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Learning Experiences and their Values Created by Distance Learning —A Qualitative Analysis of Chinese Language Learning through Cross Cultural Exchange—

(远程交流创造的学习体验及其价值初探-华语学习中跨文化体验的质性分析-)

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Abstract: In this study, blended learning model was designed, which utilized Cross-Cultural Distance Learning between Japan and China. Questionnaires were analyzed with a qualitative method and were interpreted to explore learning experiences and their outcomes. As a result, the learners recognized their achievements in knowledge, skills and communication attitudes. Besides, they accomplished promotion of cross-cultural understanding and discovering Chinese youth culture. They also experienced joy of utilizing knowledge or skills in communication. They were able to be aware of future subjects based on failure experiences, and it improved learning motivation.

摘要：本研究设计了远程交流混合式学习模式。以问卷自由记述为对象，从学生的角度探讨质性学习体验，成果及其价值。结果如下：学生通过跨文化交流，不仅认识到知识、技能、态度上的效果,且促进跨文化理解，发现中国青年文化。学生将知识和技能直接应用于交流获得沟通成功体验，基于沟通失败体验找到不足之处，由此明确学习目标并提高学习动机。

Keywords: Chinese education, CCDL, blended learning, qualitative research

关键词：华语教学，远程交流，混合式教学模式，质性研究

1. Background

As we enter the 21st century, we have become more aware of the desperate need for the utilization of ICT for foreign language teaching and learning. Targeting the development of knowledge and skills necessary to survive in this information age, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has promoted ICT utilization for education. Instructional methods, educational objectives, and materials and tools have gradually been developed. “Acquiring a new type of skills for the 21st century utilizing IT” (Japan Revitalization Strategy ~ JAPAN is BACK ~, 2013) and “The promotion of new learning experiences with ICT” (The Second Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education, 2013) were representative examples of the educational policy. At the same time, there are

great expectations for instructional practice, educational assessment and evaluation. Meanwhile, with the progress of globalization, a multicultural and inclusive society has been rapidly developing in the field of foreign language education. This change has required the provision of opportunities to communicate with people all over the world, especially in the classroom, fostering overseas studies for Japanese students and cultural exchange activities between foreign students. Recently, ICT utilization has been practiced in the classroom, providing opportunities for cross-cultural exchange with authentic conversation. The purpose of this study is twofold: Firstly, to design and practice blended learning (BL) through distance learning between Japan and China. The aim of distance learning is to realize opportunities for the practical use of language knowledge and communication skills. Secondly, to analyze the outcome of learning with a qualitative data analysis in order to explore learners' experiences and to interpret their learning achievement and values that they recognize.

One of the most well-known distance learning for Chinese language courses have been practiced as "Cross-Cultural Distance Learning (CCDL)" since 1999. "Asian students' Cross Cultural Distance Learning" program is network-based multilingual chatting and video conference by a Chinese teaching team (Sunaoka, Zheng, Ueya and Tanikawa, 2011). They have been researching the effects of CCDL and BL methods by quantitative analysis. The recent practice in high school was held between Okinawa, Osaka and Gaoxiong (Shiroma, 2013). She reported own method of class management with BL. Meanwhile, there is a practical study that focuses on the quality of learning from the learners' perspective (Sugie and Mitsugi, 2015). They set out to analyze the value of learning in mixed research methods. However, there have been few researches about the continuous practice of CCDL on Chinese language classes, and evaluate the effectiveness from the perspective of learners.

2. Research Question

We designed and practiced the blended learning (BL) with CCDL between Japan and China. For the sake of exploration of learners' experiences, interpretation of the learning achievement recognition, we formulate research question as follows: Through the CCDL, what kind of learning experiences and values does the learner find from interaction in real communication with the Chinese native speaker?

3. Research Methods

3.1 Blended Learning Model with Cross-Cultural Distance Learning

The BL model (Figure 1) practice is composed of three phases: (1) face-to-face class, preparation for CCDL with theme-based learning, (2) web-based training, preparation for CCDL with ICT skills training, (3) cross-cultural distance learning, focused on the interaction between Japanese and Chinese students. This learning process goes on and develops continuously in a cycle. The Japanese participants (n=3) were public high-school students in Hokkaido, who took a course for Chinese as a second foreign language twice a week. The Chinese participants (n=11) were university students in Hubei Province, who were all majoring in Japanese. The Japanese students used the instructor's owned computer (Windows) with Pocket Wi-

Fi LTE connection. The Chinese students used student-owned computers (Windows) using the wired broadband network on campus.

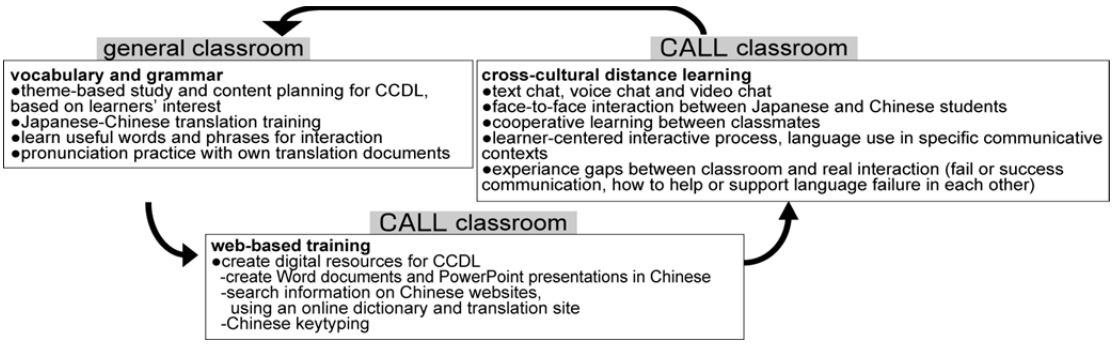

Figure 1: Blended Learning Model with Cross-Cultural Distance Learning

3.2 Qualitative Data Analysis as an Evaluation Approach

We analyzed the data with a qualitative approach such as coding the Japanese learners' narrative, then generating key concepts by re-contextualization. Based on the responses to the questionnaire, interpretations have been noted with diagrams of learners' experience, achievement, and evaluation of the exchanges. As a strategy to enhance the reliability of this interpretation, the authors conducted a multifaceted analysis. The CCDL was conducted in four sessions: 1) Greetings and self-introductions, 2) Memories from the Golden Week holiday, 3) Topics of interest to ask Chinese students (daily life, school life, about Japan), and 4) The school festival.

4. Values of experiences and achievements from the learners' perspective

To elicit values from the learners' prospective, the learners were asked to answer a questionnaire (Table 2) soliciting comments evaluating their learning experience, achievements, and changes in motivation after the exchange.

Table 2: Questionnaire Regarding CCDL

Q1 Did the online exchange cause you to become more motivated to learn Chinese? Choose one from the following choices and delete the ones that don't apply. 1. Not at all. 2. Very little. 3. I can't tell. 4. Somewhat. 5. Yes, very.
Q2 How did you feel about the online exchange? 1. Benefits. 2. Drawbacks.
Q3 Things I learned through the exchange.
Q4 New things I learned to do.

4.1 Q1: Changes in learning motivation

All of the respondents chose "5. Yes, very." clearly indicating that the motivation for learners to study Chinese remained the same or improved.

4.2 Q2: The benefits and drawbacks of distance learning

As the benefit of distance learning, the learners recognized their achievements in "knowledge and skills" through increased vocabulary, success in collaborative learning, improvement in listening, and Chinese communication with limited language resources. They gained a sense of actual participation in the school festivals as they were introduced in a play-by-play format. As experiences corresponding to

"emotion and attitudes", learners enjoyed the friendly attitude toward communication shown by their partners that helped to liven up discussions on interests that they especially had in common. Although there was some anxiety about the style of impromptu interaction, the learners felt great joy in the ability to communicate with teacher's help. They deepened "cross-cultural understanding" through the opportunity to communicate in Japanese while taking into consideration the fact that the Chinese students were learners of the Japanese. The photo presentation as subject matter as well as discussing movies helped to provide a mutual understanding of the entertainment of each other's country. After the successful face-to-face communication, learners were able to discover similarities and differences between Japan and China. One of the learners particularly emphasized the value in being able to give a personal live commentary on conducting a chorus, which was the main event of the school festival. It is noteworthy that the learners were able to exchange smoothly through introductions from the Chinese side using photos, which enhanced cross-cultural understanding and promoted a benefit of intercultural experiences.

As the drawbacks of distance learning, throughout the whole sessions, learners felt stressed about "settings and operation" because of connection trouble and were frustrated when the CCDL did not finish on time. Besides, they regretted that one of them was absent in the third session. This indicated the strong desire to enjoy the exchange as a team. As elements of "reflections and future challenges", learners reflected on their lack of consideration for the other party when they spend a lot of time talking among themselves during Japanese communication. They also recognized that communication was interrupted too often because of having to repeat words that they had not mastered the correct pronunciation. As the discussion about movies unfolded, one of the learners became very involved because of her special interest in cinema. However, another participant, through lack of interest and knowledge, was disappointed because of the limited opportunities to communicate. Still, the lack of smooth communication prompted them to reflect on inadequate preparations in areas they were respectively in charge of.

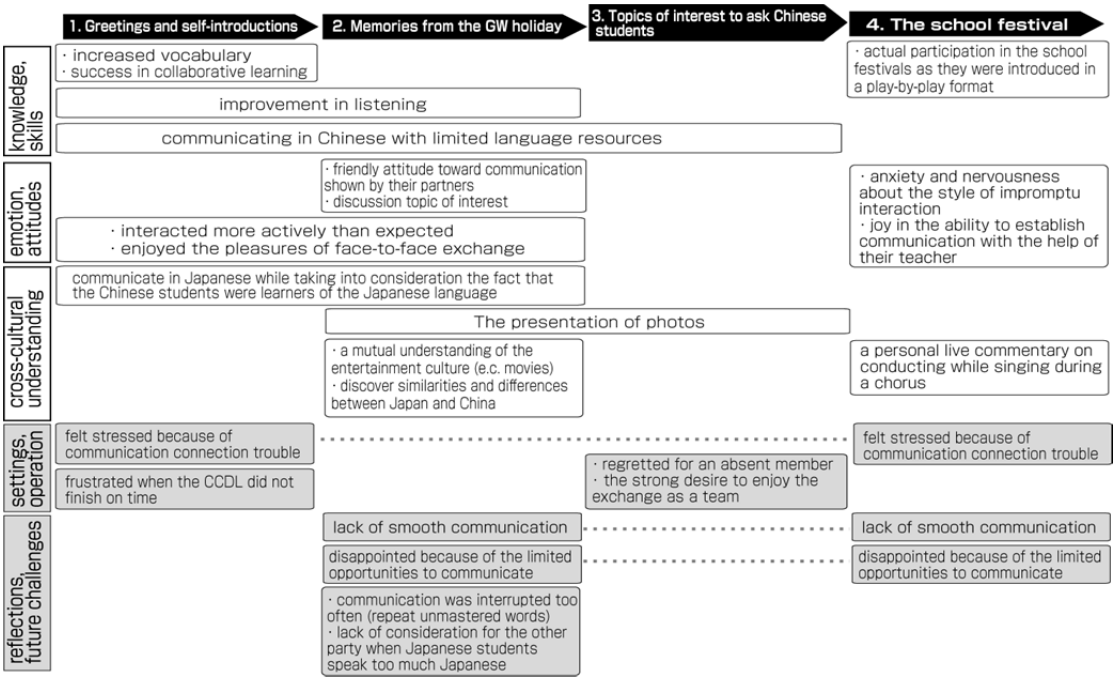

Figure 2: Schematic diagram showing learning experience (Q2)

4.4 Q3: Things learned through the exchange

The learners gained “pleasure and satisfaction” from successful authentic communication with native Chinese speakers based on acquiring an increased vocabulary and the friendly attitudes of their counterparts toward communication. Also, there was the sensation that interacts with the real Chinese materials using photo presentations, which led to learning about counterparts’ hometown. Meanwhile, the recognition of the importance about accurate pronunciation by their own failure of Chinese communication indicates “reflections and future challenges” for leaners. At the same time, they were able to discover more about their classmate’s interests. However, the students noticed their own lack of knowledge or interest about Japanese matters when the Chinese exchange partners asked them particular questions. This provided an opportunity to direct more attention to their identity. Through the attitudes of their counterparts toward communication, they discovered the great interest that young Chinese people have regarding Japan. In the second and third session, the learners were given the opportunity to know Chinese traditional fashion and other aspects of Chinese culture. During the interaction, they were able to know about local tourist information through photographs prepared by their counterparts. Moreover, the learners realized that their understanding of the other culture regarding differences between the Chinese and Japanese school culture, living environments and dining habits, the number of student enrollment at universities, and the number of hours students spent studying, had deepened. It should be noted that, whether authentic Chinese communication was succeeded or not, the experience of direct interaction led to a greater motivation to learn the language and to communicate with the people living in the foreign countries. Still, deepening knowledge about different culture enhanced leaners’ cross-cultural understanding as learners recognized for the benefit of the distance learning in Q2-1.

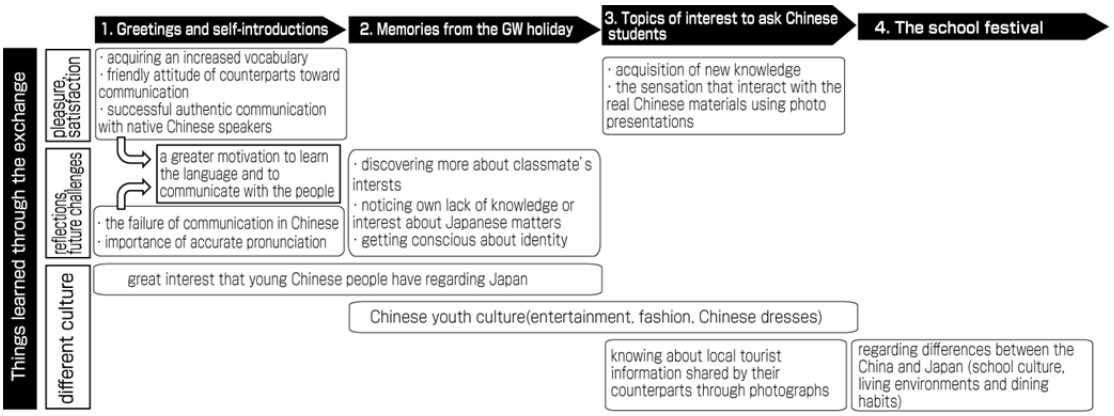

Figure 3: Schematic diagram showing achievements (Q3)

4.5 Q4: New achievements

The learners felt their improved level of understanding with increased listening “skills” and vocabulary “knowledge”. The learners realized that they were able to take advantage of the grammatical and vocabulary “knowledge” they already knew to express themselves in request and emphasized expressions. In addition, accurate pronunciation provided more opportunities to speak and the ability to carry on a conversation smoothly. Throughout the whole sessions, the learners had kept proactive communication attitude at Q & A time. The learners also recognized their

improvement in the speed of their ability to respond and recognized this as a learning achievement for “emotion and attitudes”.

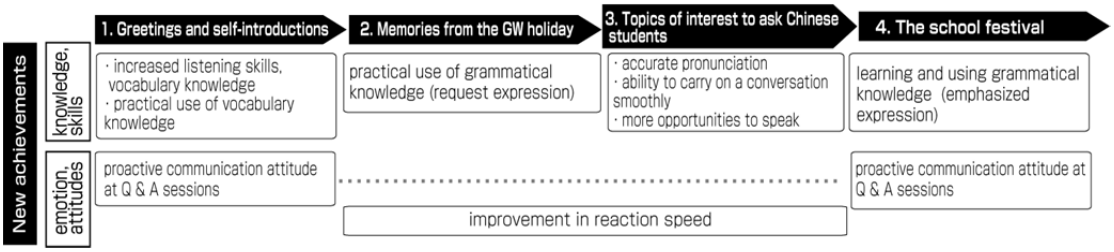

Figure 4: Schematic diagram showing achievements (Q4)

5. Conclusion

This study focused on distance learning as a nucleus, between a Chinese university and a Japanese high school by designing a CCDL blended learning model. Later, based on an open-ended questionnaire about their learning experience during the exchanges, the study explored the qualitative interpretation of the learner perspective. It was found that through the CCDL, the students showed improvement in knowledge, skills, and learning and communication attitudes; moreover, they experienced the joys of promoting cross-cultural understanding, discovering aspects of Chinese youth culture, and successfully taking advantage of practical communication skills. It was also found that reflections and the awareness of challenges as a result of failure helped to clarify and attain learning goals and motivation. The learning experiences and their values created by CCDL in this study could not be attained without the experience of interactions through the cross-cultural communication. Our task for the future is to repeatedly maintain and improve a learning environment for a second foreign language in Japan, while conducting exchanges for smooth intercultural exchanges in the classroom.

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