

Utilizing Globalization

Teaching English at the local cram school, the number one question I receive is “Why do I need to learn English?”. There are two ways to answer this question. One is that your grade depends on it. The other is that learning English will give you more opportunities to see different points of view, which let you have more options to attain happiness. When explaining this to a middle school student, however, the former seems more realistic. The problem that we are facing in Japan however is that globalization is also interpreted similarly to the former, in that there is no intrinsic motivation for globalization. Interest in globalization for the Japanese people has been waning in recent years, and even fear of crossing borders and jumping into the unknown, characterized by Japan’s shortcomings in the globalization index, ranking 36th globally in 2019 (Gygli et al.). By realizing that globalization can lead to happiness, it may ignite the fire necessary for people to take the step and cross borders, hopefully attaining happiness along the way.

An encounter I had with globalization was through a 10-day internship at an automobile part supplier company during my first year in the graduate program. In the internship program, we worked remotely in Japan while being connected with our mentor engineers in Vietnam through the internet. Even with the outside world being in chaos from Covid, we were able to work with the engineers every day to fulfill tasks, while also getting to learn about the people who work there and what it meant to work internationally. What really stood out to me about the internship however was everybody’s stance on communication and how proactive the engineers were in getting the point across, even if English was their second language as well. By taking different approaches to explain the work, we were able to get an actual grasp of the thought process and approaches of the engineers in Vietnam and what it took to communicate across borders. The way they communicated with us assured us that we had no reason to be afraid of making mistakes, not only in work but in speaking as well, which made it easier for us to express our opinions as well, something that I found joy in. It became especially exciting once we had the opportunity to present our creations and explain our thought processes to them, discussing the different approaches in English, broadening my field of view even more.

Experiencing this internship showed me that globalization is a tool to grasp different ways of thinking and sharing, something that brought

happiness and joy to me. It also showed me that to grasp this happiness, communication both ways were necessary, as the discussions that we had about the different approaches demanded both input and output. This is something that I feel is lacking in the current state of globalization in Japan, where the information stops at the point of input. In most circumstances in Japan, we tend to compare the information from the outside world to that of domestic ones, but because there is fear of standing out, the new information is swept under the rug in order to keep aligned, preventing progress from occurring. Without having the courage of being different and making mistakes, it is impossible to make use of the knowledge not native to the country, to innovate and make better of the situation. In my case, the internship allowed me to recognize this process, and by challenging myself to accept foreign ways of thinking, the range of possibilities for my actions grew exponentially.

The internship I experienced allowed me to take the next step, becoming the person to initiate global interactions and communications. To accomplish this, I decided to take part in a global conference pertaining to my area of research in fluid engineering. This opportunity allowed me to visit Canada for a week and share my research with the top engineers in the world, something that would be difficult just by staying in Japan. What was especially rewarding through the conference was how the top engineers in the area would discuss potential outlooks on my topic and by discussing each of our points of view, I was able to realize potential ways to take the next step needed in my research. This brought me a new joy in research as I was able to grasp an even greater view and taking upon the challenge of presenting on a global scale was well worth it. I was also able to meet graduate students who study in Canada, and what started with a discussion about fluid dynamics turned into a friendship. Even now I keep in touch with those friends and can connect with people that I would have never been able to meet if I didn't take the step outside of Japan.

When I speak of my experiences in globalization with my peers, however, most of the reactions that I receive are that of awe that I presented in English to a global audience. This is something that I find disturbing. Of course, speaking in a second language may be difficult, but often the people that are in awe outright reject the thought of speaking in a language that is not natural to them. To me, this seems something much more than a problem of speaking a second language, it is a problem with communication altogether. Looking at how Japanese students are at school makes this even clearer.

Moving to Japan after 15 years in America, I was dumbstruck by how orderly classes were in Japan. Everyone studied for examinations, trying to get good grades to attend the school of their liking. At first, I had no problems with this, but when I started to look at class objectively, there were little to no pauses in between the lesson for questions, as if it was normal for everybody to understand class. This made me question how everybody really thought, and when I asked a classmate about this, I realized that not everyone was on the same page, but it was rather a fear of standing out that prevented them from asking questions or expressing themselves. Of course, being orderly is a great trait of the Japanese way, but should it prevent us from expressing ourselves by standing out? To take achieve happiness from globalization, the first step we must be able to take is not being shy of standing out, by being able to express our thoughts, not just in a foreign language, but in general.

Now, there is a point to note when it comes to globalization and happiness, however. Globalization does not equal happiness. It is only a method to attain happiness, but the result depends on how it is taken. Take Bhutan for example. In 2006, Bhutan was ranked 8th globally in the happiness index (Kamenev), with only first-world countries preceding it in the rankings. Astonishingly, however, the ranking in 2019 revealed Bhutan to be the 95th happiest country out of 156 countries (LaMotte), dropping over 80 spots in a matter of 13 years. Although many factors should be accounted for, one of the more interesting reasons for Bhutan's fall is easier access to the outside world. Access to greater amounts of resources from abroad would seem to raise this index for the population, but the index declined, which must mean that there are other factors in globalization that affect happiness within the population, thought to be the flow of information

A large reason why the flow of information from the outside world caused a drop in happiness for Bhutan lies in how the information was interpreted. In the past, Bhutan was relatively weak in knowledge of the outside world, with most of its civilians knowing only of what they see around them, their universe composed of their neighborhood, the mountains that surround the country being walls to the outside world, separating them from the unknown. Living in the comforts of their limited universe, happiness was fulfilled as they had what they needed to survive, needing only little to maintain their lives. By having little to compare with, they were able to sustain their happiness just by themselves, leading to the 8th happiest country in the world. This began to change as information about the outside world

began to leak into their field of vision, learning that there is more to the world than they had ever seen. In turn, knowledge became something to compare their lives with. It can be said that this comparison became the downfall of Bhutan's happiness, as even new resources from the outside world couldn't overcome the deficit between them and the outside world.

In this sense, globalization can break down barriers, but globalization itself cannot bring happiness into people's lives. I experienced this when I moved back to Japan from America in the 9th grade, where I started to attend the local middle school. Growing up in America, I had little knowledge of the Japanese language, which made Japanese a second language for me. This language barrier caused frustration in me, and at first, I hated Japan altogether. I felt that there was no need to learn a second language, yearning for the day to move to the United States. However, as time began to tick by, I started to accept the fact English alone would not be enough, and that this was an opportunity for me to learn a new language.

At first, I thought that this would be a walk in the park, but the more I began to learn about the language, the more I realized how much of a gap there was. This gap became even more frustrating as my progress in the language began to dip and I started to become jealous of everyone around me, that they were able to speak Japanese, and not having trouble in everyday life while I had to be confused at the simplest of Kanji. The grass looked greener on the other side. However, at one point, I realized that even the people who have lived their entire lives in Japan had to deal with learning the language, and I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to live in an environment where I could learn from others on how they learned the language directly, something that would never have been possible just by looking being jealous of other people.

Without globalization, we do not have the capability to see the grass of other people's lawns and we are left to believe that our lawn is plenty. Globalization tears down the fence between lawns, but this only reveals the differences between them. To stay away from the negative emotions that come from comparing each situation, we must first accept the fact that there are differences and come to the realization that there may be ways to change them.

By looking at globalization on a local scale, it becomes obvious that it is not an easy thing to make use of. It is a double-sided sword that when used with the wrong mentality, can hurt the happiness that we currently have as we

tend to compare with others and despair at what we don't have. However, by taking the step in confronting the differences and having the courage to try and communicate with the outside world, we can gain a greater view of the world, something that can bring happiness to us. My experiences with globalization showed me that globalization is just a tool, it is up to us to make use of it, to create happiness, it is not something given, but something that is earned.

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