos along with the Japanese tutees.

Through the observation of these courses, several themes emerged around teaching global leadership in this context: pedagogy and learning, objectives of teaching global leadership, and the relationship between the English language and cultural identity. These elements are discussed in the following sections, together with relevant literature.

3. Factors Surrounding Global Leadership Education in Japan

3.1. Pedagogical Considerations

On the surface, the learning environment created for these courses was carefully crafted and orchestrated by incorporating multiple pedagogies, resources, and human resources. Tanaka-Ellis and Sekiguchi's (2019) paper on the more extensive study regarding the courses under study looked at the change in student perceptions of these leadership courses and learning objectives in Week 4 and Week 14. Week 4 was chosen to avoid the beginning of the semester enrolment period when the number of students was not usually finalised. The second interview was set one week before the final class as the final class was reserved for in-class poster presentations, and it was considered to have enough time between the first and the second interviews to see the differences and development in students. English-speaking exchange students served as the interviewers rather than their teachers or the researcher to reduce their anxiety. The questions asked in the Week 4 interview were: 1) Tell us why you decided to take this course, and 2) What do you want to learn in this course? In Week 14, the students were asked: What did you learn in this course? Tanaka-Ellis and Sekiguchi (2019) found that some students' mindsets and perceptions about the courses shifted as they initially described them as English language courses to improve their English skills and interact with native English speakers. However, in Week 14, even students with the lowest English proficiency (i.e., TOEIC 130-470)

mentioned some of the keywords from the MOOC videos (e.g., cultural intelligence). However, as per leadership learning, only a handful of students referred to leadership or global leadership as a descriptor of the courses or their learning objectives. These findings indicate that the relationship between the content and the objectives of the courses was not made salient enough, and the difficulty of the learning materials might have been beyond their capacity despite the extra assistance from the tutors and the learning environment. The outcome of these interviews was not entirely unexpected as the target audience of the FutureLearn courses was not English as second or foreign language learners.

In theory, curricula incorporating flipped learning and UL approaches should create more time for the face-to-face component. Much of the flipped classroom arrangement is focused on the structure of the course itself but not so much on the nature of the materials or the task types assigned for out-of-the-classroom learning. Watching video lectures and completing comprehension quizzes, for instance, seem appropriate for the activities assigned as homework, replacing in-class lectures. However, Kirschner and Hendrick (2020) claim that from the perspective of educational psychology, learning is not likely to occur when a learner is presented with too much new information and concepts. Unlike experts who can analyse and interpret a new piece of information using their prior knowledge, novice learners are yet to possess enough knowledge and skills to do the same.

According to Kirschner and Hendrick (2020), beginners are not small experts as they think differently from experts; thus, teaching should be adjusted to the level that the learners can access their much smaller reservoir of knowledge to process the new knowledge. Since novice learners might have incomplete, shallow hypotheses that possibly include misconceptions, certain types of tasks, such as problem-solving tasks, are unsuitable. Such tasks put more stress on learners' cognitive load and may only serve in understanding the problem-solving process rather than the knowledge itself. In this sense, using MOOC videos for novice English users to replace in-class lectures could cause cognitive overload, even if the videos were made available one week before their face-to-face classes. Students would have to process the new information with a tool (English) that is far from functional to comprehend the target knowledge. Thus, discussing new knowledge and concepts in the classroom using the imperfect tool might be cognitively too demanding. As many students' perceptions of the courses did not move beyond uttering the keywords and concepts from the videos, they were probably unable to connect the concepts or words to global leadership. This failure to attain the learning goals aligns with Kirschner and Hendrick's (2020) argument on the differing cognitive processes between experts and novices. Other factors that might have influenced students' views on learning global leadership were the presentation of the course objectives and the learners' cultural identity, which may have interplayed with the perception of the English language.

3.2. Objectives of Learning and Teaching Global Leadership

Leadership as a concept cannot easily be defined due to the fact that no two people define it in the same way (Dobson, Heppell, & Leal, 2023; Kruse, 2013; Yukl & Gardner, 2020). The esoteric and elusive concept of leadership, even for experts, should further cost cognitively for undergraduates learning the concept through a second language. As mentioned in the Background section, the leadership courses were launched to respond to MEXT's intent to internationalise Japanese universities and foster global human resources to improve Japan's global competitiveness. However, how clear were the purposes for implementing these global leadership courses to the enrolled students?

As reported by Tanaka-Ellis and Sekiguchi (2019), the Week 4 interviews revealed that most students' motivations for taking these courses were to improve their English skills and interact with native English speakers. Even after a few weeks into the semester, the objectives of the courses were not mentioned as the reason for taking these elective courses. In this regard, the narratives of the course descriptions had not been grasped by the enrolees to direct their effort in order to achieve the intended learning outcomes. In other words, these students could have chosen courses with different learning objectives, such as English language courses for global leadership, rather than global leadership courses in English, conducted in the same learning environment. The obscurity of the course objectives may have influenced how students envisioned and interpreted the proposed outcomes of these courses. However, this confusion in global personnel education is not limited to HE in Japan.

Hammond and Keating (2018) identified a trend in internationalising the tertiary education sector that can be seen worldwide, and the strategies include working with industry, investing in prestigious universities and research institutions, and recruiting more international students, which are, in fact, identical to what Japan has adopted as their strategies. This worldwide phenomenon is derived from neoliberalism, in which the HE sector is commodified and therefore influences the roles of universities to be more like firms as opposed to research institutions (Hammond & Keating, 2018). The terms describing courses and skills offered by universities include global competence, global citizenship, global leadership, intercultural competence, transcultural competence and so forth, encompassing disciplines like business, leadership, communication, applied linguistics, social psychology, and international education (Sakamoto & Roger, 2022). While leadership education, therefore, at least in Japan, seems to be built upon an equivocal vision and interpretation of global personnel. However, both EMI and leadership education are relatively new ventures for HE in Japan, and the dilemma of finding the optimal method for global leadership education is inevitable until enough evidence accumulates from empirical studies.

1) Course objectives: The course objectives need to have a clear connection to global leadership. The term global leadership needs to be defined in relation to the educational context at the beginning of the course. The teachers need to ex-

plain how each skill or concept relates to acquiring global leadership skills throughout the curriculum. As explained in the section discussing expert-novice cognitive differences, the perception of novices may not see the benefit of, for instance, critical thinking skills (the materials used in Semester 1) in exerting global leadership unless it is clearly delineated.

2) Use of English: Although English seems to be the apparent language of choice to use for global leadership training, this could be a culturally complex issue that relates to identity, self-esteem, and actual proficiency. Attaining high English proficiency is undeniably crucial in intercultural communication. However, the notion of ELF and EIL should be addressed in classrooms of global leadership and English as a foreign language in Japan. Globalisation in Japan, however, should not only focus on creating an English-only context. Such context in Japanese universities inhibits the local students' view of internationalisation and may even enforce English elitism, while most international students are from Asian countries (Phan, 2013). Despite the complexities surrounding English use in global leadership courses, EMI is not at all ineffective. According to Soruç et al. (2024), studies on the relationship between academic performance and EMI classes suggested some mixed results; however, prolonged time of EMI improves learners' language proficiency as a by-product.

3) Course materials: Perhaps it is problematic to build global leadership courses around MOOC courses without drawing attention to the intercultural and cross-cultural aspects. Educators need to evaluate the materials to see how much of the contents align with the course objectives and the culture where the students are studying. Most existing global leadership theories and training are Western-oriented (Chong & Fu, 2020). Therefore, Japanese students may feel conflicted when their self-image does not conform with the global leaders portrayed in the Western culture, which may trigger low self-esteem (Ogihara et al., 2014, 2016). Teaching these materials without adding some local elements and outlook would further enforce the perceptions associating the West as positive, Asia as unfavourable, and Japan as unique. This also undermines the heart of global leadership education, which aims to foster open-minded global personnel in a diverse society.

4) Pedagogy: The flipped classroom and ubiquitous learning approaches allow students to study the prescribed materials at their own pace, especially if the materials are in a foreign language. However, materials replacing lectures need to be accompanied by tasks that help learners internalise the focal issues and concepts, not the acquisition of problem-solving skills. Without the supportive tasks and guides for the materials, the face-to-face component of the class will not develop into opportunities for active learning and discussion.

5) Learning environment: As Japanese students rarely have opportunities to interact with students from different countries, educators should consciously create opportunities for intercultural communication. This can be done by inviting international students or setting up online interactive sessions with educators overseas. However, these students may not be limited to students from

English-speaking countries to reinforce diversity.

4. Complex Relationship between the English Language and Cultural Identity

Apart from the problems in articulating the concept of global leadership, the success of global leadership education in Japan may lie in the learners' mindsets that relate to their identity, the English language, and the incentive to study global leadership. The top-down nature of MEXT's interpretation of global human resources clearly states the importance of English skills. This viewpoint, however, is also shared among students, teachers, and researchers. Sakamoto and Roger's (2022) study of the differences in the perception of global competence between professionals, researchers, university educators, and students in Japan revealed that 77% of the 130 respondents mentioned that language skills were necessary. More than 30% of them referred to the English language, and 26.5% answered foreign language skills.

Despite the mutual agreement towards the importance of English skills, issues around English language education in Japan have been heavily debated. For example, "native speakerism" is criticised by Phan (2016) that the sentiment towards the native varieties of English is deeply associated with the factors of authenticity, reliability, qualification, credentials, and identity, which goes against English as a lingua franca (ELF) or international language (EIL) philosophy. An affiliation with an English-speaking "Western" university plays a significant role in deciding which university to choose and what discipline to study. Although the scholarship in the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) promotes EFL and EIL, other sectors endorse native speakerism, including the very educational institutions hiring TESOL teachers have a preference for hiring white English teachers (Rivers, 2021; Rivers & Ross, 2013). The view of native speakerism is deeply rooted in Japan as many English loan words are written in katakana, syllabic symbols transcribing foreign loan words, which are rampant in media and public spaces (Kubota, 1998). Kubota (1998) asserts that the influence of the English language in Japan is affecting the Japanese people's perceptions of language, culture, race, ethnicity, and even their identity in that they internalised Anglo-Saxon views of the world through English education. These views created problematic perceptions vis-à-vis foreigners from different cultural backgrounds or Others. By learning English, the Japanese identified themselves with the "civilised" West and perceived other Asian countries as inferior. However, this view does not explain the low English proficiency in Japan, especially if Japan identifies English as civilised.

The justifications for the non-attainment of functional English despite their desire to be levelled with the West were explained by Rivers (2021). The failure to attain high English skills is blamed on the differences in wavelength (sound) in the two languages, the peculiarity of the Japanese linguistic system, non-colonised history, and geographical isolation. The historical perspective, especially,

allows Japan to shield against the apparent poor performance in English. Nevertheless, although Japan recognises the overall low level of English proficiency of students and the need to bring it to the functional level, they have not been able to overcome the notion of the ownership of the English language, which is tied to the US and the UK (Burgess, 2014; Salomone, 2022). The ambivalent outlook of globalisation is derived from the entrenched view of the English language and the numerous excuses made for the current poor performance in English skills (Burgess, 2014; Rivers, 2021). As Kubota (1998) maintains, TESOL teachers and researchers often highlight the linguistic and cultural disparities between developed and developing countries, disregarding the impact of teaching English in developed non-English speaking countries like Japan. The delicate and complex relationship between the Japanese people and the English language, as well as the dilemma manifested in the different perceptions of others, are seen in their values and self-perception as Japanese.

The complex nature of Japanese identity and their attitudes towards others can be observed in Sasaki's study. Sasaki (2004) studied the identities of a total of 1763 respondents from different age groups (16 or older) and different regions all over Japan. The result revealed that while the Japanese people generally did not have a strong national identity, they were not excited about globalisation in Japan. Although the attitudes towards globalisation were neither positive nor negative, younger respondents were more open-minded towards different cultures than older generations. Other differences observed across generations were, for instance, the attitudes towards foreigners who want to come to Japan to live. Older respondents had more negative views, such as the rise in crime rates and the necessity of adopting Japanese culture, etc. On the other hand, younger generations in their teens and twenties showed a little more acceptance towards diversity, such as the emergence of new thoughts and cultures and more lenient attitudes towards visitors adopting Japanese culture. Other notable answers in relation to global competence could be the attitudes towards the number of foreigners in Japan and the use of Japanese. More than half of the respondents answered that they are happy to maintain the current number of foreign residents. If they have an opportunity to speak with a foreigner, they want to communicate in Japanese even if they know the foreigner's language. Interestingly, none of the age groups were concerned about foreigners coming to Japan and taking job opportunities from the local people. Although some differences in opinions were present across age groups, most of the items did not have extreme disparities between generations. Sasaki's (2004) study carves the image of the Japanese not particularly being interested in globalisation and almost seems indifferent towards foreigners in Japan. However, a more recent study by Uemura shows a slightly different aspect of the Japanese people.

In Uemura's (2011) study of cross-cultural identities of Japanese (n = 1102) and American (the Japanese data compared against Smith's data published in 2007) people, both Japanese and American respondents ranked family first, fol-

lowed by occupation; however, the third identity for the Japanese was nationality, which Uemura himself claimed that it was unexpected as he hypothesised it would be one of the lowest ranked identities based on previous studies from different scholars. The seemingly fluctuating nature of the Japanese identity can be observed in how they market themselves towards others.

According to Tamaki (2019), Japan's recent "Cool Japan" branding was a soft iteration of the older construction of Japan during modernisation in the post-war era, representing its identity as a non-Western and un-Asian country, while the definition of propaganda is absent. The success of manga, anime and cutting-edge technology was packaged with the notion of uniqueness that Japanese culture is neither Western nor Asian, hoping that appreciation of anime and manga would evolve into the catalyst for the affection of, eventually, Japan. Therefore, Japan historically purports its identity by positioning itself against the West and Asia, or the rest of the world, affirming its self-representation as distinctive and unparalleled (Ergin & Shinohara, 2021; Miyamoto, Shimizu, Hayashi, & Cheah, 2023; Tamaki, 2019). This narrative reflects what looks like indecisive views towards globalisation of the Japanese people, who are somewhat nationalistic as they are constantly projected to appear different from other cultures, passively resisting the change that may be brought about by accepting more foreigners. Luo's (2024) study sums up the various phenomena around Japanese identity, stating that it is neither individualistic nor collectivistic. Perhaps the Japanese identity is still evolving through continuing globalisation as well as changes in education policy.

As discussed above, various issues are embedded in implementing global leadership courses in Japan and need to be recognised and addressed. The influence of these issues appears to be profound in designing and teaching these courses, which were built around the ambivalent definitions of and the attitudes towards global leadership, the controversial views in English education in Japan, and the complex and inconsistent Japanese identity that adheres to Japan's intricate and inconsistent interpretation of globalisation. Naturally, the following question arises from all this: How, then, should global leadership be taught in Japan? There will be no simple answer to this question; however, some of the critical issues discussed in this paper may be useful in developing future courses.

5. Conclusion

The paper highlighted a number of issues surrounding global leadership courses at a university in Japan. These courses were carefully designed to overcome some of the problems commonly seen in Japan by incorporating different pedagogies and learning settings. Despite the efforts, the students did not exhibit a full understanding of the course content, only exhibiting a limited understanding of the terms and concepts in the MOOC videos, possibly largely due to their English skills. The MOOC courses were also not aimed at undergraduate students who usually have little experience in the workforce; thus, the courses may not be relatable to them to fully appreciate how the new knowledge could be applied to

the real world. The idea of using MOOCs, however, seems suited as the teaching materials for this innovative learning context since the videos and reading materials were derived from complete online courses, and they were also produced by prominent educational institutions. This is especially applicable when an institution experiences a shortage of staff or no experts in the teaching field (Curdt-Christiansen, Bin, & Baoqi, 2021) but is in need of putting together new courses.

As described earlier in this paper, the lecturers of these new global leadership courses or the project team members were not leadership educators or experts. Given this teaching staff situation, turning to teaching resources outside of their institution is considered to be a feasible starting point until the curriculum coordinator or the project team determines the learning objectives that suit their particular educational context. Inviting international exchange students created rare opportunities for local students to interact with students from other countries on a regular basis. For this matter, the Japanese students experienced some aspects of intercultural communication.

To further advance and take advantage of this international setting, both local and international students' roles may be altered to encourage equality and promote diversity among all students. Giving more power to English speakers would accentuate and sustain the Japanese students' unbalanced view of the English language and their cultural identity. Instead, the face-to-face environment could be the arena to promote multiculturalism and multilingualism by conducting discussions and activities in both Japanese and English. In this way, the Japanese students could also be tutors to the exchange students, which could have provided valuable opportunities to practise leadership. Also, the exchange students could benefit from reciprocal relationships with their Japanese counterparts for language and culture exchange and friendship. Proving hyper-equipped infrastructure for global leadership education may assist students in learning to some extent; however, without clear objectives, continuous guidance, and more multi-faceted and inclusive views of globalisation in Japan, the outcomes of these courses would only serve in a limited place in global leadership education in Japan.

Global leadership education in Japan is still in its infancy, and it can take some time to establish the methods and goals that accommodate Japanese students. However, this type of small-scale endeavour and innovation as educational leadership is essential in encouraging more discussions on the kind of global leadership that is needed in Japan and how this culture-specific leadership could be conceptualised and manifested into a curriculum. Finally, regarding the courses at the University, they set a precedent for the future direction of global leadership education in Japan by demonstrating extraordinary creativity in implementing such an innovative learning context by grappling with numerous cultural, social, and institutional constraints and challenges.

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Conflicts of Interest

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