

# Discussing Issues on International Collaborative Activities

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## **Abstract:**

The purpose of this paper is to discuss strength and weakness of international collaborative activities the author has experienced last ten years. When a group of people work together, they can gain different perspectives and ideas so that they can conduct unique collaborative activities. Furthermore, if they can involve in people in different countries, the activities would be more interesting. In addition, the Internet could internationally accelerate this kind of collaboration. They also could develop key competencies which were conceptualized by the DeSeCo Project. However, if they get involved in so different people working together, they may encounter difficulty to collaborate. Therefore, most people tend to avoid collaborative activities.

In the international collaborative activities, their social and historical backgrounds are diverse so that their way of thinking, management, and behavior, and communication styles are different. However, I would like to argue that the international collaborative activities are quite educational and informative so that we can get great benefit from it. I have been conducting the international collaborative activities with people in Syria, Myanmar, the Philippines, Cambodia, China, United States and Korea. The people in respective countries have different backgrounds. In this situation, we need to negotiate with each other how to come up with better collaboration. In this presentation, I would like to discuss strength and weakness of international collaborative research and activities and develop better understanding and fruitful outcomes of collaborative research.

**Keywords:** *international collaboration, key competency, active learning,*

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to analyze strength and weakness of international collaborative activities (ICA) the author has experienced last ten years. The ICA has been gaining popularity among university in the world. However, it is difficult to develop and continue the ICA for enhancing students learning. In this presentation, I would like to discuss how we can make the ICA successful in terms of students' learning outcomes.

Globalization has become prevail all over the world. It is not only the Internet and economy, but also any other areas, such as transportation, music, etc. Education is not an exception. Students move crossing national boarder to enroll in universities in other countries. The number of these students has been increasing in the world.

The number of Japanese students who study aboard, however, has been decreasing. They feel more comfortable staying in Japan rather than challenging to study aboard. If Japanese students avoid challenge to move themselves forward, their competency will not be well developed. The Japanese government, therefore, tried to encourage students to study aboard by providing scholarship and other incentives. Many universities in Japan shift to develop new program in which Japanese and foreign students study together to develop key competencies.

Key competencies are defined by DeSeCo project, OECD. The definition of key competencies includes not only knowledge and skills, but also flexibility, entrepreneurship and personal responsibility. The students need to draw various competencies according to different contexts. To develop the key competencies, they cannot make their competencies develop in the classroom context. They have to cross the border of classroom to move toward outside world. After moving to outer world, they put themselves into challenging situation so that they can develop their key competencies. I present my experience how I have been managing the international collaborative activities (ICA) last decade (Kubota 2013; Kubota & Kishi 2012).

## MY EXPERIENCES OF INERNATIONAL COLLABORATIVE ACTIVIRTIES

Since I have an experience of overseas volunteer for two years in the Philippines, I realize the importance of ICA. The table 1 shows the ICA in several countries and description of activities.

Table1: Contents of the international collaborative activities

| Name of collaborative activities                     | country         | Number of students | activities  | period         |
|--|-----------------|--------------------|---|----------------|
| Philippine fieldwork                                 | The Philippines | 13-20              | Junior students visit schools, universities, and NGOs to learn social and cultural contexts in the Philippines.   | 1994 - present |
| Lesson study for Palestinian refugee schools         | Syria           | 4 - 8              | Collaboration between Japanese students and educational board of Palestinian refugee organization to support lesson study conducted by Palestinian teachers | 2006 -2011     |
| In-service training for elementary teacher           | The Philippines | 7 -10              | Both Japanese and Filipino students provide in-service training how to use ICT tools in classroom at the elementary school.                                 | 2007 - present |
| Collaboration to support Cambodian rural communities | Cambodia        | 10 - 12            | Students provide picture books to rural elementary school library. Training was provided to elementary teachers to manage library activities.               | 2011 - present |
| Research on digital text book                        | Korea           | 3                  | Collaborative research to investigate digital textbook used in Korea.   | 2010 - 2011    |
| Collaborative research for thinking skills           | China           | 1                  | Collaborative research to disseminate new teaching methods with thinking tools.   | 2011 - present |

Each ICA has different objectives and activities so that we cannot simply compare with each other. For instance, some students participate in the Philippines fieldwork to go to the Philippines for two to three weeks during summer vacation. They visit elementary and secondary schools, universities, and NGOs, observe their activities, and exchange ideas and opinions. This is the first time for almost of all students to visit the country so that they feel fresh to see everything and are bewildered. The students stay at the Filipino home, and visit rural areas. They gradually understand the situation in the Philippines and become more interested in learning about the Philippines.

Both undergraduate and graduate students work together in some projects. Since the undergraduate students cannot communicate with foreign people, the graduate students lead them to work better. The undergraduate students imitate the graduate students' behaviors to learn managing activities and communicate with local people. They also work together with Cambodian students to work at a rural elementary school. The Cambodian students help Japanese to translate local language to English.

In case of collaboration research with China, Japanese graduate student introduces "thinking tools" to Chinese elementary school. The Japanese graduate students provide workshop for Chinese elementary school teachers to learn how to apply "thinking tools" for their lesson. This activity is collaborative research between Japan and China. Collaborative research is not easy, even among Japanese scholars. The ways of carrying research is different from each other. If we can conduct research with foreign researchers, we have to consider different not only in culture but also in ways of carrying our research method and ways scholars working together.

As I mentioned, each ICA has different feature so that I cannot develop a simple model we can apply any ICA. Rather, we have to develop a specific ICA model adjusting to unique context.

## **FINDINGS**

Through ICA Experiences, I found that the students developed their key competencies and actively participating in the ICA. After joining the ICA, some students went aboard to study for a year. Some other students went to developing countries as overseas volunteers. Some students gained self-confidence to present their paper at the international conference.

It is, however, not easy to carry out the ICA because individual teacher alone cannot manage this kind of activities. It is important to integrate the ICA into educational system. Like practicum and internship, the ICA can be a course in curriculum so that the ICA is officially recognized as important educational activities. If the ICA is accepted as a course, university administration will try to support the course, such as budgeting.

At present time, most students work as part-time to gain enough money to buy air plane ticket and cover accommodation. It is rare to get funding for the ICA. It was fortunate to get support inviting Cambodian, Chinese, and Korean students visiting to Japan last two years. This kind of funding, however, is not stable to support students. The university administration needs to set budgeting system of the ICA. Faculty members also need to recognize importance of the ICA for nurturing key competencies.

We also have to understand difficulty of the international collaborative research. The ways of conducting research are quite different in different countries. For instance, funding system, research methods, relationship between professors and students, time concept, how to handle things, etc. are all different. Researchers in both sides need to understand these differences and adjust each other to implement the collaborative research.

We can utilize the Internet tools to communicate each other in the collaborative research. The Internet tools, such as Skype, Facebook, and Google+, are powerful to collaborate closely. We sometimes irritate because response is not quite speedy as we expect. People are busy some time so that they may forget to respond or take time. If we do not understand partner's situation, we may get frustrated. However, we still need face-to-face context to understand and create more close relationship.

## **FUTURE DIRESTION**

Globalization is ongoing world trend. We cannot just stay and do work only within our countries. If international collaboration is “MUST” , we as educational researchers actively move ourselves forward to find ways to work together. ICoME is one example to collaborate among Korea, China, and Japan. This conference has nearly ten years of experience. Number of participants has been increasing and diversified, including the Philippines, Malaysia, and some other countries. I believe that it is the time we should more collaborate each other in the future.

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