Implementing Implicit EIL: Design, Practice, and Its Effect

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Article Info	*Abstract*
 	In this study, we design and implement an implicit EIL (English as an International Language) activity to raise EFL learners' awareness of EIL without explicitly teaching it. We investigate whether the implicit EIL activity can 1) foster EFL learners' positive attitudes toward "non-native" varieties of English, including their own, and 2) promote their willingness to learn about other cultures, which is required to increase intercultural competence (IC). We created an intercultural communicative activity in which EFL learners from seven different expanding-circle countries can learn about different cultures by focusing on three distinct components of culture. This activity took place over four class meetings in an English course at a Japanese college. After the four intercultural communication sessions, a survey was conducted to examine the Japanese EFL learners' ideas about EIL, Japanese English, and their willingness to learn about other cultures. We also collected some feedback from them about the effectiveness of our activity. The findings suggest that implicit EIL is less effective than explicit EIL in nurturing positive attitudes toward non-native Englishes, with the implication that implicit EIL can be implemented as a preliminary activity before explicit EIL. Implicit EIL, while not resulting in wide acceptance of EIL or "non-native" Englishes, could nonetheless motivate participants to learn about other cultures, and they considered our activity to help do so.

I. INTRODUCTION

Globalization and the developments in ICT (Information and Communication Technology) have brought us more opportunities to communicate with people of different cultural backgrounds in other countries. Even those countries considered predominantly monocultural, such as Korea or Japan, are facing the necessity of adapting to the recent progression of globalization, with the influx of foreign workers with various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds to sustain the local and global economy (McKay, 2012). This means that more and more the global citizens will be required to communicate with people from various cultures shortly, even in their own territory or as they continue to interact with them remotely using online

tools. Given the circumstances, it is crucial to help EFL learners to gain pluralistic and multicultural perspectives, and incorporating EIL into the EFL curriculum can contribute to the wide acceptance of the local English so that it can motivate learners to "use" English rather than just "learning" it as a school subject.

Practicing EIL (English as an International Language) has great potential to boost the confidence of EFL learners in that it facilitates an environment that helps "non-native" speakers to focus on the function of English as a communication tool. In particular, communication among the speakers of expanding circle countries (Kachru, 1985), where people learn and speak English as a foreign language, embodies a low-stress L2 environment for the "non-native"

speakers of English by avoiding monitor-overuse (Krashen, 1981). For instance, Ke and Suzuki (2011) implemented a cross-cultural communicative activity between Japanese and Taiwanese students and reported that the participants were less nervous using English because they shared a similar educational background in terms of English−English taught as a foreign language. Namely, the equal linguistic power relationship built a low-stress environment that allowed learners to focus more on meaning(fluency) rather than form(accuracy) (Saito et al., 2020). In order to improve L2 performance, especially in speaking, it is crucial to reduce foreign language anxiety. According to Ortega (2015), high levels of anxiety impede L2 learning, pushing risk-avoiding behaviors. Engaging in EIL practice with other "non-native" speakers of English is expected to help learners suffer less from foreign language anxiety.

Being able to communicate in English is essential in today's globalized society, but what is equally important is to build intercultural competence (IC), or the capacity to interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. For this, it is vital to understand your global partner's variety of English, whether it be "native" or "non-native" English. From the perspective of sociolinguistics, the relationship between language and culture is similar to two sides of a coin; that is, they are inseparable. Thus, it is important for EFL learners to improve not only their English proficiency but also their ability to understand different cultures and cultural connotations. The key to the successful development of IC lies in the favorable attitude toward other cultures, i.e., their willingness to learn about or open up to foreign cultures.

In this study, we develop and implement an implicit EIL activity, in which EFL learners from seven different expanding circle countries exchange their cultures using their own varieties of English. We investigate whether our activity fosters favorable attitudes toward Japanese English and EIL among Japanese EFL learners. We also examine whether the activity can increase their willingness to learn about foreign cultures. Additionally, based on the results of the survey, we assess the effectiveness of our activity as a tool for intercultural communication.

II. BACKGROUND

2.1 English as an International Language

Around two billion people speak English worldwide, and it is the official language of more than 70 nations and territories (Crystal, 1997). It has reached the point that the majority of users are not native speakers of English, and they have more opportunities to speak English with other "non-native" speakers than native speakers (Kirkpatrick, 2007). In fact, more than 80% of English communication in the world is

now between so-called "non-native" speakers of the language. Despite being referred to as a global language, English has been localized in many different ways depending on the speakers, which has resulted in the development of numerous varieties. Given that English has both aspects of globalization and localization, Sharifian (2010) refers to this characteristic of English as "glocalization." Namely, English is no longer a single language but rather a group of similar languages, each of which represents the cultural background of the speakers.

As Horibe (2008) mentions, language and culture are intrinsically linked to one another. According to Niemeier (2004), language is not just simply a communication tool, but it also reflects the speaker's own culture and identity. Morimitsu (2010) remarks that language comprises an important aspect of culture and is deeply involved in the cognition of people using the language. Considering the interrelation between language and culture, it is natural for people with different cultural backgrounds to speak different 'Englishes,' expressing their cultures in their own varieties of English. When viewing it from the perspective of English education, it is beneficial for EFL learners to know about the English varieties of people whom they closely interact with and understand the cultures underlying these varieties to successfully communicate with them.

Redefining the role of English as a global language, English as an International Language (EIL) was put forth by Smith (1976). He emphasizes that "(i)t is yours (no matter who you are) as much as it is mine (no matter who I am)" (p.39). As for its pedagogical implications, Hassall (1996) stresses the necessity of embracing a new paradigm in English education to reflect the new needs of the current pluralistic and multilingual society, where traditional concepts like "native speaker of English" are becoming obsolete. The above-mentioned perspectives of EIL scholars empower those who were previously considered as "non-native" speakers of English (ESL/EFL learners) and acknowledge their Englishes as legitimate varieties of English. EIL encourages speakers of so-called "accented" English to freely express their cultures and identities without mimicking 'Standard English' such as American and British English (Saito and Heo, 2021).

How we avail ourselves of such positive aspects of EIL can range from partial adoption of EIL in the current ESL/EFL curriculum to the introduction of a new EIL program. In developing new EIL courses at International Pacific College (IPC) in New Zealand, Hassall (1996) introduced two approaches to presenting EIL in English education: implicit EIL and explicit EIL. According to him, implicit EIL refers to the unbiased teaching approach and resources, encouraging international students to interact with other learners of English−not as a preliminary step before

communicating with native speakers but as a purpose in itself. Explicit EIL, on the other hand, teaches the concept of EIL directly to learners and lets them explore the functions, varieties, and models of English on a global scale.

2.2 Explicit EIL: Previous Studies

In our previous studies (Saito et al., 2020; Saito and Heo, 2021), we aimed to encourage EFL learners to acknowledge "non-native" as well as "native" English varieties through the explicit teaching of EIL. During the intercultural communication among English speakers of three expanding circles (Chinese, Vietnamese and Japanese), the readings and discussion topics related to EIL were provided. The activity design was based on the framework of two EIL studies (Ke and Suzuki, 2011; Lee et al., 2017) and consisted of the following three stages.

(1) Stage 1 (Explicit EIL teaching):

The concept of EIL was introduced to the participants via readings. The reading materials for the first study (Saito et al, 2020) were summaries of EIL scholarly readings with an emphasis on the definition of EIL, World Englishes, and some related issues, while those in the second study (Saito and Heo, 2021) were EIL-related casual readings with a focus on cross-cultural daily life. Although the readings used in these two studies were different, the purpose of this stage was the same, i.e., to introduce the concept of EIL and various English varieties, including "non-native" varieties.

(2) Stage 2 (Practicing EIL in group discussion):

Participants practiced EIL communication through a small group discussion. Each group was composed of Japanese, Chinese, and Vietnamese students. In the first study (Saito et al, 2020), the participants discussed the given reading topics and freely exchanged their opinions and ideas. In the second study (Saito and Heo, 2021), on the other hand, the participants introduced and practiced words, expressions, and accents of their English varieties according to the reading topics.

(3) Stage 3 (Practicing EIL in a presentation):

Participants shared their ideas with other groups. This phase was designed to allow the participants to obtain different ideas from other groups and become further exposed to more viewpoints.

In total, four intercultural sessions, each consisting of the above three stages, were conducted over a period of two weeks in both studies. The findings demonstrated that explicit EIL teaching was successful. Especially in Saito et al. (2020), all of the participants reported a positive attitude toward EIL (Figure 1 in Section 4.2).

2.3 Implicit EIL (This Study)

While our two previous studies employed the explicit EIL approach, the current study focuses on designing and implementing implicit EIL that can facilitate intercultural communication, the goals of which are 1) indirectly raising their awareness of different expanding circle Englishes, leading to a favorable attitude toward their own English, and 2) encouraging participants to open up to different cultures, which is necessary to improve intercultural competence (IC) as well as EIL competence in the future.

2.3.1   Promoting positive attitudes toward "non-native" English varieties via implicit teaching

In this study, participants are not taught about EIL directly. Rather, they have a chance to communicate with a diverse group of "non-native" English speakers from seven different expanding circle countries. During the intercultural discussion, each language group was referred to as speakers of a certain variety of English (e.g., Japanese English and Vietnamese English) rather than "learners" of English. The goal is to have the participants exposed to various varieties of "non-native" English so that they can experience what resembles actual scenes of global communication between "non-native" speakers of English and recognize themselves as well as others as speakers of their own variety of English, which can potentially lead to a positive attitude toward "non-native" varieties of English.

2.3.2   Intercultural understanding and competence

Another goal of this research is to promote the willingness of the participants to explore other cultures. Such an attitude strengthens the basis for intercultural understanding and EIL competence. Regarding intercultural understanding, Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) underline that understanding different cultures enables individuals to progress from a monocultural mindset and worldview to more pluralistic and multicultural perspectives and world views. Their remark signifies how vital it is to encourage EFL learners to get exposed to various cultures and nurture the ability of intercultural understanding through EFL education, because especially in fairly monolingual/monocultural countries like Korea or Japan, the situation does not allow EFL learners to experience diverse cultures and acquire multicultural perspectives through their daily life. Sharifian (2013) also argues the importance of intercultural understanding; developing the right attitude towards "others" and "other cultures" is the most essential requirement for cross-cultural understanding and sympathy. The

"right attitude" in his remark is associated with pluralistic and multicultural perspectives; that is, people can develop the attitude to respect others and other cultures as they nurture the perspectives. Regardless to say, respect for other cultures is an essential component of successful intercultural communication. In light of that, EFL education can be driven to take on the role of helping learners acquire the "right attitude" as well.

Intercultural competence (IC) is defined as knowledge and skills that enable speakers to communicate effectively and appropriately with speakers of other cultural backgrounds (e.g., Byram, 2012). Further, Hammer (2015) defines IC as "the capability to shift one's cultural perspective and appropriately adapt one's behavior to cultural differences and commonalities (p.483)." Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) refer to Howard-Hamilton, Richardson, and Shunford (1998) as an example of its compositional model, composed of three main components: *Attitudes*, *Knowledge*, and *Skills*. Among them, the current study focuses on *Attitudes* ("Curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own culture") and *Skills of interpreting and relating* ("Ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, explain it, and relate it to documents from one's own culture") to help EFL learners understand other cultures and even their own culture through cross-cultural comparison (Dinh, 2017; McKay, 2012), which is an effective method to discover the differences between multiple cultures and find their uniqueness. In a monocultural country like Korea or Japan, it is not common for people to compare different cultures with their own. Namely, focusing on *Skills of interpreting and relating* is expected to provide them a chance to broaden their worldview and develop their intercultural understanding as well as the understanding of their own culture.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants

The Japanese participants in this study were college students in Japan, majoring in computer science and engineering: 13 junior and senior students (12 males and 1 female). Their English proficiency ranged from novice to intermediate. These students were enrolled in an English-speaking class, and the activity was implemented in four class meetings toward the end of this course. For intercultural communication, six international students from all different expanding circle countries (China, Vietnam, Sri Lanka,

Egypt, Colombia, and Ukraine) studying at the same university were invited to the class for an hour per session for this study. Since international students are required to show a certain level of English proficiency at the time of admission, their English proficiency was higher than that of Japanese students, ranging from high-intermediate to advanced. For the participants, residing in Japan during the time of this activity, English (not Japanese) was the lingua franca between the Japanese and the international students because the international students were not fluent in Japanese as Japanese proficiency was not required, unlike many other universities in Japan.

3.2 Group Design

Considering the lower proficiency level of Japanese participants, boosting their motivation to speak English without being discouraged by the gap in English proficiency was key to making intercultural communication successful. Thereby, we created a low-stress L2 environment for them to speak English in a relaxed atmosphere. First, the individual group consisted of only three members. This is because EFL learners, in general, are likely to feel less stressed when the number of interlocutors (observers) is fewer. Second, each group was comprised of two Japanese and one international student so that Japanese students can help each other (sometimes by using their L1) during the English conversation with an international student. Lastly, the group members were fixed during the whole activity so that students can feel more comfortable with their interlocutors and speak English more freely as they get to know more about each other and gradually become more familiar with each other's "accents." Although participants were not given the opportunities to learn and understand different cultures during the stage of group discussion, they still had a chance to do so through a presentation session.

3.3 Activity Design

As in our previous studies, intercultural sessions were implemented four times over two weeks. In the first session, the students introduced themselves in individual groups and enjoyed a free conversation with their group members. Our activity with the prepared topics was conducted in the last three sessions. The activity was composed of three communicative sessions focusing on the three aspects of culture (Horibe, 2008). To maximize their experience of exploring other cultures and culture-bound Englishes in relatively short activity hours, we prepared three culture-related topics so that various aspects of culture can be covered during the three sessions.

3.3.1   Discussion topics: Different aspects of culture

In general, culture is such an abstract and broad concept, so it is hard to define it. Horibe (2008) also asserts the difficulty of defining culture because it encompasses a broad range of elements such as

ideas, beliefs, views, values, and customs. Based on the categorization introduced by Adaskou, Britten, and Fahsi (1990), Horibe (2008) proposes the following conceptual framework to classify culture into three types: 1) culture as a social custom, 2) culture in the pragmatic sense, and 3) culture in the semantic sense.

Culture as a social custom

Culture as a social custom includes styles, activities, and commodities in people's daily lives, so it covers a broad range of elements (Horibe, 2008). To practice cross-cultural comparison, it is important to choose common topics of social customs for EFL learners. For instance, "gift" can be discussed as a common topic for participants, describing on what occasions and how people give gifts to others. When a specific culture in the topic is common among participants, it would provide them a good chance to discuss the similarities as well as differences related to that custom (e.g., "Valentine's Day").

Culture in the pragmatic sense

Horibe (2008) defines culture in the pragmatic sense as culture associated with language use, particularly cultural decisions, restrictions, and effects in interpersonal communication, referring to the definition of pragmatics, "the study of language from the point of view of the users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction, and the effects their use of language has on the other participants in an act of communication" (Crystal, 2003).

In learning culture in the pragmatic sense, EFL learners can be more encouraged to express their own culture and learn about various examples in many different Englishes rather than uniformly adopting the norms and patterns of "native" speakers (e.g., American or British). For example, when someone helps you, people's responses are different in Japan and the US. People in the US say "Thank you" to show their appreciation to the person, which can be universally general. In the same situation, many people in Japan would rather "apologize" to the person by saying "I am sorry" because they tend to regard being helped by others as making those people get in trouble. This example shows the unique apology culture of Japan in the pragmatic sense. Although such a Japanese mentality is something that is not easily understood by other cultures, EFL learners can perceive and compare such pragmatic differences to understand

different cultures and practice successful intercultural communication.

Culture in the semantic sense

As for culture in the semantic sense, Horibe (2008) mentions how language shapes our perception of reality by categorizing the world and our experiences using it, and how the makeup of the semantic universe reflects an individual culture's interests and concerns. Thus, according to him, culture in the semantic sense is defined as culture embedded in the semantic system of a language. In the present study, we asked learners to discuss metaphors to compare cultural differences because the use of metaphors in language is very much culture-bound (e.g., "fox" as a cunning character in some cultures). By sharing metaphor examples, EFL learners can compare and acknowledge the semantic and lexical differences to discover new viewpoints, perceptions, and ideas in different cultures.

3.3.2 Three Cultural Exchange Sessions

What is illustrated below is the flow of the three intercultural sessions, with the topics and details of each session.

(1) Session 1: Culture as a Social Custom

In a group, students choose a common social custom found in both cultures, such as a wedding ceremony or a new year event. Then they compare the traditions in the two cultures to find and discuss the cultural similarities or differences.

(2) Session 2: Culture in the Pragmatic Sense

In a group, either a Japanese or international student selects an example of daily life dialogue that can be unique to their culture (e.g., how people thank or apologize to others) and introduces it to their group members. Students from different cultures consider how people in their country would respond in such a situation and share their ideas with their group members. Students compare and discuss both cases to discover the cross-cultural similarities or differences in the pragmatic sense.

(3) Session 3: Culture in the Semantic Sense

In a group, either a Japanese or international student introduces an example of a metaphor to show their unique and interesting culture in the semantic sense. Students from different cultures find the same

or similar example and explain the metaphor to their group members. Students compare and discuss the examples in both cultures to explore the cross-cultural similarities or differences.

Each group discussion was followed by a presentation session in which individual groups reported their findings to the other groups. By sharing the findings and also listening to other "non-native" varieties of English, students were expected to broaden their perspective by learning about different cultures and "accents." Guidelines for each session were provided to students to show some topic suggestions and to inform the discussion session procedure. These materials were uploaded on a course site prior to each intercultural session so that the students could be prepared for their examples before participating in the session. The lower proficiency group, the Japanese students, were asked to write a paragraph on each topic as their homework assignment before each session as we assumed speaking spontaneously in English is much harder for this group.

3.4 Survey

After completing the three sessions, a survey was conducted among the Japanese EFL learners. They were asked whether they are willing to learn about other cultures and also their opinions about Japanese English. Additionally, there were some questions regarding the activity itself. Two different types of questions, Likert scale questions (5-point scale evaluation) and essay questions, were created. For essay questions to help the Japanese participants understand the question contents well and express their thoughts in detail, the feedback form was prepared for them to read and write in Japanese (approximately 100 words per question). In total, seven questions (3 Likert scale questions and 4 essay questions) were created as follows.

Table 1: Survey Questions

Categories	Questions
Attitude toward Japanese English and EIL	Question 6: *What do you think about speaking Japanese English proactively to reflect the Japanese culture? Further, can you expect others to learn about the Japanese culture by interacting with speakers of Japanese English?* (Essay question)
	Question 7: *Do you think we should learn American/British English or Japanese English?* (Essay question)
Willingness to learn about other cultures	Question 1: *After the activity, do you think you would like to learn and understand more about different cultures?* (Likert scale question)
Effectiveness of the activity	Question 2: *Was the activity effective for you to introduce your culture?* (Likert scale question)
	Question 3: *Was the activity effective for you to understand different cultures?* (Likert scale question)
	Question 4: *Among the three activities on different aspects of culture, which session did you enjoy the most? Why?* (Essay question)
	Question 5: *Which part do you think you could explain well? On the contrary, which part do you think you could not explain well?* (Essay question)

IV.   Results and Discussion

4.1 Overall Results

Regarding their willingness to learn about other cultures and the effectiveness of the activity, the overall feedback from the participants was positive, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Results: Willingness to Learn about Other Cultures and Effectiveness of the Activity

Answers	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3
1 (Not at all)	0	0	0
2 (Not really)	0	0	1
3 (Undecided)	2	2	1
4 (Somewhat)	6	6	4
5 (Very much)	5	5	7

Note: Numbers indicate the number of students who marked each point scale.

For all three questions, the rating was 4 and up for 84% of all participants. The result of their ideas about Japanese English shows that EIL or Japanese English is not readily accepted by the Japanese group. Especially regarding the idea of having Japanese English as a model language, the majority showed a strong objection (53.8%) while only two participants supported the idea (Table 3).

Table 3. Attitude toward Japanese English and EIL

Answers	Question 6	Question 7
Positive	6	2
Negative	5	7
Neutral	2	4

The individual results with some detailed discussion and some excerpts from the student survey are provided in Sections 4.2 through 4.4.

4.2 Attitude toward Japanese English and EIL

As shown in the result for Question 6 in Table 3, only about half of the participants showed a positive attitude toward Japanese English (6 participants, 46%) in this study. When compared to our two previous studies that used an explicit EIL approach, the percentage of students in the current study who reported a positive attitude toward EIL is smaller (Figure 1). This is because the idea of EIL was not directly and strongly introduced in the present study as a learning process to help students form a positive attitude toward various English varieties. As a result, although some students could accept the idea of EIL through implicit EIL (cross-cultural communication) and become positive about it, the method was still indirect and not effective enough to change the majority of the students' mindsets.
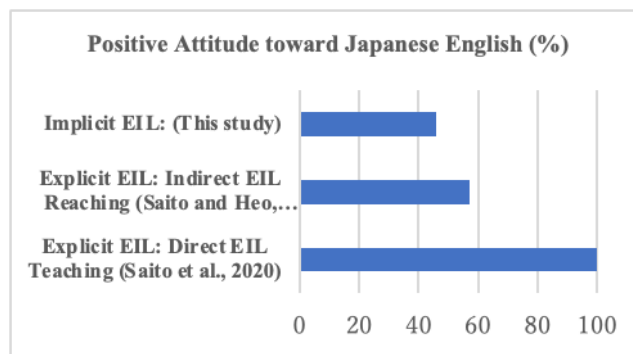

Fig. 1: Explicit EIL vs. Implicit EIL

Below is an excerpt from student essays for Question 6 (attitude toward Japanese English).

I believe we should use Japanese English. The sound features from the Japanese language represent our English characteristics. On top of that, Japanese English expresses Japanese culture and identity.

We should use Japanese English. I think we can let others know about the Japanese culture through our own English. In some contexts, however, it would be difficult for us to make ourselves understood using Japanese English.

Although I somewhat agree with the idea of using Japanese English, I still believe we should make efforts to speak easy-to-understand English. I suppose it is clearer to explain the Japanese culture using Standard English.

Those who disagreed with the idea of using Japanese English pointed out the intelligibility issue as a drawback of using it; that is, we are likely to face miscommunication and misunderstanding by using Japanese English. The rest of the students (five students) took a neutral position; we can use Japanese English to let people understand our culture while we try hard to learn "Standard English" for clear and effective communication. Interestingly, however, these opinions from the students taking a negative or neutral position are based on a stereotype that many Japanese people have. Many of them think that the majority of English speakers in the world use American or British English, so they believe speaking "Standard English" facilitates high intelligibility, comprehensibility, and interpretability between people with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Then, when asked the question of which variety of English they think they should learn (Question 7), they answered as follows.

We should learn Japanese English. Since there are many unique Japanese words and expressions in Japanese English, people, including us, can learn Japanese culture through our own English.

We should learn American or British English, especially when we have many chances to communicate with

foreigners. This is because we can achieve smooth communication by using Standard English. On the contrary, we can learn Japanese English to communicate with foreigners who live in Japan or are familiar with Japanese culture.

It would be hard for us to start learning American or British English in the beginning, so we can start learning Japanese English more comfortably. As we improve our English skills, we can shift from Japanese to American or British English.

Although about half of the participants think positively about Japanese English (Question 6), those positive responses did not lead to a supportive attitude toward making Japanese English a new norm (model language) in Japan (Question 7). Seven out of 13 students disagreed with the idea that we should "learn" Japanese English; only two out of 13 students agreed with the idea. Like the answers to Question 6, those who are negative about the idea of EIL consider that Japanese English can cause miscommunication and misunderstanding in English communication. We suppose that it is attributable to English education in Japan. Through the education, students have been taught that "Standard English"(mostly, American English) is the model they should aim to reach for at least six years from junior high school to high school. Considering that, it is natural to imagine that the idea strongly influences the students' attitude toward EIL, particularly in the school setting.

Across the board, the result indicates that implicit EIL was less effective than explicit EIL in motivating participants to think favorably about their English or EIL. For some groups of EFL learners who studied English with American or British English as their norm, it may be difficult for them to readily accept EIL only with implicit EIL. For example, the Standard English norm is deeply embedded in the minds of Japanese EFL learners from the years of school education in Japan, and it is conceivable that it can only be replaced by another authoritative approach (explicit EIL). However, such a result does not undermine the importance of the implicit EIL approach. As Hassall (1996) points out, it can be used as a preliminary stage before the explicit EIL for the smooth transition to a new perspective.

4.3 Willingness to Learn about Other Cultures

As shown in Table 2 (Question 1), the majority of participants (approximately 84%) exhibited their interest in learning about other cultures. Such a willingness to open up to other cultures is essential in promoting intercultural understanding and IC. The result indicates that this study successfully helped the participants motivate themselves for future IC activities. In their essays for other questions, the expressions they used to describe their partners' cultures also illustrate their positive attitude towards other cultures (e.g., "interesting," "unique" and "impressive").

4.4 Effectiveness of the Activity and Self-reflection

Questions 2 through 5 were created to examine how effective the activity was for the students to introduce their own culture and understand different cultures through our activity, and they also reflected on their own performances during the activity. As shown in Table 2, it appears that most of the students positively commented on the activity; 11 out of 13 students marked four or five points on all the questions. In particular, for Question 3, seven out of 13 students gave five points, showing that the activity was very effective for over half of the students to learn and understand different cultures. This indicates that the activity is well-designed to encourage Japanese EFL learners to explore different cultures, which can further lead to the development of their IC. Some excerpts of the students' comments on each question are presented below.

Topics participants liked

Regarding Question 4 (the most interesting topic/session), some students answered as follows.

In Session 1, it was interesting for me to learn that Valentine's Day is an event for only couples in some countries, even though we celebrate the event not only with partners but also with friends and families.

In Session 2, I learned that Chinese people take a pose of Bruce Lee to express their feelings, such as appreciation and apology. Further, I thought it was interesting that they indirectly refuse others' offers by saying "Next time", which is similar to our way of communicating.

In Session 1, the most impressive one is how to spend a new year. There are many common features, such as "New Year's Money" (otoshidama) in both our and their culture. In contrast, however, some customs are different from ours. For example, I was surprised that children give some presents to seniors in a certain country.

In Session 1, it was interesting that Colombians burn mannequins to separate from themselves in the past and run around with an empty suitcase to wish to travel a lot when they celebrate a new year.

Looking at the student essays, it appears that they learned a lot about different cultures by discussing various topics. Many of them pointed out some similarities in how people celebrate the New Year in Japan, China, and Vietnam, which may have seemed surprising to them. Furthermore, it is obvious from their comments that the Colombian way of celebrating New Year was very unique and interesting to them. In light of that, the students could get exposed to various cultures and understand them by discovering their similarities and differences.

Easy vs. difficult discussion topics

By answering Question 5, participants could reflect on their performance during the activity, and we could analyze which topics were easy or difficult for them and also what kinds of difficulties they faced during the discussion.

I think I was able to explain Japanese metaphors, sayings, and ways of expressing greetings and expressions. On the other hand, I couldn't understand what my group members explained so much. I felt I needed to improve my listening skills so that I could understand their English.

I could introduce Japanese culture well, such as Valentine's Day in Japan whereas, it was hard for me to introduce and explain Japanese metaphors.

I think I was able to use simple words and expressions for the explanation of Japanese culture. However, there were many situations where I didn't know how to explain in English. Thus, I felt I needed to learn more vocabulary to communicate smoothly.

Regarding the topics, Session 3 (metaphors used in different cultures) was relatively challenging for some students. In general, metaphor represents a linguistic and cultural concept that can be very ambiguous and abstract for people to explain and understand.

Some students also commented on their own speaking/listening performance. When it comes to explaining their own culture, it seems that the Japanese students were able to explain it well. Whereas, they had difficulty answering the members' questions and understanding their explanations due to their insufficient vocabulary knowledge and listening skills. Therefore, many of the students pointed out that they should learn more vocabulary and work on their listening skills to communicate better with their group members. In presenting what they prepared (Japanese culture), Japanese participants could feel confident, but what they lacked was interaction with international partners and spontaneous speech.

V. CONCLUSION

In this study, we employed the implicit EIL approach to develop and implement an intercultural communication activity that can foster EFL learners' positive attitudes toward their own English and raise awareness of EIL. Some additional goals were to increase their intercultural understanding and examine the effectiveness of our activity through a survey after the activity. The survey result shows that about half of the participants positively viewed Japanese English, but the percentage of those who answered favorably about Japanese English was lower compared to when we employed an explicit EIL approach in our previous studies (Saito et al., 2020; Saito and Heo, 2021). This implies that implicit EIL is better suited to serving as a preliminary

session before an explicit EIL activity. Regarding the willingness to learn about other cultures and the effectiveness of our activity, more than 80% of the participants responded positively about them. Such curiosity and an open-minded attitude toward foreign cultures are essential in fostering intercultural understanding and IC.

Although it is commonly agreed that fostering intercultural competence (IC) is an essential component of English education, there are not many class materials/activities available or concrete methods developed to promote the movement. Given this, we believe it is meaningful to suggest an activity model to introduce EIL, boost EFL learners' IC and empirically implement its prototype in college English courses. After implementing the activity we developed, we noticed that some parts of the activity were difficult for the students to work on, but the majority of them gave us some positive feedback about learning and understanding different cultures. Looking at their comments, we believe this study was a good stepping stone to progress EFL learners' intercultural understanding and develop their IC.

For future research, we plan to combine implicit EIL and explicit EIL to create a hybrid activity in which EFL learners can promote their IC as they participate in expanding circle communication with cultural topics (implicit EIL), followed by explicit teaching of EIL. Hassell (1996) also argues that although explicit EIL doesn't need to follow implicit EIL, there are certainly advantages to combining the two in a curriculum. We expect that introducing an integrated EIL activity can help EFL learners broaden their perspectives and help them promote their IC, which is congruent with the multicultural society we live in.

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