

Study on Japanese University Students' Awareness and Interest toward Multicultural Exchange

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Abstract—The population of foreign residents in Yokohama City has increased annually, surpassing 100,000 in 2019. A Yokohama City questionnaire survey revealed that most foreign residents expressed satisfaction with their quality of life in the city. The present study aimed to ascertain the extent of Japanese university students' awareness of and interest in multicultural exchange in Yokohama. The results indicate that Japanese university students have a limited understanding of Yokohama City's multicultural context. Furthermore, the findings suggest that Japanese university students have limited experience with multicultural exchange. However, the results also demonstrate their keen interest in other cultures and eagerness to participate in multicultural events or programs.

Keywords—multicultural exchange, multicultural coexistence, multicultural awareness, multicultural society

I. INTRODUCTION

The number of foreign residents in Yokohama City has increased year after year, surpassing 100,000 in 2019, which is a 30 percent increase compared to 2014. Consequently, Yokohama City now has the second largest foreign resident population in Japan, after Osaka City. Yokohama City now has a population of approximately 132 million, including 47 thousand Chinese, 14 thousand Vietnamese, 13 thousand Korean, 10 thousand Nepalese, and 40 thousand from other countries and regions.

A. Yokohama City's International Strategies

To promote a multicultural society in which Japanese and foreign residents develop mutual understanding and collaborate with empathy, Yokohama City enacted its International Strategy in 2016 [1]. In pursuit of this strategy, Yokohama International Affairs Bureau has released "Yokohama's Multicultural City Development Guidelines: Achieving a Creative Society" in 2017 [2]. According to the Guideline, Yokohama City adopted three policy directions: the creation of opportunities for foreign residents to be recognized and empowered, the improvement of hospitality so that anybody can live and work in the city, and the expansion of connections to address diverse issues foreign residents face. The City's International Strategy was revised in 2021 [3], with the aim of fostering an inclusive society and empowering the next generation to bridge cities and people, engaging dynamic foreign organizations and individuals to grow Yokohama's economy, and enhance cooperation to address global issues and promote peace and prosperity.

Various efforts aligned with the International Strategies have been made by the City and pertinent agencies. The Public Relations Division, Civic Affairs Bureau, City of Yokohama published the "2018 Living Guide [4]" in both English and Plan Japanese. The Yokohama Foreign

Residents Information Center has been offering complimentary on-site and telephone consultations. The Yokohama Association for International Communications and Exchanges has been offering foreign residents the opportunity to learn Japanese and to interact with Japanese residents.

B. Current Situation and Issues of Multicultural Exchange in Yokohama City

Yokohama International Affairs Bureau conducted a questionnaire survey to investigate the perspectives and needs of its foreign residents [5]. A total of 1,764 foreign residents participated in the survey with a response rate of 35.3 percent. Results of the survey revealed that 64.1 percent of the foreign residents live a satisfactory life in Yokohama, 74.1 percent are eager to participate in local community activities. 76.2 percent of the participants replied that they want to keep living in Yokohama City, and 80.8 percent mentioned that Yokohama is a city that is easy to live in as it has good and convenient transportation.

Conversely, 29.8 percent of the participants indicated that they encountered language barriers. A significant majority of foreign residents, ranging from 60 to 70 percent, reported that they did not possess Japanese language skills upon their arrival in Japan. Furthermore, 73.1 percent of these individuals expressed a desire to learn Japanese if they had a chance and if it was free of charge. Despite the circumstances, only 41.7 percent of the respondents mentioned that they are studying Japanese, and amongst them, 68.2 percent replied that they are currently studying Japanese by themselves. Moreover, 60.3 percent of the respondents replied that they gather information in the Japanese language, and only 38.0 percent reported that they consult a Japanese friend when they are in trouble.

The results of the questionnaire survey indicate that foreign residents are satisfied with their lives in Yokohama City, but they have issues communicating in Japanese. To support these foreign residents, it is essential to investigate their perspectives and needs. However, it is also necessary to identify the attitudes and needs of Japanese residents, especially youngsters. Therefore, the objective of this study is to assess Japanese university students' awareness and interest in multicultural exchange.

II. PURPOSE

The current study aims to identify Japanese university students' awareness and interest toward multicultural exchange. The following four Research Questions (RQ) will be examined in this study.

- RQ1: To what extent are Japanese university students aware of multicultural exchange in Yokohama City?
- RQ2: To what extent have Japanese university students experienced multicultural exchange?
- RQ3: What are Japanese university students' attitudes toward multicultural exchange?
- RQ4: What are Japanese university students' needs for multicultural exchange?

III. METHODS

The current study was conducted from June 30th, 2021, to July 20th.

A. Participants

The participants were 103 Japanese first and second-year university students (ages 18 to 21) majoring in English language and culture.

B. Questionnaire

A questionnaire was developed to assess Japanese university students' awareness and interest in multicultural exchange. The questionnaire consisted of 20 items: four items that assess participants' awareness of multiculturalism in Yokohama City, seven items that assess students' experience of multicultural exchange, five items that assess students' attitudes toward multicultural exchange, and four items that assess students' needs toward multicultural exchange. The items were developed from questionnaires designed by Soja City [6], Hamamatsu City [7], Kyotango City [8], and Urayasu City [9], which conducted questionnaire surveys targeting their Japanese residents.

IV. RESULTS

Among the 103 participants, 101 responses were collected, indicating a response rate of 98.06 percent. The results of the 101 responses will be presented hereafter.

A. Participants' Profile

Table 1 shows the breakdown of participants by gender.

Profile of participants		F	%
Gender	Female	45	44.55%
	Male	54	53.47%
	N/A	2	1.98%
	Total	101	100.00%

Results show that 44.55 percent of the participants were female students, while 53.47 percent were male.

B. Awareness of Multiculturalism in Yokohama City

Participants' awareness of multicultural exchange in Yokohama was evaluated by a set of four items (see Table 2).

The results suggest that approximately half of the participants are aware of the number of foreign residents in Yokohama City (46.53 percent) and the country of origin of these residents (44.55 percent). The majority of the participants replied that were familiar with the term

“multicultural coexistence” (89.14 percent), however, only half of them could define the term (51.49 percent).

Table 2. Participants' awareness of multiculturalism

1. How many foreign residents do you think are in Yokohama City? (SA)	
a. 1,000	1.98%
b. 10,000	39.60%
c. 100,000 (correct answer)	46.53%
d. 500,000	11.88%
2. Do you know the following multicultural exchange services or centers managed by Yokohama city? Have you ever used them? (SA)	
a. Yokohama Association for International Communications and Exchanges	
I don't know it.	93.07%
I know, but I have never used it.	6.93%
I have used it.	0.00%
b. International Lounge (Yokohama)	
I don't know it.	80.20%
I know, but I have never used it.	18.81%
I have used it.	0.99%
c. Yokohama Japanese Language Support Center	
I don't know it.	90.10%
I know, but I have never used it.	9.90%
I have used it.	0.00%
d. Yokohama Foreign Residents Information Center	
I don't know it.	94.06%
I know, but I have never used it.	5.94%
I have used it.	0.00%
e. Yokohama International Festa	
I don't know it.	68.32%
I know, but I have never joined it.	29.70%
I joined it.	1.98%
3. Which country do you think is home to the largest number of Yokohama residents? (SA)	
f. China (correct answer)	44.55%
h. the Philippines	21.78%
a. the USA	11.88%
c. South Korea	5.94%
j. Vietnam	3.96%
4. Have you ever heard of the term “multicultural coexistence”? Do you know the meaning? (SA)	
a. I know the term and I also know the meaning.	51.49%
b. I know the term but I don't know the meaning.	37.62%
c. I don't know the term.	10.89%

The results indicate that almost no participants are unaware of and have used multicultural exchange services or centers managed by Yokohama City. Only 6.93 percent of the students reported that they know Yokohama Association for International Communications and Exchanges, 18.81 percent replied that they know International Lounge (Yokohama), 9.90 percent answered that they know Yokohama Japanese Language Support Center, 5.94 percent said that they know Yokohama Foreign Residents Information Center, and all the participants replied that they have never used the facilitations. While the Yokohama International Festa was known by 29.70 percent of the students, only 1.98 percent of them participated in the event.

C. Experience in Multicultural Exchange

Participants' experience of multicultural exchange was assessed by a set of seven items (see Table 3).

Table 3. Participants' experience of multicultural exchange

5. Which multicultural activities held by Yokohama City have you participated in? (MA)	
a. Multicultural experiences	2.97%
b. Music or dance	7.92%
c. Foreign language learning	4.95%
d. Sports activities	3.96%
e. Regional exchange	5.94%
f. Others	0.00%
g. Never	76.24%
6. Which multicultural activities held by other cities have you participated in? (MA)	
a. Multicultural experiences	9.90%
b. Music or dance	8.91%
c. Foreign language learning	10.89%
d. Sports activities	8.91%
e. Regional exchange	8.91%
f. Others	1.98%
g. Never	64.36%
7. How many times have you participated in multicultural activities? (SA)	
Average: 1.75 times	
8. How often do you encounter foreign residents in your daily life? (SA)	
a. Less than once a week	50.50%
b. About once a week	25.74%
c. Two or three times a week	15.84%
d. Four times a week or more	7.92%
9. In what settings do you typically interact with foreign residents on a daily basis? (MA)	
a. At part-time job	44.55%
b. At university	50.50%
c. In the neighborhood	7.92%
d. At a language school	0.99%
e. At a multicultural event	0.99%
f. Others	9.90%
10. With which foreign countries do you interact in your daily life? (MA)	
a. the USA	44.55%
f. China	22.77%
h. the Philippines	14.85%
k. Others	14.85%
c. South Korea	9.90%
j. Vietnam	8.91%
11. Have you ever experienced any of the following cultural incidents? (MA)	
a. Value-related issues	17.82%
b. Language issues	42.57%
c. Religious issues	5.94%
d. Customary issues	4.95%
e. Lifestyle issues	0.00%
f. Moral issues	15.84%

g. Others	0.99%
h. No	29.70%

The results suggest that the majority of the participants have never participated in multicultural activities organized by Yokohama City (76.24 percent) or other cities (64.36 percent). Participants replied that they have joined an average of 1.75 multicultural activities per person.

The results also indicate that half of the participants (49.50 percent) interact with foreign residents more than once a week in their daily lives. Among the participants, 50.50 percent mentioned that they meet foreign residents at part-time jobs, while 44.55 percent said that they meet foreign residents at university. 44.55 percent of the participants replied that they meet foreign residents from the USA, while 22.77 percent mentioned that they meet residents from China, and 14.85 percent said that they meet residents from the Philippines. Furthermore, 42.57 percent of the participants mentioned that they have experienced language issues, 17.82 percent experienced value issues, and 15.84 percent experienced moral issues, while 29.70 percent replied that they have never experienced a cultural incident.

Cross tabulation was conducted to capture the relationships between the variables that refer to participants' multicultural experiences in their daily life. Consequently, it became clear that students who interact with foreign residents more than once a week (50 participants) tend to meet foreign residents at university (60.00 percent) or at part-time jobs. These students also reported meeting residents from the USA (60.00 percent) and the Philippines (22.00 percent). According to the findings, 46.00 percent of respondents reported that they encountered language issues, and 20.00 percent indicated that they had faced value-related challenges. Notably, 28.00 of the respondents reported that they have never experienced cultural incidents. In contrast, students who rarely interact with foreign residents (51 participants) replied that they meet foreign residents at part-time jobs (47.06 percent) and at university (41.18 percent), and they meet residents from the USA (29.41 percent) and China (27.45 percent). Amongst the participants, 39.22 percent mentioned that they have experienced language issues, and 21.57 percent had encountered moral issues, while 31.37 had never experienced cultural incidents.

D. Attitudes toward Multicultural Exchange

Participants' attitudes toward multicultural exchange were assessed by a set of seven items (see Table 4).

Table 4. Participants' attitudes toward multicultural exchange

12. What of the following aspects do you consider to be essential for facilitating multicultural exchanges? (MA)	
a. Knowledge of each other's language	49.50%
b. Knowledge of each other's customs	45.54%
c. Knowledge of each other's culture	51.49%
d. Respecting and thinking about each other	61.39%
e. Willingness to interact with each other	39.60%
f. Unbiased mind	44.55%
g. Others	1.98%
13. Which of the following aspects do you think are the advantages of multicultural exchange? (MA)	
a. We can learn other languages and cultures.	83.17%

b. We can make friends from foreign countries.	53.47%
c. We can activate our local community.	13.86%
d. We can interact and help each other.	27.72%
e. Others	1.98%
f. Nothing	1.98%

14. Which of the following aspects do you think are the barriers to multicultural exchange? (MA)

a. Understanding each other's language	63.37%
b. Understanding each other's culture	34.36%
c. Understanding each other's lifestyle	37.62%
d. Lack of opportunities	32.67%
e. Others	1.98%
f. Nothing	0.99%

15. What recommendations would you offer to Yokohama City to facilitate multicultural exchange? (MA)

a. Hold Japanese language classes	36.63%
b. Facilitate consultation desks	36.63%
c. Hold intercultural understanding classes	24.75%
d. Publish official documents in several foreign languages	16.83%
e. Deliver information in "Plain Japanese"	40.59%
f. Facilitate opportunities for multicultural exchange	30.69%
g. Foster volunteers to support foreign residents	20.79%
h. Disseminate rules of the local society	28.71%
i. Announce disaster prevention and emergency information	28.71%
e. Others	0.99%
f. Nothing	2.97%

16. What strategies do you consider effective in fostering mutual understanding with foreign residents? (MA)

a. Language learning programs	67.33%
b. Multicultural food programs	42.57%
c. Traditional culture programs	41.58%
d. Regional/Local exchange programs	29.70%
e. Overseas programs	23.76%
f. Others	0.00%

The results indicate that the participants believe there is a need for knowledge of foreign languages and cultures, as well as multicultural mindsets, to cope with the challenges posed by a multicultural society. 61.39 percent of the participants indicated that respecting and considering each other is of importance in a multicultural exchange. Meanwhile, 51.49 percent emphasized the significance of knowledge regarding each other's culture, and 49.50 percent underscored the importance of language proficiency.

Furthermore, 83.17 percent of the participants noted that the benefit of multicultural exchange is the opportunity to learn other languages and cultures, while 53.47 percent indicated that it facilitates the establishment of international friendships. Conversely, 63.37 percent of the participants identified language differences as the primary barrier to multicultural exchange, while 37.62 percent cited lifestyle differences as the main obstacle.

To promote multicultural exchange, participants suggested that Yokohama City should deliver information to foreign residents in "Plain Japanese" (40.59 percent), hold Japanese classes (36.63 percent), establish consultation desks (36.63 percent), and facilitate opportunities for multicultural exchange (30.69 percent).

Furthermore, the participants mentioned that language learning programs (67.33 percent), multicultural food programs (42.57 percent), and traditional culture programs (41.58 percent) are effective in deepening mutual understanding with foreign residents.

E. Needs toward Multicultural Exchange

Participants' needs toward multicultural exchange were assessed by a set of seven items (see Table 5).

Table 5. Participants' needs toward multicultural exchange

17. Are you interested in other cultures? (SA)	
a. Yes	94.06%
b. No	5.94%
18. Are you interested in facilitating mutual understanding with foreign residents through active interaction?	
a. Yes	77.23%
b. No	22.77%
19. Which of the following multicultural events do you want to participate in? (MA)	
a. Intercultural experience events	47.52%
b. Music or dance event	38.61%
c. Foreign language learning programs	42.57%
d. Sports activities	33.66%
e. Regional/Local exchange	8.91%
f. Others	0.00%
g. None	7.92%
20. Which of the following multicultural community support activity do you want to take part in?	
a. Teach Japanese to foreign residents	46.53%
b. Do translation or interpretation service	29.70%
c. Teach Japanese cultures and customs to foreign residents	48.51%
d. Teach sports and customs to foreign residents	17.82%
e. Teach sports and customs to foreign residents	5.94%
f. Support newcomers to Japan	30.69%
g. Support children who have roots in foreign countries	13.86%
h. Look after children who have roots in foreign countries	11.88%
i. Support elderly and disabled foreign residents	3.96%
j. Organize or support a local event	2.97%
k. Others	0.00%
l. None	5.94%

The results of the questionnaire survey suggest that the vast majority of the participants expressed a keen interest in other cultures (94.06 percent), and a significant proportion of them are enthusiastic about interacting with foreign residents to foster mutual understanding (77.23 percent).

Nearly half of the participants indicated a desire to participate in intercultural experience events, with 47.52 percent of those respondents expressing a preference for foreign language learning programs. Furthermore, 48.51 percent of the participants indicated a desire to support foreign residents by imparting cultural knowledge and customs, while 46.53 percent expressed a commitment to teaching the Japanese language to foreign residents.

V. DISCUSSIONS

The purpose of the current study was to identify the extent of Japanese university students' awareness and interest

toward multicultural exchange. A questionnaire survey was conducted to examine the four research questions in this study.

Regarding the first research question, “To what extent are Japanese university students aware of multicultural exchange in Yokohama City?” the results of the questionnaire survey suggest that the majority of the participants are familiar with the term “multicultural coexistence”. Additionally, approximately half of the participants are aware of Yokohama City’s multicultural context. However, they are not aware of the available multicultural services and multicultural facilities in Yokohama City.

Regarding the second research question, “To what extent have Japanese university students experienced multicultural exchange?”, the results of the study indicate that most of the participants have never participated in a multicultural activity held in Yokohama City as well as other cities. Additionally, only half of the participants reported that they meet foreign residents more than once a week in their daily life, with most encountering foreign residents at part-time jobs or universities. Given that all of the participants were university students, many participants replied that they had encountered foreign residents from the USA, who were expected to serve as their English language teachers.

Regarding the third research question, “What are Japanese university students’ attitudes toward multicultural exchange?” the results of the study suggest that the participants believe that it is essential to acquire knowledge of foreign languages and cultures and to cultivate a multicultural mindset to facilitate interaction with foreign residents. Particularly, it was revealed that many participants consider that knowledge and understanding of foreign languages to be important for multicultural exchange. The participants also replied that language support and learning are necessary to promote multicultural exchange within the community.

Regarding the fourth research question, “What are Japanese university students’ needs for multicultural exchange?” the results of the study suggest that most of the participants expressed interest in foreign cultures and a strong desire to interact with foreign residents. Furthermore, 90.10 percent of the participants answered that they want to participate in some kind of multicultural event, and 94.06 percent of the participants mentioned that they want to take part in some kind of multicultural community support activity.

VI. CONCLUSION

Findings of the current study suggest that Japanese university students are not much aware of the multicultural situation of Yokohama City. More than 40 percent of the

participants think that there are less than 10 thousand foreign residents in Yokohama, which is one-tenth of the actual number. The most commonly expressed reason for this is that more than half of the participants meet foreign residents less than once a week. Furthermore, results indicate that Japanese university students don’t have much experience in multicultural exchange, although they are interested in other cultures and are eager to participate in multicultural events or programs.

In order to tackle this issue, efforts should be made to first let youngsters experience multicultural exchange with foreign residents. By doing so, youngsters will get to know foreign residents, and gradually, they will foster awareness of the multicultural situation in Yokohama.

The findings of this study provide suggestions for the promotion of multicultural exchange in Yokohama City. However, there are also some limitations. As the participants of this study were Japanese university students who major in English language and culture, using other samples from other locations, majors, ages, and prior experience of multicultural exchange is recommended for future generalization of this study’s findings.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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