

A Step towards Assessing Japanese Culture Proficiency of International Students in-class

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1. Introduction

There is an increasing interest in learning Japanese culture along with the Japanese language among international students in Japan. Understanding Japanese culture will not only facilitate international students' daily life and help to avoid academic stress but also support to adapt to the Japanese working environments and doing business with Japanese partners in the long run. Therefore, possessing sound Japanese cultural proficiency along with the Japanese language will be an asset for international students in the future.

Tokushima University (TU) provides international students with a preparatory course for Intensive Japanese Language, where they can experience international exchange activities and Japanese culture experience. Aiming to assess the proficiency in Japanese culture of international students during a Japanese preparatory course in 2021, we designed a short test covering various aspects of Japanese culture. By analyzing the results of the tests conducted at TU in 2021, this presentation is aiming to show: (1) the preliminary results of applying a Japanese culture proficiency test in class; and (2) the implications for further test development and application.

2. Method

The test was designed in English and consisted of 10 multiple choice questions covering aspects such as lifestyle, sightseeing, food and drink, seasons, tradition, technology, business style, and social value... of Japanese culture. Figure 1 shows a sample of questions. The participants needed to choose a correct answer among four choices. Data collection was conducted via

online Google Forms by 11 participants who were international students who attended the session in Oct. 2021, and who had English proficiency from intermediate to advanced level. The students were from Asian countries including Malaysia, the Philippines, Bangladesh, and African countries.

In what season this picture is taken?



- A.Spring
- B.Summer
- C.Fall
- D.Winter

Figure 1. A question examples

The same set of questions was applied before and after the session. Quantitative data were analyzed by Excel/SPSS. Qualitative data were analyzed by KH Coder.

3. Results

(1) Improvements in general scores

Figure 1 shows that all 11 participants scored higher in the posttest, implying that they gained some understanding of Japanese culture during the session.

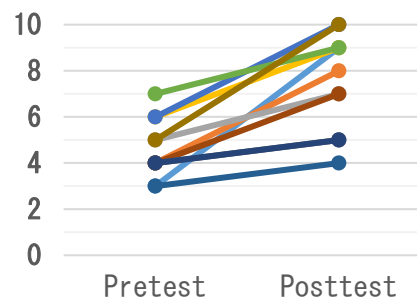


Figure 2. Individual scores

Table 1 shows the increased total mean score of all participants by 2.91 points (Paired-samples t-Test, $t=-5.675$, $df(10)$, $p(2-tailed)<.001$).

Table 2. Total mean score difference

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	4.64	1.286	.388
Posttest	7.55	2.115	.638
Pre-Post	-2.91	1.7	

(2) Mean score by type of questions

Though short, the test was designed to cover a wide range of themes (Table 2).

Table 2. Mean score difference by item

	Question about	Pre	Post	Diff.
1	Vending machine	0.27	0.82	0.55
2	Restaurants	0	0.73	0.73
3	Foods	0.36	0.82	0.46
4	Castles	0.09	0.36	0.27
5	Seasons	0.73	0.91	0.18
6	Appliances	0.91	1	0.09
7	Drinks	0.73	0.82	0.09
8	Values	0.36	0.64	0.28
9	Gardens	0.91	0.82	-0.09
10	Business	0.27	0.64	0.37

The results show that higher scores at the pretest were achieved in questions about appliances, gardens, seasons, and drinks (6, 9, 5, 7) ... while lower scores at the pretest were related to restaurants, castles, businesses, vending machines, and values (2, 4, 1, 10) ... Quantitative questions (1, 4) and abstract questions (8, 10) are difficult to score high even in the posttest.

(3) Future directions

In this preliminary attempt, as the number of participants was quite limited, we could not take into account the factors that could influence the results such as English proficiency, country, major, scholarship, age, part-time job, and income ... In the future, we consider applying the test to compare longer period such as between pre-arrival and, post-arrival, or pre-program and

post-program. For such a purpose, it also needs to design a pool of questions with more diversified content.

4. Conclusion

This presentation shows the results of our preliminary attempts to assess the progress of Japanese cultural learning among international students. Aiming to assess the proficiency in Japanese culture of international students during a Japanese preparatory course in 2021, we designed a short test containing 10 multiple-choice questions covering various aspects of Japanese culture. The test was applied as a pretest and posttest during an introductory session about Japanese culture. The results showed an increase in mean score between the pretest and post-test (Paired-samples t-Test, $p<.001$), while tangible items tended to be scored higher than abstract items. Applying such a test let the participants reveal their understanding and interest in Japanese culture and helped the instructor track progress of learning. The results show that applying a Japanese culture proficiency test could be an effective approach and could be applied successfully in the online classroom mode. These results imply a need for further elaborating the test for effective assessment and better educational outcomes.

References

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