

# Pedagogical Implications of One-on-One International Teleconference Assignments Using Skype

## Key Research Questions

In the U-M Residential College's intensive Japanese course, students used Skype, an online teleconferencing device, to conduct individual interviews in Japanese with students at a Japanese university. After each interview, they wrote reports in Japanese reflecting on their conversational exchanges. In order to understand how telecollaboration can support development of intercultural awareness and grammatical competence (O'Dowd, 2007), this study examines:

- **students' perceptions of the educational benefits of Skype conversations** with Japanese students
- **suggestions students have** for ways to enhance Skype assignments in the future.

## About the Study

During Fall 2009-Winter 2010, 14 U-M students (each term), enrolled in Intensive Japanese, made six Skype calls to students at Mie University in Japan. Following each conversation, they wrote brief reports reflecting on their conversational exchanges.

At the end of each semester, students were asked to rate themselves on items designed to assess their intercultural awareness (Deardorff, 2006). They were also asked to respond to these questions:

- 1) In what ways were the Skype assignments helpful to your learning in [this course]?
- 2) What suggestions do you have for ways to enhance Skype assignments in the future?

## References & Acknowledgements

- O'Dowd, R. (2007). *Online Intercultural Exchange: An Introduction for Foreign Language Teachers*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Deardorff, D. K. (2006). Identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, (10)3, 241-266.

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## Observational Reports

In their post-interview reports written in English, students generally made very detailed observations about their conversations with Japanese students.

*"There were many pauses, yet [my partner] was comfortable throughout the conversation. During these pauses she did not find it necessary to fill the silence with any questions, and she seemed inclined to let me ask questions first."*

*"[My partner] would often smile or laugh during the conversation and nod along with the conversation to show she was paying attention. We would sometimes bob our heads at each other, when apologizing for a mistake and at the closing of the conversation."*

## Survey Results

1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree

I am interested in learning about different cultures in this world.	4.7
I would like to study or travel abroad while at U-M.	4.7
I am comfortable interacting with someone from another culture.	4.5
I'm confident that I could have a conversation with a native speaker in Japanese.	3.8
I would like to take more classes with Skype assignments at U-M	3.6

## Student Feedback

- *"I learned Japanese conversational habits I could only learn in a 'native' conversation, something not readily available here at the University. It also **helped me understand Japanese culture more** when I listened to my partners' daily lives—through them I was able to enter a 'Japanese' state of mind."*
- *"The Skype calls were able to help me better for questions 'on the spot' while I'm in class... It was **good practice in listening and speaking simultaneously**."*
- *"The Skype assignments were an excellent way to practice conversational Japanese outside of class and to 'test' pronunciation on native speakers previously untrained in understanding American accent on Japanese. I learned a lot from these assignments and **would highlight them as one of the most useful and most fun aspects of the course**."*



## Implications for Teaching

**Overall, students were very positive about the Skype assignments.** They reported that interviews helped them gain a deeper understanding of Japanese culture and better listening and comprehension skills. To converse, however, requires students to give spontaneous feedback and/or follow-up questions in response to their addressee's remarks, which not all students successfully did. In addition, many students expressed difficulty in coming up with conversation topics "on the spot." It seems vital to teach students these practical skills more explicitly in class.

When students were asked what could be improved about the assignment in the Fall Term, the most common suggestion was to maintain the same partner for each conversation to get to know one person better and allow the conversation to "move beyond 'interviewing' to actually conversing." In Winter 2010, students had one conversational partner throughout the term and rated this structure very favorably (4.5 on a 5-point scale).