

# “I’m totally enjoying myself!”: the camera-off never-unmuted lively participants —Illuminating students’ learning in an online cultural exchange programme during the COVID-19 pandemic—

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Key words : Online, Cultural exchange programme, Japanese language learners, Cross-cultural understanding

## Abstract

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, universities and educators were tasked to start offering online learning opportunities. The aim of this paper is to present insights into challenges and lessons learned from an online cultural exchange programme in Japanese between Japanese and Italian university students. This paper follows a case study that attempted to document Japanese students’ engagement in learning over the course of 44 online walk-in sessions, for a period of over a year. There is no doubt that the students’ interests in Italian language, culture and people were the major source of motivation to participate, though, it was notable that they were in dire need to socialise with anyone even online. It is also interesting to point out that not all of the participating students were interested in aggressively being engaged in conversation, and preferred to sit in and listen to what other participating students talked about. This cultural exchange programme successfully provided a comfortable space for the students to learn about others and themselves, and to nurture generosity, patience, and compassion for others.

## 1. Introduction

This paper provides insights into challenges and lessons learned from an online cultural exchange programme between Japanese and Italian university students during the COVID-19 pandemic, when an in-person exchange was not possible. This paper also aims to document the Japanese students’ impressions and thoughts, described in their own words, on this

online cultural exchange. It specifically drew on the Japanese students’ responses on Google Form questionnaires and online interviews.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forcibly resulted in the avoidance of human interactions, including travel restrictions to limit human movement. University education was not exempted from these overall restrictions. Students started taking classes using

digital devices from home, equipped with moderate speed internet. Opportunities to meet new friends became restricted, and active learning opportunities in classes also became limited, at least until course syllabuses were successfully converted into an online class format. Even before the pandemic started, COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning) started gaining recognition<sup>[1][2]</sup>; however, many will agree that this pandemic forced universities and educators, even unwilling ones, to start offering online learning opportunities.

Many studies have already covered online learning courses and online international programmes<sup>[3][4]</sup>. Yet, irregular, non-compulsory, non-credited, open-to-all-students online international cultural exchange practices, which does not follow a fixed date and time schedule, fall into a frontier field of research. Accordingly, this study presents novel insights into practical suggestions for future research projects and more attractive online cultural exchange practices. This paper follows a case study that attempted to document students' engagement in learning during an online cultural exchange programme for a period of over a year.

## 2. Students' engagement in online cultural exchange programme

Studying abroad has become popular amongst university students in Japan especially since 1980, and the achievements of sojourn students have been well documented<sup>[5][6][7]</sup>. During the COVID-19 pandemic, however, an increasing number of university students have participated in short-term international courses by attending online courses offered by educational institutions overseas<sup>[8]</sup>. The length and purpose of these online courses are varied, from one academic year to a few days, from ones for strictly language learning and others for language and cultural learning. What also varied, was how different universities treated with course participation, in terms of allowing students to earn credits towards their graduation.

Online study abroad programmes offer various learning opportunities; however, its students' achievements and its comparison with in-person study abroad programmes are not fully researched<sup>[9][10]</sup>.

In-person programmes offer out-of-class, authentic experiences, intensive face-to-face interaction with different cultural groups, and cultural exposure. Participating students develop cultural awareness, improved understanding of self and subject knowledge through these experiences<sup>[11]</sup>. Online study abroad programmes are in need of research into participating students' experiences and achievements, in order to achieve its quality and reliability<sup>[12]</sup>. This is especially the case because online study abroad programmes have gained in popularity. While many students wish to participate in an in-person study abroad programme, many of them choose to join online ones due to financial and health-related reasons<sup>[13]</sup>.

One of the reasons for the popularity of online study abroad programmes is that many of their schedules allow participating students to continue their daily activities, including part-time jobs, taking care of family members and accessing medical services, because their daily classes will end before evening<sup>[14]</sup>. It is also because the participating fees are much less than in-person programmes, especially because the students are not required travel to participate in the programme. Amongst Japanese universities' study abroad programmes, for example, the participation fee for a 27-day in-person language programme at the University of California at Chico is approximately US\$5,000, exclusive of personal expenses<sup>[15]</sup>. An 18-day Italian cultural study programme in Perugia is also approximately US\$5,000<sup>[16]</sup>. These prices are inclusive of airfare, accommodation and tuition. On the other hand, the University of Freiburg, Germany offers a 22-day online language programme at €700<sup>[17]</sup>. Peking University's 28-day online language programme is approximately US\$1,000<sup>[18]</sup>. Although online ones do not offer in-person interactive opportunities with local peers and people, this cost difference is attractive to many financially conscious students.

Once in-person study abroad programmes became impossible due to the worldwide spread of COVID-19, universities which were used to offering credited in-person study abroad programmes to their students, were forced to re-consider the criteria and conditions for granting credits to the students who completed

online study abroad programmes. For students, being able to acquire 1 or 2 credit(s) upon completion of online short study abroad programmes seems to be inviting, given the fact that in order to obtain 2 credits, you would need to successfully complete a one semester course. Nevertheless, it is not clear whether or not acquiring credits is the important decision-making factor in participating in an online versus in-person study abroad programme.

Documenting participating students' insights and educators' observations of students' reactions to online cultural exchange programme is valuable. This is especially true, because the motivation for cultural exchange collaboration between universities in different countries can be encouraged by evidence that irregular online cultural exchange programmes may be as meaningful as in-person ones.

### 3. The Study

This paper's task is to provide insights into challenges and lessons learned from an online cultural exchange programme between Japanese and Italian university students. This paper also aims to document the Japanese students' impressions and thoughts and researchers' observations over this online cultural exchange opportunity. It used collected answers from online anonymous Google Form questionnaires and online interviews.

The universities involved in this online cultural exchange programmes are Otsuma Women's University in Tokyo, Japan and University for Foreigners of Perugia in Umbria, Italy. These two universities concluded a Scientific and Cultural Cooperation Agreement in 2019. In this regard, Otsuma sent 5 students to Perugia for two weeks in Summer 2019 as a part of 18-day Italian cultural summer programme. Otsuma does not have any Italian language courses as either compulsory elective or elective at any proficiency level. The University for Foreigners of Perugia offers Japanese language courses at the beginners and intermediate levels which are taught by two native Japanese instructors.

This online cultural exchange programme was coordinated by the two universities, with two researchers, one each from these universities, who

served as volunteer moderators. The idea to host this online cultural exchange programme was proposed by a lead researcher of this study, a faculty member of the Japanese university, who later became a moderator of the programme. Although the Japanese university's 2020 summer cultural study programme at the Italian university was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher wished to offer a cultural study opportunity to her students. The idea was soon agreed and approved by the Italian university, as they were not able to accept as many Japanese students as in previous years, due to the pandemic, and which would have provided an opportunity for Japanese language students to interact with native Japanese students in Japanese language.

The online cultural exchange programme ran from December 2020 for a year, and was advertised on the Japanese university's website as well as UNIPA (online student assistance portal) (see Figure 3), which allowed only its students to login to find the Google Meet link to participate in the sessions. The students at the Italian university were invited by their Japanese lecturer, who also was a moderator of the programme. The programme had 44 one-hour online meeting sessions in the afternoon (Japan time) on weekday over a year. They were not held at a fixed time, and the times of the sessions varied during the course of the programme. This programme specifically intended to have cultural exchange opportunities in Japanese language so that even the Japanese students with the least confidence in their foreign language proficiency skills could participate.

The genres and topics discussed during the one-hour sessions were seasonal and timely (see Table 1 below). The researchers welcomed students' voluntary participation and they were encouraged to start the discussions.

Table 1. Discussion topics

Genres	Topics
Seasonal	Zapatone, cotechino, osechi-ryori, panettone, Hina-matsuri, San Valentino, Pasqua, Christmas, Carnevale, l'ora legale estiva, San Costanzo, vacation
Timely	Damages from WWII bombing, vaccination, International Women's Day

	and mimosa cakes (Festa della donna), Great East Japan earthquake, the Olympics
Political	General election, incompetent government, nation state, royal family, refugee
Work/Jobs	“Host club”, work-life balance, job hunting, siesta, vacation, commutation
Sports	Soccer, Euro Cup, volleyball, rugby, sumo, track and field, boxing, karate, judo
Food	Latteria, Strangozzi, Saizeriya, maritozzo, sushi-tozzo, tozzo-ing in Japan, pink potato, chestnut, Spaghetti Napolitano, pasta with ketchup, pizza
Beverage	Wine, craft beer, espresso, newly brewed sake, hard/soft/gas water, sambuca
School life	School rules, graduation, cafeteria, graduation thesis, international students
Tourism	Hot springs, Hokkaido, Perugia, Tokyo, Rome, Firenze, World heritage, Kyoto, agrotourism, diving at underwater archeological sites, tourist manners
Religious	Order of Friars Minor Capuchin, curse, spirits and soul, Shintoism, Catholicism, Buddhism, Christians in Japan, shrines, temples and churches
Linguistic	Onomatopoeia, scarso!, scarsa!!, greeting words, honorific and curse words
Music	Italian rock, opera, J-pop, national anthem, kyogen, Karaoke, Perugia Jazz
Animals	Wild birds, eels, frog call, deers in Nara, pets, national animal, stray dogs
Clothing	Kimono, yukata, Costume di Scanno, zendàle, Fadedda, hanten, jimbei

#### 4. Participants and their comments

The Japanese and Italian universities have had 44 online cultural exchange sessions over a year from December 2020. In total, 222 Japanese students and 156 Italian students participated; however, many of them were returning students, who would have participated in previous online sessions. The Japanese proficiency level of the Italian students was beginners. Some of them have studied in Japan for a year, but they lost confidence in speaking Japanese. When needed, the moderator/researcher acted as interpreter. The Japanese students had various backgrounds, and none have learned Italian language before.

The following are the questions and answers from the Japanese university's participating students. The questionnaire had very low response rate at 5.9%; therefore, the researcher tried to interview as many of the participating students as possible.

##### (1) Why did you participate in the online cultural exchange programme with students from University for Foreigners of Perugia?

In Figure 1, it is clear that Japanese students' interests in Italian language, culture and people were the major source of motivation to participate. Moreover, for the students who lost their privilege to go to university to attend classes or make new friends in person under the COVID-19 pandemic, they were in dire need to socialise with anyone online using digital devices.

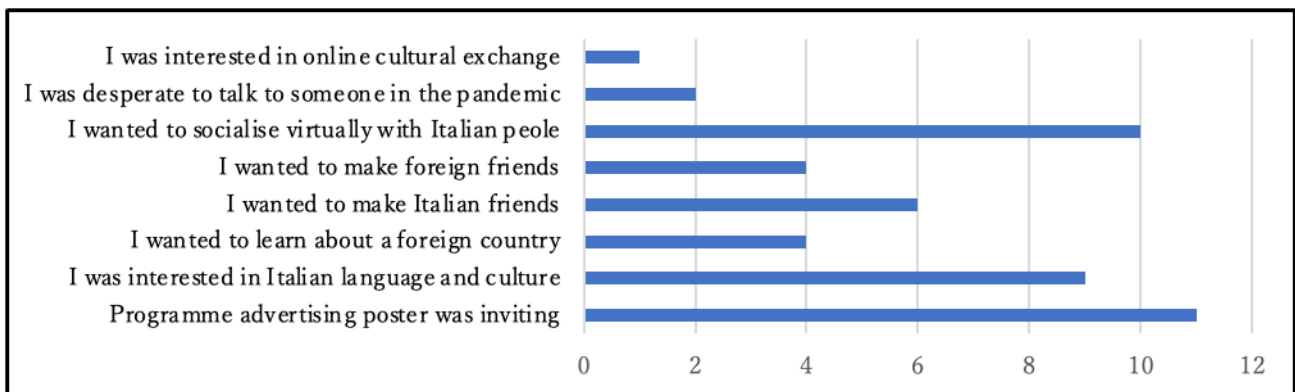


Figure 1. Why did you participate in the online cultural exchange programme with students from University for Foreigners of Perugia?

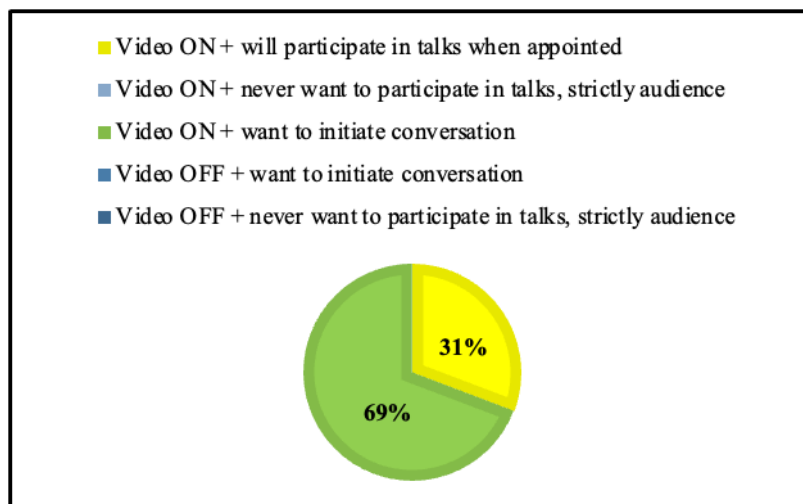


Figure 2. Participating style

## (2) Participating style

Figure 2 indicates that many of the participating students were interested in initiating conversation during the sessions. However, it is notable that more than 30% of the participating students were not interested in aggressively being engaged in conversation, and preferred to sit in and listen to what other participating students talked about. These two types of students resulted in the sessions being enjoyable, which was evident in the muted laughter and smiling faces, as seen in the Google Meet meeting room windows.

It is true that some of the participating students did not turn on the video throughout the sessions. The advertising posters for this cultural exchange programme did not mention whether the students were asked to turn on the video to participate. During the sessions, some participating students have asked whether they should have turned on the video like others do. The sessions never forced the participating students to turn on their videos; however, if asked, the researchers told the participating students to show their faces only if they can. Even though it was totally acceptable that the students did not initiate talks, because this was a cultural exchange programme, not an Italian cultural lecture, the students were expected to show some respect and interact with each other. When introducing themselves, it was rather impolite not to turn on their videos.

## (3) Any Italian words you learned?

The followings are the Italian words students wrote down (as they wrote) [researcher's memo]:

*Japanese, スプマンテ[Spumante], ラウーロ [l'alloro], マロッキオ[Malocchio], カプチーノ[Cappucino], ウンブリア[Umbria], Perugia, settimana, Coda di aragosta, Mi sono innamorato la prima vista, ciao, シー[si], ノ[no], Graze, Buongiorno, Buonasera, Arrivederc, Prego, Scusi, Per favore, Ho capito, biglietteria, Come sta?, buono, bravissimo, コジ[cosi], calcio, scarso*

These words written down by the students show that a vast range of topics were discussed in the cultural exchange programme. The Japanese participating students heard Italian words during the sessions that they did not know. They did not stop the flowing conversations to ask for their spelling, instead they wrote down the Italian words in English or Japanese phonetic spelling.

## (4) Your experience of participating in this cultural exchange programme feeds you in a way....

- I learned Italian mannerisms so that I would not be rude or impolite when I travel to Italy;
- It would be helpful as a reference for the course to introduce Japan to foreign people;
- It was interesting to socialise with foreigners. Definitely a good experience;

- I would like to get a job in the field of urban development in the future, and I am sure this experience destroyed the stereotype I had to be a considerate developer;
- I learned how to make comparisons between different cultures. No culture is better than others. They are just different. I found being different is interesting;
- When I travel to Italy in near future, I would like to visit monasteries;
- My wish to visit Italy became clearer and stronger;
- I want to start learning Italian language and Italian history;
- When I ever visit Italy, I try not to order too many dishes at a restaurant;
- Since I joined this programme, I started learning Italian language and watching Italian films. I used to watch Hollywood films all the time. This programme has broadened my views;
- It has motivated me to learn other languages to communicate better with people from all over the world;
- It helped broaden my views, and reduce my fear to speak to foreigners in Japan.

##### (5) The most interesting topic was....

- Maritozzo and “tozzo”-ing in Japan. Maritozzo evolution. Sushi-tozzo. Seasonal progressive maritozzo for example, pistachio maritozzo, strawberry maritozzo, lemon maritozzo. So innovative;
- What to bring from Japan to Italy, from Italy to Japan;
- Beauty salons in Japan and Italy. Services, shampooing, hair cut technique, different hairs;
- Table manners: toasting, chopsticks, eating spaghetti, eating pizza, females pouring wine;
- How to make cotechino, where to buy cotechino in Summer. KFC as Christmas dinner;
- Naming babies and Christian Saints;
- Physical education classes at schools, and extracurricular sports club activities;

- When Italian students showed us the scenery outside their windows;
- The real Italian foods that Saizeriya has /does not have. Japanese Italian. Spaghetti Napolitano;
- Italian seafood cooking recipes with garlic and tomato. Cooking fish in Japan> sashimi, grill, stew fried;
- How to deal with evil spirits. When people die, what happens next?;
- Differences in north, south, east, west, and middle parts of Italy and Japan.



The advertisement notice is titled "大妻女子大学 & イタリア・ペルー・ジャ外国人大学 オンライン交流会 in 日本語" (Online Exchange Event in Japanese between Otsuma Women's University and International University of Perugia, Italy, and Peru). It features four images: the Fontana del Gallo in Rome, the Duomo di Siena, a bowl of pasta, and the interior of a church. The text provides details about the event dates (January 5, 8, 19, 22, 26, and 29), times (17:00-18:00 for Japan, 9:00-10:00 for Italy), and the use of Google Meet. It also mentions that the event is for students of Japanese and Italian universities and includes topics like self-introductions, student life, and Japanese culture.

Figure 3. The advertising notice in January 2021, International Center, Otsuma Women's University

##### (6) Free comments

- I knew where Italy was located, but I did not know much about it. This programme has made me want to learn more about Italy;
- Very convenient schedule, very good that no-registration needed to participate;
- I was very nervous at first, because I had never participated in this kind of cultural exchange session. But the sessions were very welcoming,

*and the researchers asked me questions when I really wanted to initiate the talk. The researchers were very attentive. I am very grateful for that;*

- *The “Italian” things I have done were, I sang an Italian song in music class and ate Italian food at Saizeriya. I wish I could have told the Italian students that these were what Japanese students know about Italy in Japan;*
- *I started having a wish to meet people not only from Italy but from all over the world;*
- *One hour flies so fast. I wish the sessions were longer, but 60 minutes may be enough for others;*
- *I was so afraid that I might not be able to join the conversation. I was relieved that it was ok just to listen to what other students were talking about;*
- *I love cooking and sometimes I cook Italian. I would like to learn Italian sweets recipes;*
- *I sincerely appreciate the precious opportunity to meet Italian students virtually when I cannot meet Japanese students in-person;*
- *At first I thought it might have been challenging for me to join, because I was not good at speaking English. But the researcher explained it was not about English learning, but having fun, and sharing and learning cultural differences and similarities with Italian students in Japanese. I praise myself for deciding to participate. It was fun and I learned a lot;*
- *I was very happy with these casual sessions. They were good, because I did not need to speak English;*
- *Thank you for appointing and waiting for me to voice my idea when I hesitated to start the conversation.*

#### **(7) Any suggestions to improve the programme?**

- *My concern is that not many Japanese students join more than 2 consecutive sessions, therefore we do not improve the stability of participating members. Some of the participating students did not say a word in a*

*session. Please give them a chance to say at least a word, especially if it is their first time participating.*

#### **5. Observations of the researchers**

##### **(1) Polite students**

Although the researcher appreciated all the positive responses, it is regrettable that there was only one critical comment from a student, which would assist with improvements. As one student pointed out as in 4. (7), the researchers noticed that some students did not say a word in the sessions. Also the researchers have noticed not many students attended the sessions regularly. However, that was expected to happen. Although the researchers agreed that all the students should have had a chance to participate verbally if they wished, it is one of the purposes of this programme, that the students are free to determine their own level of participation in the sessions. This was because not all the students were willing to actively voice their opinion in extracurricular online sessions. It was totally acceptable for participating students just to sit and listen to the on-going discussion for 60 minutes quietly.

##### **(2) Video cameras on or off (see Figure 4)**

It was indeed within our expectation to have absolutely quiet participating students, but some incidences/cases were quite surprising. Although it is well documented that the students who do not turn on their cameras during online classes despite the plea from teachers to turn them on <sup>[19][20][21][22]</sup>, a similar experience shared by the researchers for regular classes, the researchers never ever imagined that the some of the participating students did not think that it was impolite not to show their faces when they greet others for the first time online, especially when all the others did. There could have been many reasons for not turning on their video cameras. For example, the students might have been in a public space or untidy room, or their internet connection might have been too slow to use their videos. Nevertheless, this concern was also shared by many participating students, who seemed a bit surprised and in some cases offended, to find a black window in a Google Meet meeting room.

### (3) Participating environment

One of the expectations of the researchers was that all the students would have joined from a quiet and undisturbed private room. Yet that was not always the case. There was an incident when the researchers became uneasy and nervous about the environment, from where one particular student joined, with her TV on loud and her laundry hanging all over. The sound of a loud TV was successfully muted upon request from the researcher; however, the student did not seem to know how to change or blur the Google Meet background, or did not seem to care whether her surroundings were disclosed. Actually, many of the students joined the programme from their own private space, such as their own room, living room, dormitory, Karaoke room, empty classroom and cafeteria. Sometimes enthusiastic students joined from the commuting train and gymnasium. When a graduate joined as a guest, she joined from her office. The researchers also hosted some sessions from the park, a COVID-19 vaccination venue and the neighbouring train station, which were favourably accepted by Japanese and Italian students.

As the cultural exchange programme was held online, many students were not necessarily based where their universities were located. Some of the participants joined from various places in Japan or Italy. One student participated from her home in Hokkaido. One from Tochigi and the other from the southern part of Chiba. Because all of their university classes were held online, they did not move to Tokyo. Some of the students from Italy participated from Lecce, where they were registered to get vaccinated. Even a researcher joined from Kagoshima and the other researcher joined from a quarantine room in Tokyo. The COVID-19 pandemic surely limited our movement, but gave us the opportunity to experience something new and unusual which we did not have a chance to experience before the virus came along.

### (4) Why/how the students participated

The motivation and interests of the students who chose to participate in extracurricular online cultural exchange programme were varied. Most of the students were so considerate to others that they paid a great deal

of attention and waited for those who seemed too shy to unmute and start talking. On the other hand, some participating students did not show any interest in what others were discussing. It was obvious that they prepared a list of topics they wished to talk about in the sessions beforehand. While that was not a problem, they tried to complete the list, irrespective of the circumstances, including the flow of the discussion, resulting in an unfavourable situation. The outcome was a series of unrelated topics of questions and short answers, which continued for a good length of time.

For instance, during a session which was held on March 11, the majority of the participating students were on the topic of earthquakes, sharing a sense of mourning, because it was the date that the Great East Japan earthquake occurred in 2011. They were talking about casualties, reconstruction, damage to the historical and natural heritage sites, and disaster prevention. As Italy is also an earthquake prone country, the students from both sides had a lot to share and discuss. Then, all of a sudden, one student unmuted and blithely asked a question about a wine opener of a high-end Italian brand. The rest of the participants, including the researchers had paused for a second and sought the intent of that question about the particular wine opener. As soon as the rest of the participating students realised that that was an unrelated, random question, they moved on to the topic of the particular wine opener without concluding the engaging discussion on earthquakes. New, unrelated topics followed.

### (5) Students' generosity, patience, and compassion

This cultural exchange programme was held in Japanese; however, Japanese students were fortunate to have an opportunity to listen to a generous amount of Italian. This was because many of the Italian students were not fluent enough to express themselves freely, and the researcher stepped in and acted as interpreter. It was encouraging and inspiring to watch Italian students try hard to speak Japanese. Sometimes it took time to complete a sentence in Japanese, but when they did, the students were happily applauded in muted videos. The Japanese students never pointed out any Japanese grammatical errors to the Italian students,



such as postpositional particles, tenses, and counter suffixes, nor rushed the Italian students to complete sentences when they were constructing sentences. The Japanese students were generous, patient and compassionate towards the Italian students learning Japanese. The researcher was in hope that the Japanese

students would be inspired by the Italian students to learn other languages, and they would find that making grammatical mistakes was not embarrassing when learning a language.

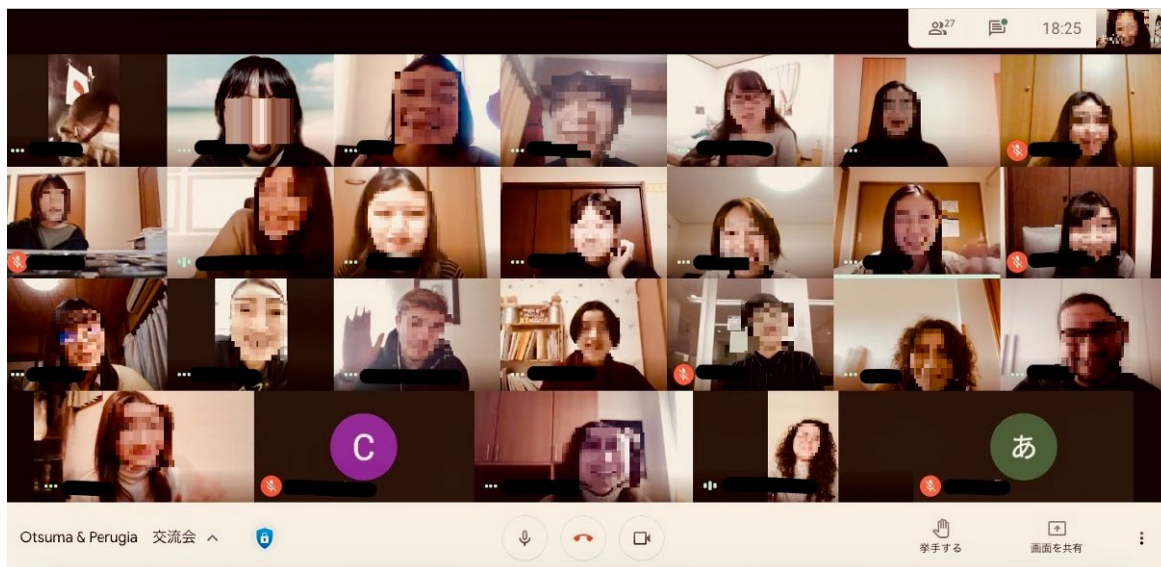


Figure 4. Participating students on 18 December 2020, screenshot by M. Ito, Otsuma Women's University

## 6. Reflections on the case study findings

Having an online cultural exchange programme with Italian students has affected Japanese students positively. At first, it was questioned by the Japanese side, whether having an online cultural exchange programme with an Italian university in Japanese was meaningful for Japanese students, as the Japanese university does not offer any Italian courses. Some commented that offering an online cultural exchange programme in English would be more beneficial to students. In spite of all these concerns and worries, overall comments from participating students indicate they were satisfied with the programme as it was.

Little has been done to examine the effectiveness and attractiveness of having English as a common language for cultural exchange programmes which target Japanese students. This is especially so for a no-registration-needed, online extracurricular programme. The main purpose of cultural exchange is to acknowledge and respect other cultures, and as a

reflection of the process to learn other cultures, it is expected to foster acute awareness and a deep understanding of your own culture. Cultural exchange can of course be done in English, but it can also be done in other languages. Cultural exchange programmes in English would be attractive to enthusiastic English learners, but it would be discouraging and distressing for students with limited fluency and/or interest in English. Cultural exchange programmes need not risk being exclusively for students who are fortunate to have considerable fluency and/or interest in English. In the case of the cultural exchange programme which this research focused on, if English was used as the working language of the programme, fewer students would have participated. In addition, as the average level of most of the Japanese students' English proficiency is not that high, the programme would not have been full of laughter and deep discussions as it successfully was in Japanese.

Learning English is important; however, it should be noted that there are a number of students who would not be interested in using English in extracurricular activities. Before entering a university, some students have lost interest in learning English and have also lost confidence in utilizing English to communicate with others. Not all of the students are interested in improving their English. Forcing those students to use English for cultural exchange programmes would take away opportunities to learn about other cultures and meet exciting people. Cultural exchange programmes should not always be about English learning, but should be about sharing and learning about similarities and differences of the culture, and learning about self, in a comfortable setting. If communicating in English would encourage participating students to study English more, that is inspiring. However, there could also be a cultural exchange programme in Japanese, that would be comfortable and fun for Japanese students who are interested more in learning about others and themselves, in Japanese.

## 7. Methodological reflections

The study was subject to common methodological limitations, including a limited sample and social desirability bias of both sides: the researchers and the research subjects, the participating students of the online cultural exchange programme. The other limitation which this study experienced was self-regulated students' politeness and consideration. Specifically, those students' questionnaire responses that included absolutely no negative comments about the programme or the researchers. The researchers were well aware there was a large room for improvement for the programme, especially because this programme was the first attempt for the researchers as well as the universities to provide students with an online cultural exchange opportunity. Therefore, the questionnaire responses might not have been able to grasp the participating students' real motivation and openness in writing about their own experiences, although they provided sufficient amount of information on what the participating students enjoyed.

Other approaches, observations and interviews,

contributed to deepening our understanding. Observation and unbiased analyses would add objective evaluation on the participating students' learning and needs, as well as an assessment of the online cultural exchange programme. The researchers agreed on these approaches since students' learning occurred not only in an online Google Meet meeting room, but also in out-of-session solitary contemplation. This study did not conduct interviews with all the participating students, as some of the students declined to be interviewed. More thorough interviews with the participating students should have been conducted to further clarify, elaborate and uncover "how" and "why" on their questionnaire responses. Nevertheless, the combination of questionnaire responses, observations and interviews was able to unpack the participating students' attitude and engagement in learning. Hence, even though the sample size of questionnaire responses is small, this study was able to illuminate how the online cultural exchange programme successfully impacted students' learning.

## Acknowledgments

We would like to express appreciation to Otsuma and Perugia students who participated in the online cultural exchange programme this paper discusses. Our gratitude also goes to Ms. A. Israel for her usual support.

This work was supported by Institute of Human Culture Studies, Otsuma Women's University (Grant Number # K2105).

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**Abstract (Japanese)**

新型コロナウイルスのまん延により、大学や教育者はオンラインによる学習機会提供を余儀なくされた。本稿は、日本とイタリアの大学生による、日本語オンライン文化交流プログラムから得られた課題と教訓を明らかにするものである。本稿で扱うケーススタディは、2020年12月から1年を超える期間中に44回開催された、自由参加式のオンライン交流会における日本人学生の学習態度の記録を目的に行われた。学生がオンライン交流会に参加した主な動機は、イタリア語、文化、人々に対する関心であることは明らかである。一方で、コロナ禍で人的交流に飢えていたために、オンライン交流会に参加した者がいたというのも注目すべき点である。さらに学生の中には、積極的に会話に参加したがった者だけでなく、発言を希望せずに他の学生の話聞くことだけを好み参加した者も見られた。文化交流プログラムは、学生が他者や自分自身について学んだり、他者に対する寛大な心や忍耐、思いやりを育んだりするための心地良い空間を提供した。

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Key words (Japanese) : オンライン, 文化交流プログラム, 日本語学習者, 異文化理解

(Received May 31, 2023; accepted June 22, 2023)



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