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Japanese student teachers' perceptions about teaching global issues

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Abstract

This paper reports on a study which examined the perceptions of student teachers enrolled on a secondary civics teaching method course on teaching global issues. Data, in the form questionnaires, was collected from two private universities in Kyoto, Japan and, generally speaking, the findings suggest that student teachers have a positive attitude towards teaching global issues. At the same time, however, three main characteristics appear: firstly, the student teachers may have lacked opportunities for experiential learning and for considering global issues as a matter of personal concern; secondly, they seem to lack confidence in teaching sensitive and controversial issues; thirdly, they also seem to lack confidence in using various strategies for curriculum development. These findings suggest further possibilities for conducting future comparative research and for improving the citizenship teacher education programme.

Keywords: *Teachers' perception; global issues; knowledge, skills, and attitude.*

1. Introduction

This paper examines the perceptions of student teachers on secondary civics teaching method course in Japan concerning the teaching of global issues. The paper consists of five parts. First, we review three approaches to international education in Japanese educational policy and practices. Second, we present the purpose of our study. Third, we describe our research method used in two universities in Kyoto in January 2012. Fourth, we report the findings. Fifth, we provide summary and interpretation of the findings. The final section of the article provides a conclusion, identifying limitations of this study, and offering recommendations for further research.

1.1 International education initiatives in Japan

There is considerable activity in the area called international education (education for international understanding) in Japanese schools today. Three main approaches exist simultaneously (Sato, 2007). The first, initiated mainly by the central government, aims to nurture national identity. As Japan experienced the economic boom and became one of the major economic powers in the world in the late 1960s, Japanese companies became more globalized. More Japanese people began to go overseas for business, study or leisure. In line with this, the increasing role that Japanese people should play in the international community was discussed. Thus the Central Education Council (1974), for instance, called for education to nurture Japanese people's abilities and attitudes to be recognized in the international community. It also called for a fostering of Japanese identity based on the deep appreciation of Japanese culture and tradition.

A second approach aims to improve students' global knowledge and attitudes. This approach has been promoted by educational scholars and some enthusiastic school teachers who have disagreed with the first approach on the grounds that it did not meet the challenges arising from an interconnected and complex world. In seeking alternatives, they supported education for international understanding initiated by the United Nations as well as learned from theory and practice of global education in the United States and world studies in the United Kingdom (Otsu, 1992; Uozumi, 1987). This approach recently attracted the attention of the government. Course of study, which is equivalent to National Curriculum in England, for example, suggested learning issues introduced by the Education for Sustainable Development (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2008).

The third approach has emphasized multicultural coexistence. This approach has been emphasized by both the central government and educators. The bubble economy of the 1980s saw the movement of an increasing number of people from different countries into Japan for labour, academic exchange and international marriage purposes. As a result, Japanese schools now have more non-Japanese children with diverse cultures. Schools with large numbers of non-Japanese children have included the element of multicultural coexistence in the objectives of the school curriculum (Sato, 2007), and the ministry of education has allocated special teachers to teach Japanese to these children.

2. Purpose and research question

Although the teaching of global issues and diverse cultures has attracted more attention of the Japanese government and enthusiastic scholars and educators, little is known about teachers' knowledge, skills and attitudes for teaching global issues. It is widely known among education researchers that 'Teacher expertise—what teachers know and can do—affects all the core tasks of teaching' (Darling-Hammond and Deborah Loewenberg, 1997, p.1). It seems reasonable to us to extend this generalization to the teaching of global issues and attitudes.

Parker et al. (1997) conducted a comparative study of student teachers' attitudes towards global issues and relations. The study found that the sample of student teachers chosen from primary education courses in two Universities in the United States and one in Japan generally showed positive attitudes toward global issues and relations, but Japanese student teachers were less positive compared with those in the United States. Our study here differs from Parker *et al.*: our samples of student teachers were chosen from secondary teaching method course and we examined not only student teachers' perception on knowledge, but also their skills and attitudes.

The purpose of our research is to explore student teachers' perceptions about teaching global issues. Our research questions are as follows: 1) How do student teachers evaluate their own current knowledge, skills and attitude for teaching global issues? 2) What kind of curriculum would student teachers develop when they become teachers in the future?

3. Method

3.1 Samples

The survey was conducted at two private universities in Kyoto. It involved one-hundred seventy three students who were enrolled in a secondary civics teaching methods class that aims to prepare teachers for civics teaches in secondary schools. Compared with many western countries, the Japanese teacher training system seems to be relatively rigid, because almost all of the current teachers obtained their teacher qualifications after graduation of university which was authorised by minister of education. Of the certified teacher training colleges, almost 80% are private universities – including the sampled universities.

The sample was not nationally representative and the researchers therefore seek to avoid generalising the findings beyond the sample. The sampled teachers were selected in order to provide valuable data for current teacher education system. We adopted a case study approach as a possible means of obtaining coherent information, even on a small-scale study.. In terms of year levels, 70% of the students are sophomore, 23 % are junior, and less than 2% are senior. 95% of the students had not completed a teaching internship (such internships takes place in the 4th year). The specialities of student teachers were diverse, including education, history and economics. Thus the background of the sampled students teachers were various and this could feed benefit on this study

3.2 Questionnaire

The main study took place on January 2012. The questionnaire was distributed to the students at the end of the class. Before being provided with the questionnaires, the sampled student teachers were required to listen to the purpose and instructions of this study carefully. Participation was optional: most opted to be involved.

The survey comprised a 30-item Likert-style scale focused on students' self-assessment on their knowledge, skills, participation and curriculum development for teaching global education. The survey framework drew heavily on the items suggested by Czarra's (2002) checklist of global education. The checklist is based on the guidelines of global education (Collins et al. 1995) that was developed by global education scholars to help elementary and secondary school educators in the United States to highlight global dimension in their curriculum. The premise of the checklist (Czarra, 2002) and our questionnaire is as follows. Knowledge of the world can be divided into three main themes: global issues, culture and global connections. Skills that student can develop include issue analysis, problem solving, interpretation, reasoned persuasion, and research/investigation. Students are encouraged to be involved in the communities by using civic knowledge and skills. These areas of global education have numerous commonalities with the framework of Japanese international education (cf. The Japan Association for International Education, 2010): thus items of the checklist seem to be relevant to the students and we decided to use the list. The number of the questions in each category of the survey is shown in Table 1. Survey instruments were developed in English for possible future comparative study and then translated into Japanese

Table 1. Number of questions in each item

	Global issues	Culture	Global connections
Current attitude to...			
Knowledge	1	6	2
Skills	1	3	5
Participation	2	1	3
Future actions	7		

4. Findings

4.1 Overall Tendency

This section shows how student teachers perceive global education was measured by examining the overall tendency of the total score. The questions were mainly divided into two sections, namely, (a) current attitude toward knowledge, skills and participations in relation to global education and (b) the expected action as a future teacher. As scores range from 1 to 4 and the all items indicate the positive standpoints of global education, the children who scored more than middle score in each category were regarded as pro-global education minded.

Table 2 presents the results from global education scale. The result suggest that student teachers' attitudes toward global education were relatively positive: the mean score on the items were above the middle score in each category and standard deviation showed that the score points are less spread out.

Comparison of the results by item reveals the gaps between them. The result indicate that the sampled student teachers were willing to participate in global education in their future classroom, while they showed less confidence in their current knowledge, skill and participation. Especially, the score related to skill could indicate low confidence as the students' score of skill (=15.5) are almost equivalent of middle score (=15). To sum up, the results could reveal positive attitudes toward global education, in spite of a little gap between the items.

Table 2. Results from global education scale: possible range score, the number of student teachers were included, Mean and Standard deviation

Category	Possible range score (middle score)	N	M	SD
Current attitude toward...				
Knowledge	9-36 (22.5)	172	24.8	4.3
Skill	6-24 (15)	171	15.5	3.4
Participation	8-32 (20)	171	21.8	3.9
Expected action	7-28 (17.5)	173	20.6	4.4

Note: 2.5 means middle, 'don't know' removed.

4.2 Item analysis

In addition to analysis of overall tendency, we conducted item analysis. It is important to obtain detailed information to deepen understanding the attitudes of Japanese student teachers to global education.

The items of current attitude toward knowledge, skill and participation were divided into three categories, namely, global issues, culture and global connections. Each category includes the elements of knowledge, skills and participation. The order of questions starts from the questions of knowledge, skill and participation of global issues and culture to those of global connections. However these categories of the questions were not explicitly shown in the questionnaire, the sampled teachers completed in the questionnaire without explicit regard to the categories of items. After completing the questions related to current attitude, the sampled teachers were required to answer the questions concerning expected actions as future teachers. The following sections present the results from the collected questionnaires.

4.2.1 Current attitude to knowledge on global education

Table 3 shows the nine items relating to current attitude toward knowledge of global education among Japanese student teachers. Within the nine items, Q1 was about global issues, while Q5, Q6, Q7, Q8, Q9 and Q10 were about culture and Q13 and Q14 belong to global connections.

Almost all of the student teachers in Japan reported that they were conscious about the interrelationship between global issues (95 per cent) and they had knowledge of diverse view of people from different culture (91 per cent) and understanding of positive and negative influence by global interconnections (89 per cent). Almost three-fifths of them also felt that they had a knowledge and understanding about (a) major areas of world (56 per cent), (b) the role of Japan since WW II (62 per cent), (c) an experience of learning another culture through learning language (66 per cent) and (d) extensive interaction with people from different cultural background in Japan (54 per cent).

However, on two items they were divided. Less than half the student teachers expressed confidence in their knowledge of issues and challenges concerning (a) unity and division of areas in the world (48 per cent) and (b) having the chance to interact with people from different cultural background in a foreign nation (44 per cent).

We can summarise the findings relating to current attitudes toward knowledge as follows. First, Japanese student teachers tend to have confidence in their knowledge relating to global education. In particular, the items where there was a clear consensus among the student teachers in Japan concern general knowledge, such as an awareness of interrelations of global issues and understanding of different people. In contrast, the items dealing with sensitive and controversial issues, such as issues and challenges related to unity or division between areas, and those items concerning cultural

interaction in foreign nations elicited different responses. Interestingly, while the participants seemed confident about understanding the views of different people, they showed little experience of intercultural exchange in foreign nation. This could indicate that their understandings of diverse views were not based on their own experience but may be based on the other media, such as internet or TV.

Table 3. Results from current attitude to knowledge on global education

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't know
	%	%	%	%	%
Q1: I am aware that global issues are interrelated	0	2.9	57	38.4	1.7
Q5: I have a general knowledge about the major geographical and cultural areas of the world	5.2	33.7	44.8	11.6	4.7
Q6: I have a general knowledge about some of the issues and challenges that unite and divide the major geographical and cultural areas of the world	5.2	41.6	38.2	9.8	5.2
Q7: I have learned about another culture through the study of a foreign language	7.1	24.1	43.5	22.4	2.9
Q8: In a foreign nation, I have had opportunity to interact extensively with people from different cultural background	22.4	30	27.6	15.9	4.1
Q9: Within Japan, I have had opportunity to interact extensively with people	8.1	34.9	35.5	18.6	2.9
Q10: I know that members of different cultures view the world in different ways	0	7.5	54.3	36.4	1.7
Q13: I understand that global interconnections have both positive and negative consequences in Japan	0.6	5.8	52.9	36	4.7
Q14: I understand the role of Japan in international relations since WW II	2.9	26.7	47.7	14.5	8.1

N=172, A series of single response items

4.2.2 Current attitude to skills on global education

Table 4 shows the nine items, relating to current attitude toward skills of global education among Japanese student teachers. Within the nine items, Q2 concerned global issues, while Q11 was about culture and Q15 to Q19 related to global connections.

Suspending judgement when facing new information, which could be opposed to the people's original understanding and values (78 per cent) was seen as the most common skill among the sampled teachers. A majority of the sampled teachers also reported that they could analyse the interconnections of global issues with local issues (63 per cent) or with their life (63 per cent) and that they could identify the major trends in Japanese history and examine the connection with local community and Japan (64 per cent). Meanwhile, fewer people felt they could identify the major trends in world history (54 per cent). Almost half seemed to have confidence with regard to respecting another

culture (56 per cent) and generating alternative projections related to future scenarios (50 per cent).

Overall, these result indicate that the sampled Japanese teachers have confident to use skills related to global education. Particularly, they were more likely to use 'passive' skill, such as suspending judgement to conflict their own belief and new information. In addition, fewer people stated that they could examine Japanese history from the broader perspective of world history. Only half of them felt confidence about valuing other culture without distortion and creating future alternative projections. The findings suggest that the Japanese teachers tended to avoid dealing with unclear and ambiguous matters which are important for global education.

Table 4. Results from current attitude to skills on global education

	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %	Don't know %
Q2: I have the ability to suspend judgement when confronted with new information about an issue when that information is in conflict with my own understandings and values					
	0.6	11.6	69.4	8.1	10.4
Q11: I know how to value another culture without distorting it	5.2	33.7	44.8	11.6	4.7
Q15: I can identify major trends in Japanese history and examine how these trends connect to my local community and Japan					
	4.6	25.4	45.7	17.9	6.4
Q16: I can identify major trends in world history and examine how these trends connect to my local community and Japan	7.5	32.9	45.7	8.7	5.2
Q17: I can analyse the interconnections of local issues with global issues	1.2	28.3	53.8	9.2	7.5
Q18: I can analyse the interconnections between my life and global issues	2.3	25.4	54.9	11.6	5.8
Q19: I can generate alternative projections for the future and weigh potential future scenarios					
	5.8	35.8	41.6	8.1	8.7
N=171, A series of single response items					

4.2.3 Current attitude to participations on global education

Table 5 shows the nine items relating to current attitude toward participations of global education among Japanese student teachers. Within the nine items, Q3 and Q4 were about global issues, while Q12 about culture and Q20 to Q23 related to global connections.

Over two-thirds of student teachers reported that they could deal with global matters objectively (74 per cent) and tolerate ambiguity (73 per cent). The majority of them also

felt they could develop a sense of efficacy and responsibility through involvement with resolution of a global issue (71 per cent). A considerably majority of people are likely to seek communication with people from other culture (63 per cent) and value participation in democratic processes (67 per cent). Meanwhile, only half of the teachers stated that they were able to value cultural diversity (48 per cent) and that they read and listen related media, such as newspapers and TV programme about intercultural and international topics (55 per cent).

To sum up the findings, most Japanese student teachers are involved in the matters with regard to global education. Particularly, most of them seemed to have confidence in adopting a neutral stance toward global issues and ambiguity. Meanwhile, half of them tended to deal with cultural matters in a relatively passive manner. This tendency may reflected a lack of opportunities of cultural exchange in their own life, as described in previous sections. As they had limited experience of communicating with people from different culture, they would become less interested in cultural matters in media and they have less confident of valuing cultural diversity.

Table 5. Results from current attitude toward participation

	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %	Don't know %
Q3: I can approach global issues, problems and challenges objectively, with neither undue optimism nor unwarranted pessimism.	0.6	16.9	52.3	22.1	8.1
Q4: I can develop some sense of efficacy and civic responsibility by identifying specific ways that I can make some contribution to the resolution of a global issue	1.2	23.1	46.8	23.7	5.2
Q12: I can value cultural diversity	5.2	41.6	38.2	9.8	5.2
Q20: I seek to communicate with people from other cultures	5.2	22.7	45.3	17.4	9.3
Q21: I value participation in the democratic process	2.3	23.1	54.3	12.7	7.5
Q22: I am able to tolerate ambiguity	4	16.2	50.9	22.5	6.4
Q23: I read websites, newspapers, magazines, and books and listen to radio and TV programs that relate to intercultural and international topics	5.8	32.2	41.5	13.5	7
N=171, A series of single response items					

4.2.4 Expected action in global education

Intended participation in global education was measured by seven items. The items could be divided into three parts: the first concerns how to integrate a number of elements in relation to global education into their school curriculum; the second

concerns whether they promote study abroad programme; and the final part relates to educational resources from various organizations. Each student teacher was required to answer as a future teacher. Table 6 shows the nine items, relating to current attitudes toward participations of global education among Japanese student teachers.

There were a number of items where there was a clear consensus among student teachers as to future intended activity related to global education for student teachers. Almost all student teachers reported that they are willing to integrate multiple viewpoints (94 per cent), global system (96 per cent), cross-cultural experiences (87 per cent), global system (93 per cent) and human choice for future decision making (86 per cent) into their future curriculum. Of course, we should be aware that the answers may not directly reflect on their real practice in the future.

Meanwhile, there were two items that the sampled teachers do not agree on. Three fifths of the teachers expected to promote study abroad programmes to their future students (60 per cent). Less than half were likely to use teacher resources from international organisations, such as UNICEF and UNESCO (44 per cent). Interestingly, in this items, there were a number of student teachers who selected 'Don't know' This could indicate that they had had little chance to use such resources at that time and thus it was difficult for them to judge the usefulness of this kind of resources.

In summary, the sampled student teachers in Japan showed positive attitudes towards participating in activity in relation to global education for future practice. However, they tended to have less confidence over involvement in activities beyond classroom, such as study-abroad programmes and resources from various organisations.

Table 6. Results from expected action in global education

As a future teacher, I believe that it is important...	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't know
24 to integrate multiple viewpoints into the curriculum	0.6	4.1	45.3	48.3	1.7
25. to integrate global system into the curriculum	0.6	2.3	51.7	44.2	1.2
26. to integrate cross-cultural experiences into the curriculum	0.6	8.1	51.2	36	4.1
27. to integrate global systems (e.g. political, economic, technological, ecological) into the curriculum	0.6	4.1	60.5	32	2.9
28. to integrate students awareness of human choice in decision making about the future into the curriculum	0.6	9.9	47.1	39	3.5
29. to lead students on study abroad programmes	3.5	22.8	40.4	19.3	14
30. to use teacher resources from international organisations that have education and					

cultural divisions such as the UNICEF and UNESCO	8.2	25.1	32.7	11.1	22.8
N=173, A series of single response items					

5. Summary and Interpretation of the findings

Overall, student teachers revealed positive attitudes toward teaching global issues. However, their perceptions can be analysed in detail in three ways, as follows.

First, the student teachers may have lacked opportunities for experiential learning as well as to consider global issues as a matter of concern to themselves. This tendency can be found typically when it comes to the understanding of different culture. As was explained above, almost all of the students answered that they know and understand that members of different cultures view the world in different ways, while only around half of them replied that they have an opportunity to engage in exchanges with another culture either in a foreign nation or within Japan. Moreover, although around 80 per cent of the student teachers are confident to suspend their judgement when they confronted with new information that is in conflict with their own understanding and values, less than half of them said they can tolerate cultural diversity. Likewise only half of the student teachers are confident of introducing another culture without distorting its values. There seems to be a gap between student teachers' confidence on their possession of the knowledge for intercultural understanding and their abilities to interact with different cultures.

The reason for this may lie in the difference between supporting the normative idea and involvement and experience in actual situations. Mabuchi (2002) examined 'cultural relativism' as a typical discourse of Japanese international education. In his research, Mabuchi argued that while interviewees agreed to the normative idea of cultural relativism – the idea that there is no relative superiority among different cultures and thus that difference should be respected – the interviewees replied that it was difficult to treat every culture equally.

Findings of our study seem to support Mabuchi's research findings. If student teachers wish to tolerate cultural diversity and introduce another culture to others without distorting their values, they may need to learn diverse cultures in detail, find commonalities and differences between their and own culture, and deliver the interpretation to others. This may be difficult without actually interacting with people with other cultures and carefully examine their understanding of different cultures. As we discuss in the next section, it is interesting that student teachers replied very positively about including the experiential learning of other cultures in the curriculum, albeit in a limited way.

Secondly, student teachers are less confident in teaching items related to national borders and role of the country in the world history, which is relatively controversial. For instance, the findings showed that only forty eight percent of them said they had knowledge about the issues and challenges that unite and divide areas of the world.

There may be two reasons behind this tendency. One is that current events themselves are difficult to teach, as they are on-going affairs, discussed by various view points and therefore controversial. A number of social studies teachers deliberately avoid focusing on these issues in lessons, or otherwise use newspaper articles or TV programmes just to explain the events (Fujiwara, 2009). Likewise, student teachers seem to hesitate to touch such issues. Another interpretation is that, as discussed in the introduction above, Japanese international education has emphasized the nurturing national identity as based on Japanese culture and tradition: Therefore, student teachers may not have had sufficient opportunities to learn sensitive issues such as conflict over national border.

Thirdly, student teachers seem not to be confident to use various strategies for curriculum development. As was examined in the section on findings above, although 89 percent of them agreed to include experiential learning about different cultures, only 60 percent of them support study abroad program. In addition, only about 34 per cent of them agreed and about 23 per cent of them are unsure about using materials developed by international organizations such as UNICEF and UNESCO. Moreover, only 55 percent of the student teachers usually use variety of information resources such as newspapers, magazines, and books, radio and TV when they gather information about global issues.

One possible reason behind this tendency is that student teachers do not see the needs of possessing various curriculum development strategies. As pointed out above, student teachers tend to avoid focusing on current issues that are relatively controversial in the lessons. Thus, they may not think it is necessary to keep in touch with the latest information or seek the information from specialized agencies such as institutions of United Nations. Instead student teachers may see textbooks as the major educational materials in schools, and as they cover basic information of the past, the majority of them do not voluntarily develop other materials.

Another possible reason is that student teachers may possess a static or inflexible image of the subject area and role of the schools. Our sampled student teachers enrolled in the teaching method course of Civics, which is a statutory subject like History and Geography in high schools in Japan. Global issues are taught in Civics, but the time allocated for this is relatively small. Global issues are also expected to be taught during 'the time for integrated learning', which is a new curriculum area with great flexibility in curriculum development introduced from 2002. Although some enthusiastic school teachers see great potentials to teach global issues in an integrated curriculum (Yoneda et al., 2006), secondary school teachers tend to be reluctant to make integrated curriculum because they often consider their subject area as separated and static. The view of student teachers in this study may reflect these current school practices. Student teachers may think that, as a Civics teacher, they do not have to teach students about the contents that exceed the basic area of the curriculum and do not have to engage with the program that goes beyond the schools such as study abroad program or making links between schools and organizations outside the schools.

6. Concluding Reflections

Before we can consider the possible implications of our findings, we need to consider the limitations of this study.

6.1 Limitations of the study

Here we identify two major limitations. First, there are good reasons to question the student teachers' understanding of scale's meaning. As the scale was translated into Japanese from English, there are phrases that were not common in Japanese. Moreover, most of the student teachers have not learned global education or something equivalent: thus it is uncertain that the intent of a question was correctly picked up by the students. Second, the findings cannot be generalized, considering that the sample was small number and not randomly selected.

6.2 Implications for Teacher Education and Further Research

This section offers three broad propositions. First, it appears that it may be helpful for student teachers to be given more opportunities for the experiential learning as well as to consider global issues as a matter of concern to oneself, especially the area of cultural understanding. Findings in this study revealed that although most of the student teachers agreed with the normative idea of multicultural coexistence, almost half of the student teachers tend to show negative attitudes when it comes to actual interaction with people with diverse background. Interacting with people with different culture may cause conflict, but it may be important for student teachers to learn possibilities and limitations of understanding different cultures rather than avoiding it.

Second, the findings suggest the need for teacher education programmes to develop more explicitly the knowledge base and teaching method of current and controversial issues. The findings indicate that student teachers have less confidence to deal with sensitive and controversial issues such as a conflict over national borders. These issues may not be common topics in international education according to the government policy, but learning these issues is vital in this globalized age. Therefore, it would help for student teachers to learn better how to develop the lessons on controversial issues with the rationale of picking up these issues in the lessons, the method of teaching them and things to consider.

Third, there appears to be a considerable need to deepen teachers' understanding of the goal of civics and develop various curriculum planning strategies incorporating the use of resources from inside and outside schools. Student teachers seem to have narrow scope on the contents and method of Civics curriculum. In order to overcome the limitation, teacher education programme may re-examine the goal of Civics and deepen their understanding of it. In addition, it is important for student teachers to use a variety of information resources and teaching materials when student developing the curriculum on controversial issues, as this requires materials with different views. Teacher education may thus need to be improved to help student teachers to examine the importance of various resources, the way they can be used in the lesson planning.

For further research, in-depth interviews are necessary to fully understand the possible reasons behind the trend that we have discussed. What student teachers mean when they answer ‘respect different culture’ and ‘cannot using various materials’ could thus be explored further. In addition, researchers would like to conduct comparative study in the future in order to explore the Japanese student teachers’ attitude.

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