

## **Reaching the world outside: cultural representation and perceptions of global citizenship in Japanese elementary school English textbooks**

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Research on the representation of culture in language textbooks rarely incorporates the concept of global citizenship, despite its increasing relevance to language education in our globalising world. To address this critique, a mixed-method study was conducted to investigate cultural representation in Japanese elementary school English textbooks, and the degree to which students feel connected to the concept of global citizenship. Content analysis of Japanese textbooks and thematic analysis of student and teacher interviews found that the texts are culturally simplistic and did not help this population of students fully realise the values of global citizenship. Meaningful cultural representation may reinforce cultural awareness, open-mindedness, and social responsibility – the core dimensions of global citizenship. To this end, future English curricula would benefit from supplementary authentic materials, cultural exchange experiences, and explicit discussions of culture between teachers and students.

Keywords: cultural representation; global citizenship; textbook analysis; Japan; EFL education; elementary school

### **Introduction**

As globalisation rapidly propels the expansion of English education, researchers are increasingly calling attention to the concept of global citizenship in language education around the world. Although the exact definition is still under debate, global citizenship is becoming a core principle which denotes an open-minded and socially responsible attitude

towards the world outside one's own country (Pashby, 2011). When EFL (English as a Foreign Language) educators consider how to propagate this international mindset, language textbooks are often seen as a key starting point, because they heavily influence the impressions of foreign cultures gained by learners who are not typically exposed to English in everyday life (Nasser Rashidi & Ghaedsharafi, 2015). However, previous studies have found that language textbooks contain problematic cultural representations which may inhibit uptake of global citizenship values (McConachy, 2018). In order to explore the under-researched intersection of cultural representation and global citizenship, this mixed-method study investigated both the patterns of cultural representation in textbooks and resultant sentiments of global citizenship in the context of Japanese EFL education.

Although English has been compulsory in Japanese junior and senior high schools for decades, elementary English is a relatively new subject. In 2011, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) published the first set of standardised Grade 5 and 6 texts (McCurry, 2011). Despite the concerns of elementary homeroom teachers who were not trained in English (Machida, 2016), MEXT continues to overhaul the English curriculum, both as preparation for the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics and as an attempt to catch up to neighboring Asian countries (Kodera & Kameda, 2013). Since the Japanese government plans to develop new elementary texts throughout 2018 and 2019 (MEXT, 2016) and the future of elementary EFL education remains malleable, it is crucial to examine the consequences of cultural representation in the contemporary series of textbooks entitled *Hi, friends!*, and provide timely evidence to inform the development of future textbooks.

The goal of this paper is to investigate connections between the cultural content of *Hi, friends!* and the students' degree of identification as global citizens. This is accomplished

through two complementary strands of data collection and analysis: an evaluation of cultural representation in the textbook, and interviews of local students and teachers, the primary stakeholders in this curriculum.

## **Literature review**

### ***Global citizenship and language education***

While the heterogeneity of national histories and cultures prevents a worldwide consensus on the meaning of global citizenship (Risager, 2018), several scholars and organisations have developed frameworks for defining and operationalising this concept. In 2014, UNESCO formally recognised global citizenship education as an empowering opportunity to transform cultural understanding into physical and psychological engagement, solve global challenges, and work towards a more peaceful and tolerant world (Yemini & Furstenburg, 2018). Morais and Ogden (2011) developed a Likert scale survey which isolates three main dimensions of global citizenship: social responsibility, global competence, and global civic engagement. Reysen and Katzarska-Miller (2013) also employed two Likert scale surveys to test their model, and ultimately defined global citizenship as ‘awareness, caring, and embracing cultural diversity while promoting social justice and sustainability, coupled with a sense of responsibility to act’ (p. 858). Deviating from quantitative research, Lilley, Barker, and Harris (2015) qualitatively analysed students’ self-reports of personal change and highlighted common values of ‘openness, tolerance, respect, and responsibility’ (p. 238). From these studies, one may summarise the core global citizenship values as cultural awareness, open-mindedness, and social responsibility.

Despite the enthusiasm of UNESCO and scholars alike, global citizenship has also faced criticism. Stein’s (2015) review of global citizenship discourse identifies four typical

‘positions’ from which institutions and scholars conceptualise global citizenship values, and highlights how the concept has been critiqued for furthering Eurocentric assumptions and existing social inequalities. However, it is possible, and indeed desirable, to teach positive global citizenship values while allowing room for criticality and ‘new possibilities for knowing, being, and relating’ (Stein, 2015, p. 250).

As national governments increasingly respond to ‘global problems’ by endorsing global citizenship education (Pashby, 2011, p. 428), language education also implicates the ‘global’ by exposing students to international concepts (Porto, Houghton, & Byram, 2017). Among languages, English has emerged as especially ‘global’ due to the rise of transnational corporations, organisations, conferences, and the predominance of English-language content on the Internet (Gray, 2002). Through these channels, learners may connect to a variety of English-speaking communities. Therefore, EFL education is specially positioned to enable students to become concerned with, and actively involved in, the world beyond their national borders.

Drawing from recent research advocating the values of intercultural knowledge, communicative competencies, and open-minded attitudes (Pais & Costa, 2017), schools have begun to address global citizenship in the EFL classroom. Porto (2018) led a case study connecting intercultural citizenship and language learning via collaborative Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) classes in Argentina and the UK. The results showed that students developed their language and communicative skills within a framework of ‘cosmopolitan values’ including consensus, support, and solidarity (Porto, 2018, p. 8). These values and multiliteracies neatly map onto the central global citizenship values of cultural awareness, open-mindedness, and social responsibility. Moreover, students seem to be aware

that language education can influence their global citizenship posture. At two secondary schools in Israel, Yemeni and Furstenburg (2018) found that students quoted the study of English as one of the school initiatives which fosters global citizenship by exposing them to ‘different worlds and values’ (p. 11). These studies show that global citizenship is not merely an option, but rather a central tenet of effective language pedagogy in our globalising world. This concept could be especially useful in Japan, where 98.5% of residents are ethnically Japanese (Central Intelligence Agency, 2018) and everyday life rarely presents opportunities to interact with English-speaking people or English-language popular culture (Ryan, 2009). Thus, examining the ways in which language textbooks encourage values of global citizenship may confirm the centrality of intercultural awareness to a well-rounded language education.

### ***Cultural representation in language textbooks***

As educational tools and cultural artefacts (Gray, 2000), language textbooks are well-placed to encourage engagement with culture and global citizenship values, and researchers have found many ways to scrutinise the content and reception thereof. Methods range from Littlejohn’s (2011) oft-cited framework for assessing the appropriateness of materials for use in a particular classroom context, to corpus-based analysis (Tajeddin & Teimournezhad, 2015; Weir & Ozasa, 2008), to directly asking teachers for feedback (Forman, 2014; Masuhara, 2011). However, these textbooks often contain stereotypical accounts of both the target culture and the home culture, and may become envoys of problematic ideological discourses informed by sociopolitical frameworks, cultural practices, and national history (Low-Beer, 2001; Yamada, 2010). Lack of consensus on the meaning of ‘culture’ likely

contributes to this wide range of methodologies. For the purposes of the present study, however, we adopt the definition of ‘a form of knowledge gained through engagement with people’ (Reeves-Ellington & Yammarino, 2010, pp. 11, 17–18), with a focus on ‘engagement with people’ who belong to a national community.

Imbalanced cultural representations have negative educational consequences including conflict among students, missed opportunities to deepen intercultural awareness, and the perpetuation of stereotypes. Shardakova and Pavlenko’s (2004) critical discourse analysis of Russian language textbooks scrutinised an ‘almost exclusive focus on middle-class individuals’ (p. 35), who are presented as imagined interlocutors for the young American audience, and expressed concern that these beginner-level texts oversimplify cross-cultural encounters and thereby perpetuate stereotypes. They argued this may be especially problematic if the narrow range of representation conflicts with the linguistic and cultural values held by students using the textbooks. Messekher (2014) made a similar conclusion in an African context, affirming that Algerian EFL textbooks fail to explicate nuanced worldviews or encourage cultural awareness. Content analysis of textbooks and interviews with teachers revealed that despite the textbooks’ abundance of knowledge concerning Algerian, English-speaking, and non-English-speaking cultures, the lack of provision for intercultural communication and cultural awareness led teachers to neglect the relevance of intercultural communication in the language classroom. Both studies evince a gap between contemporary language textbooks and appropriately intercultural pedagogy.

These critiques are supported by Canale’s (2016) qualitative analysis of nine prior textbook studies, in which he dissected the ‘politics of inclusion and exclusion’ (p. 230): the strategies of representation and avoidance in textbook discourse. Regardless of the

geographical context and research methods employed, this meta-analysis found that cultural diversity tends to be associated with ‘material objects, historical facts and static artefacts’, often presenting culture as static, homogenous ‘facts’ (Canale, 2016, p. 237). Contemporary textbooks are therefore prone to promoting superficial comparisons between ‘our’ and ‘their’ cultures, while failing to recognise diversity or encourage reader criticality (Canale, 2016, p. 239).

Thus far, global citizenship has not been incorporated into any studies of culture in textbooks, yet the concept serves as a natural extension of cultural concerns in the globalising educational landscape. As Canale suggests, successful cultural representation in any language curriculum involves developing a nuanced understanding of both the target language culture and other international cultures, and this understanding may inform and deepen not only global citizenship sentiments, but also the overall language education experience.

### ***English textbooks and stakeholders in Japan***

Japan’s contemporary language curriculum renders English mandatory, and studies suggest that the nationally standardised English textbooks perpetuate a tension between overt government enthusiasm for *kokusaika*, or internationalisation, and implicit nationalist undercurrents (Ryan, 2009; Saito, 1995). In 2000, the then Prime Minister declared English a ‘global literacy’ through which students may establish meaningful connections to the world outside Japan (Yamada, 2010, p. 492). In further support of cultural exchange and global citizenship values, the MEXT guidelines for the grade 5 and 6 ‘Foreign Language Activities’ curriculum often refer to ‘deepening understanding’ of culture, including learning ‘the differences in ways of living, customs and events between Japan and foreign countries’ (MEXT, 2010, p. 1). However, Yamada (2010) found that throughout editions of junior high

English textbooks from the 1980s onwards, focus gradually shifted from representations of the United States and other Western countries towards Japan itself. While the government publicly projects a desire for international linguistic and cultural connections, latent textbook discourse reveals a reaction against the attendant decrease in Japan's linguistic and cultural uniqueness, and a reluctance to accept multiculturalism and ethnic diversity as assets rather than challenges (Hashimoto, 2011; Tsuneyoshi, 2007).

As MEXT continues to alter the elementary English curriculum to meet their stated goals of deepening linguistic and cultural understanding, they may benefit from considering the voices of students and teachers, who are the primary stakeholders and audience. For example, McConachy (2018) asked eight Japanese university students to write a critique of their English textbook. The assignment not only promoted meaningful reflection about cultural differences, but also revealed students' abilities to transcend the stereotypes and ethnocentricities they witnessed in the text. Therefore, consulting students and their teachers could not only inform and improve future materials development, but also raise critical awareness of the interface between culture, global citizenship, and language education.

Although many studies have scrutinised textbook cultural representation (McConachy, 2018; Risager, 2018; Shin, Eslami, & Chen, 2011; Tajeddin & Teimournezhad, 2015; Yuen, 2011), research rarely emphasises the importance of student and teacher input in developing materials which promote multiculturalism and global citizenship values. Their views as stakeholders are especially meaningful in the context of Japan's under-researched and continually developing elementary English curriculum.



Drawing from a larger study with a broader focus on textbook perceptions and national language education policy, this analysis was designed to answer the following questions concerning cultural representation and global citizenship respectively:

- (1) How do Japanese elementary English textbooks represent Japanese and non-Japanese cultures?
- (2) How do students and teachers perceive the values of global citizenship, in the context of their experience with the textbooks?

## **Methodology**

In order to consider both cultural representation and global citizenship, a mixed-method design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) was employed to synthesise two strands of data obtained in a suburban region of Hokkaido, Japan. Quantitative data was collected by coding the content of widely-used elementary textbooks according to cultural representations. Complementary qualitative data was gathered from interviews with junior high students, who had just finished the textbooks, and elementary school teachers.

[Figure 1 near here]

## ***Sampling, Coding, and Content Analysis of Textbooks***

The first part of data analysis concerned the cultural content of the *Hi, friends!* physical and digital volumes 1 and 2, which were mandatory in nationwide elementary schools at the time of fieldwork. In order to determine the frequency of key categories (Neuendorf & Skalski, 2009), content analysis was employed to count all items which appear in the textbooks and

refer to cultures either Japanese or non-Japanese. Although images and English audio clips do not represent the textbooks in their entirety, this paper focuses on those two elements due to limited space and the scarcity of non-Japanese language text in the books. Both physical and digital texts were analysed because the books and computer programme form a cohesive curricular set and are often used simultaneously in the classroom, allowing for multiple sources of cultural meaning (Bezemer, Jewitt, & O'Halloran, 2016). Coding catalogued two aspects of each image: the country it represents (or 'non-specific' if the item lacks national symbolism), and the type of culture according to Yuen's (2011) classification of four Ps: products, practices, perspectives, and persons. The first three categories arise from American *Standards for Foreign Language Learning*, and Yuen added 'persons' in light of Moran's (2001) finding that people can also represent culture. According to Yuen (2011, p. 463), 'practices' signifies aspects of customs, daily life, and society, such as a national sport or a commonly played game, while 'perspectives' may include myths, inspirations, and world views.

[Figure 2 near here]

For example, an illustration of the Thai water festival would be filed as 'Thailand' and 'practice', while the Thai flag itself would fall under 'Thailand' and 'products' (Figure 2). Each of the four Ps of culture was clearly defined with examples and counterexamples in order to avoid biasing the results with ideological preconceptions (Neuendorf & Skalski, 2009).

Coding the content in Microsoft Excel resulted in frequency tables which were compared to determine which countries and aspects of culture appear most often in *Hi, friends!* (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Similar to Yuen (2011), this analysis focuses on the frequency of cultural appearances and the educational implications thereof; the role of the relative placement and length of cultural signifiers is beyond the scope of the present paper.

### ***Sampling, Procedure, and Analysis of Interviews***

This study employed maximum variation sampling (Cohen et al., 2007) of students and teachers at nine schools in a suburban city in Hokkaido, the northernmost prefecture in Japan. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 participants: one male and one female first-year student from each of five junior high schools, and one native Japanese homeroom teacher from each of four elementary schools. Selection considered not only convenient access to the site, but also the access of ‘knowledgeable people’ (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 115): those in the best position to offer in-depth information regarding their experience with EFL education and the textbooks at hand. At the time of fieldwork, the interviewed students had recently graduated from elementary school, and *Hi, friends!* represented their exclusive experience of mandatory textbook English. Similarly, all four teachers had at least 2 years’ experience with *Hi, friends!*, which ensured their expertise concerning the content and student reception of the textbooks.

After signing informed consent forms (BERA, 2011), participants were individually interviewed in an empty, quiet room, and the resultant 14 audio recordings were transcribed in original Japanese. Their statements were then carefully translated to obviate semantic

deviation, with proofreading assistance from local Board of Education employees and two native Japanese speakers. For the subsequent thematic analysis, ATLAS.ti software was used to identify, critique, and report recurring patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The coding process comprised three stages: firstly, during open coding, meaningful phrases were highlighted according to a set of themes which noticeably recurred during interviews. Axial coding then grouped the original codes into overarching themes, focusing on concepts related to global citizenship. The last stage of selective coding involved interpreting the connections between salient themes and eliciting an overarching narrative of global citizenship identification and values (Creswell, 2014, p. 196).

## **Findings**

The two strands of analysis revealed complementary themes: low exposure to non-Japanese cultures, and fledgling yet fragmentary accordance with the values of global citizenship.

Content analysis showed that the textbooks portray mainly Japanese cultural content and focus on products and persons rather than practices and perspectives. In subsequent interviews, many students did not identify with the notion of global citizenship; however, their answers displayed the central global citizenship quality of open-mindedness. They also expressed a desire to deepen their international connections, which could contribute to the other values of cultural awareness and social responsibility in future.

### ***Simplistic cultural representation in textbooks***

#### ***Higher frequency of Japanese culture***

Content analysis of the textbooks showed a substantial imbalance between Japanese and non-Japanese cultural representation.

[Table 1 near here]

As seen in Table 1, Japanese culture is represented more often than any other country in *Hi, friends!*, manifesting in images such as sushi, the Japanese flag, and famous Japanese landmarks including Mount Fuji and Kiyomizu Temple. Although a total of 19 non-Japanese countries appear at least once, they do so infrequently, especially compared to non-country-specific content which comprised 1,244 out of 2,324 observed elements. Examples of items depicted without national or cultural markers include furniture, school supplies, and household pets. Each non-Japanese country appears less than 5% of the time: the most frequent is Australia at 2.15% of all appearances, followed by France, Korea, China, and the United States. Despite the government's stated goal to deepen understanding of both Japanese and foreign cultures through the EFL curriculum (MEXT, 2010), these small percentages suggest that cultural representation in these textbooks is dominated by Japan.

*Frequent appearance of simple products and persons*

[Table 2 near here]

Secondly, according to Yuen's (2011) division of products, practices, perspectives, and persons, the two most frequently appearing categories are persons and products. As shown in Table 2, persons comprise more than half of the items at 1,229 out of 2,324 total appearances, followed by products at 956 appearances. Conversely, practices comprise only 5.25% of all cultural references. While one video depicts the practice of an entrance ceremony at a Korean school, for example (MEXT, 2012, p. 6), there were many more pictures and videos of Japanese national holidays. Perspectives are the rarest of the four Ps at 0.73%. When perspectives appear, they are audio clips rather than images, and form fairly bland,

uncontroversial opinions which people from any country could hold. For example, the recurring character Taku speaks about his ability to ride a bicycle, and another character Tomoe states her desire to travel by saying ‘I want to go to China’ (MEXT, 2012, pp. 11, 20). This suggests a ‘knowledge-based’ level of cultural presentation, rooted in facts rather than beliefs and values (Shin et al., 2011, p. 265).

In sum, Japanese cultural referents far outnumber foreign referents in these textbooks. Moreover, cultural representation often manifests in the simple, knowledge-based categories of persons and products, rather than complex, conceptual practices and perspectives. This imbalanced representation frames the relationship between language and culture as one which primarily occurs along national boundaries (McConachy & Hata, 2013), when in fact there are many possible ways of viewing and engaging with foreign cultures.

### *Nascent global citizenship sentiments*

When students and teachers were asked whether they identify with the concept of global citizenship, they were largely unfamiliar with the term. One student, who ‘modestly’ identified with global citizenship and at one point said ‘I am one [a global citizen]’ proved a rare exception to the rule. The majority felt distant from the concept, as Hana summarised: ‘It [global citizenship] feels a little like a faraway existence’. Despite widespread reluctance to assert identification, these students displayed hints of the core values: (inter)cultural awareness from the textbooks, however sparse; open-mindedness to travel and international friendships; and social responsibility to contribute to the world outside Japan.

*(Inter)cultural awareness*

When questioned about the accuracy of cultural representation in *Hi, friends!*, many students were uncritical, and praised the text as *wakariyasui*, or ‘easy to understand’; however, one believed that the textbooks do not sufficiently represent non-Japanese cultures. As Kouki responded:

Kouki: I thought countries were shown only a little because things like greetings, country flags, time differences and famous places are written... If they showed pictures and a day in the life [of a non-Japanese person], it would be easier to understand [foreign cultures].

Kouki’s views align with the perspectives of interviewed teachers, who also cited basic greetings and numbers, not cultural knowledge, as primary learning outcomes of *Hi, friends!*.

Ms Ozawa expressed a similarly critical opinion when asked how to improve the texts: ‘I want [the textbooks] to express more... With the textbooks alone, I think it’s difficult to feel [like a global citizen].’ Further, Ms Ozawa and Mr Suzuki both said they could not use their own travel experience to augment the textbooks, because it wasn’t relevant to the curriculum’s set phrases such as ‘What fruit do you like?’ In fact, it had not even occurred to Ms Takahashi to connect the textbook with conversations about culture or global citizenship.

However, four students referenced the eighth chapter of volume 2 as a memorable case of accurate Japanese cultural representation, and a rare opportunity to increase cross-cultural understanding. Entitled ‘We are good friends’, this section showcases fairy tales from different countries and culminates in an English-language cartoon version of Japan’s own *Momotarou*, or ‘Peach Boy’: a national symbol which appeared in Western editions of fairy tales as early as 1871 (Antoni, 1991). Seiichi elaborated: ‘When things like old stories are written, and communicated through generations from a pretty long time ago, and said in

English class, it's... what can I call it? Like *wa*'. In this statement, the meaning of *wa* depends on the Chinese character: it may signify 'circle' with 輪, or 'harmony' with 和.

Given that Seiichi subsequently stated 'It seems like I can become good friends with other countries', his use of *wa* likely suggests harmony among different peoples and cultures.

Seeing Seiichi's own culture reflected in the study of another language brought his understanding full circle, heightening feelings of cultural connection to other countries.

Despite the students' connection to *Momotarou*, all four teachers attested that this introductory curriculum offers few opportunities to deepen cultural awareness – and with it, confident identification as a global citizen.

### *Open-mindedness*

The most salient global citizenship value evinced by both students and teachers was open-mindedness to new experiences including in-depth English study, international contact, and overseas travel. Eight out of ten students had never been outside Japan, including Hana, who explained her motivation in response to the question of global citizenship identification:

Hana: Because I haven't been abroad even once, I think people who go to different countries are amazing... If I was also able to go to various countries, I could feel greater affinity [with global citizenship].

Echoing this admiration for multicultural experiences, Arisa noted that personal interactions left her with the strongest global citizenship sentiments:

Arisa: When the ALTs [Assistant Language Teachers] kindly come [to class], and at things like the local World Festival, when lots of people from different countries come to visit, I really feel it [global citizenship]... I personally want to try and come in contact with other cultures, and I



think others want to come into contact with my culture, so I want to try and have that kind of exchange.

This wish for multicultural interactions beyond the foreign-born Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) visits to their schools was often expressed in terms of mutual exchange. When asked for additional thoughts beyond the interview questions, Hitomi said ‘I want to become good friends by teaching each other and having an exchange’ and Seiichi noted ‘I want to become friends... I want to deepen cultural exchange with foreign people’.

### *Social responsibility*

Lastly, social responsibility extending outside the students’ local community was indicated by two main reasons for their desire to befriend non-Japanese people: their understanding that the world is bigger than Japan alone, and positive impressions of foreigners they have met. Arisa articulated this awareness when asked if she feels globally connected while studying English:

Arisa: The world isn’t just Japan; it’s not like the world is only one country. There are many countries which make up the world. At times when, for example, representatives of different countries do things like meet and talk together, I think that’s important.

Many students shared impressions that foreigners are *yasashii*, or ‘kind’, and *omoshiroi*, which may be translated as ‘interesting’ or ‘funny’, fueling their aspirations. Timidity and inadequate communicative fluency are currently barriers to these friendships. Asked about how she feels around people from other countries, Arisa admitted: ‘I’m shy, so I think I tend to be silent, but in my heart, I want to ask them various things.’ However, curiosity abounds, as Seiichi noted ‘I am interested in what kind of people they are’.

Furthermore, when Yuriko was asked whether she feels connected to the world when studying English, she cited ways she could assist others if they shared the same language:

Yuriko: I think through learning foreign languages, there are a lot of methods we can use to feel connected to other countries... because we can have conversations with those foreigners, and if they have lost their way, we can help show them [the way].

Here, Yuriko evinces not only the desire to converse with non-Japanese people, but also a crucial aspect of social responsibility: interest in caring for people who are lost in transit or otherwise struggling, regardless of their nationality.

Ms Ozawa and Mr Suzuki echoed the sentiment that face-to-face interaction encourages deeper multicultural exchange. While Mr Suzuki noted that students ‘probably do not have much [international] communication aside from those relations [with ALTs]’, he was grateful for the ALTs’ provision of international contact.

Regardless of their low level of confidence and the limitations of textbook content and the homogenous local community, these students unanimously recognised the benefits of cross-cultural interactions. Their stated desire to connect with the world outside Japan signals early onset of the open-mindedness, cultural awareness, and social responsibility central to global citizenship. Yoshi’s statement ‘As I grow up from now on, my international connections might become deeper’ suggests global citizenship may be realised with additional education and further opportunities to connect with diverse peers as a teenager and adult.

## Discussion

The analysed textbooks display a lack of cultural diversity and depth through their paucity of non-Japanese items and their overwhelming focus on products and persons, which may perpetuate stereotypes about each country. The abundance of Japanese, ‘source-cultural’ content seen in *Hi, friends!* is not a universal phenomenon, as shown by a study of Iranian texts which contained no L1 culture whatsoever (Tajeddin & Teimournezhad, 2015) and Yuen’s (2011) analysis of Hong Kong textbooks which found that a biased ‘tourist’s perspective’ underrepresented the learners’ home culture (p. 464). However, the present content analysis is mirrored by several studies in which other international language textbooks were deemed problematic. In the Japanese context, Yamada (2010) found that junior high English texts approached cultural representation from an insular perspective, beginning with known entities and cautiously expanding. Moreover, Rashidi & Meihami (2016) argued that ELT textbooks tend to contain cultural content associated with the L1 and international cultures rather than the L2 culture at hand. A rare example of successful cultural representation in the literature is an account of the Lunar New Year in Vietnamese high school English textbooks (Dinh & Sharifian 2017), yet even this content was heterogeneously understood by each region in Vietnam. Regardless of the degree of home culture representation, foreign culture is still treated in a ‘fragmented and stereotypical’ manner, which does not produce cultural awareness in terms of knowledge of various worldviews and how culture informs language (Messekher, 2014; Yuen, 2011, p. 464). This fragmentation is similar to the deficiency of practices and perspectives in *Hi, friends!*: although brief videos of practices such as Korean school opening ceremonies are present in the digital textbook, they remain isolated examples which lack both context and commentary. Although images and

videos could have revealed more profound aspects of culture, engagement did not go beyond simple spectating, limiting deeper cultural awareness.

Interviews shed further light on the issues stemming from underrepresentation of culture in textbooks: the students' lack of criticality about *Hi, friends!* exemplifies Canale's (2016) finding that students do not usually have explicit conversations reinforcing, appropriating, or contesting cultural representation. Some have argued that an abundance of home culture content is acceptable because students benefit from using local cultural knowledge as a bridge to relate to unfamiliar, foreign material, thereby promoting 'exploration into global understandings' (Forman, 2014, p. 86). Although the introductory nature of these texts may make the overwhelmingly Japanese content seem innocuous, an absence of criticality and cultural complexity at any level can create future issues and barriers to intercultural understanding (Risager, 2018). In addition to previously cited concerns of conflict among students, missed opportunities to deepen cultural awareness, and the perpetuation of stereotypes, long-term use of such culturally imbalanced textbooks may seriously bias students' worldviews, especially their understanding of their home culture in relation to others (Song, 2013). These results therefore support Rashidi & Meihami's (2015) conclusions that both L1 and L2 cultures must be adequately represented in order to increase cultural awareness, especially as a key value of global citizenship.

After two years of study with the culturally simplistic *Hi, friends!*, students vaguely expressed the core values of cultural awareness, open-mindedness, and social responsibility through their desire for increased interaction with non-Japanese people. Besser and Chik (2014) argue that several factors influence young language learner identities: educational policy, cultural values, and distribution of resources. Applied to this Japanese context, the

students' weak identification with global citizenship may arise from the popular view of English as a symbol (Glasgow & Paller, 2016), common Japanese values of modesty and self-effacement (Yamagishi et al., 2012), and the fact that teachers lack time to substantially supplement or improve the provided materials.

Although the Japanese government's globalisation rhetoric includes emphasis on 'the mastery of the English language as the international lingua franca' and 'communication skills' (Yamada, 2010, pp. 492–493), English is seen by many citizens – including the student interviewees – as a symbol of foreign cultures and communicative potential, rather than a living language with which to engage (Glasgow & Paller, 2016). This was seen in Ryan's (2009) large-scale attitudinal study, wherein secondary and post-secondary Japanese students 'liked English' largely for socially conditioned reasons, and less often out of a genuine desire to learn. Although the present interviewees expressed more enthusiasm for English education than Ryan's population, they also viewed global citizenship as an aspiration arising from future communication with foreigners, rather than a present possibility. Yoshi summarised this idea of future potential when he said 'As I grow up from now on, my international connections might become deeper', linking maturity with greater global citizenship sentiments. As Smith et al. (2017) note, people with higher education abandon stereotypes and show less favouritism of one group over another – and perhaps it is a tall order to expect an introductory textbook to address all the complexities of culture. Therefore, further education may increase cultural awareness and global citizenship identification within these young students.

Reticence to claim global citizenship identification may also be attributed to societal norms: the East Asian value of 'interdependency' prioritises fitting into the social context

above excelling in comparison to others (Yamagishi et al., 2012). The interviewed students' hesitation to identify with the term 'global citizen' aligns with Roger's (2010) study of post-secondary Korean students. The learners' individual backgrounds and experiences rendered it difficult to describe their L2 identities in broad strokes, and they did not universally aspire to become 'global citizens'. Because global citizenship education is not 'one-size-fits-all' and demands an expansive, democratic approach when implemented in schools (Myers, 2016, p. 10), perhaps the label is unnatural in some modesty-driven East Asian contexts. In future studies, it may be more prudent to emphasise localised engagement with the core values of global citizenship than to impose any foreign, strict terminology.

Further, a shortage of preparation time, institutional pressure, and unfamiliarity with the target culture leave the content of English class at the whims of the national curriculum (Forman, 2014; Nasser Rashidi & Ghaedsharafi, 2015), regardless of the interviewed teachers' awareness that *Hi, friends!* neither optimally reflects world cultures nor encourages global citizenship identification. Given the challenge of finding time for a brief interview, these teachers are likely overwhelmed with the many demands of homeroom teaching, and do not have the time and energy to expand the cultural content of their English lessons beyond *Hi, friends!*, let alone advocate for the values of global citizenship.

Despite the best intentions of MEXT to produce an engaging and communicative introduction to English, the simplistic nature of *Hi, friends!* limits opportunities to critically compare cultures, hampering students' cultivation of global citizenship through cultural awareness, open-mindedness, and social responsibility. However, their unanimously positive attitude towards the world outside Japan may herald a future of greater intercultural

communication and global citizenship identification, given a more critical and internationally-aware pedagogy.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has demonstrated that Japan's contemporary elementary English textbooks are culturally simplistic – lacking in practices and perspectives – and they fall short of encouraging global citizen sentiments in students, who were reluctant to identify with the term 'global citizenship'. As suggested by the interview analysis and discussion, 'global citizenship' as a broad value is not native to this Japanese elementary school context. However, development of cultural awareness and social responsibility remains a future possibility, as seen in the students' open-minded aspirations to interact with and befriend people from other countries, and the teachers' enthusiasm for classroom cultural exchange provided by ALTs. Engagement with the values of global citizenship may be enhanced by deeper and more comprehensive cultural experiences in the EFL classroom.

Student and teacher responses suggest that the EFL curriculum would be usefully developed by supplementing the textbooks with a wider range of authentic materials, promoting greater engagement with non-Japanese people, and encouraging explicit classroom discussions about culture and cultural experiences. Authentic materials may include content from other academic subjects, common expressions, literature, and interesting facts. Although these materials also present the pedagogical difficulty of grading language to the level of the class (Gilmore, 2007), future textbooks could provide a selection of excerpts from which teachers may choose according to the interests and needs of their students. Incorporating authentic materials with more personal, real-world relevance – and more

representations of international practices and perspectives – would encourage greater cognitive engagement (Camilleri, 2000; Opoku-Amankwa, Brew-Hammond, & Kofifah, 2011).

Interaction with non-Japanese people, whenever feasible, is also paramount to increasing multicultural understanding and sentiments of global citizenship. Both students and teachers attested that students greatly enjoy communicating with ALTs and international volunteers at community festivals, and these interactions provide more dynamic and individualised cultural exposure than the textbooks alone. Moreover, open discussion would help increase engagement: the curriculum could encourage students and teachers to critique textbook depictions of various people, places, and customs in comparison with their own life experiences. If teachers facilitated a supportive, reflective environment wherein students feel comfortable sharing their own perspectives, students would ‘learn to be interactants within culture rather than learners of discrete language forms and static cultural facts’ (Michelson, 2018, p. 14). They would also handily fulfill the core values of global citizenship, especially cultural awareness, by opening their minds towards a non-binary, ‘non-essentialist’ view of reality and building their ‘interpretive capacities for intercultural communication’ (McConachy, 2018, p. 86; Shin et al., 2011). Therefore, language educators aiming to add the dimension of global citizenship should encourage meaningful reflection and communication both inside and outside the classroom.

Methodological limitations inherent to the scale of this project include the narrow focus of content analysis on images and audio, and the problem of defining ‘culture’. Omitting text from the coding scheme may have produced a simplified analysis, and restricted broader consideration of the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of representation. A more comprehensive sample of



textbooks may yield divergent results. Further, our focus on ‘culture’ as nationally-based and our adoption of Yuen (2011)’s four Ps represent one attempt to encapsulate the many facets of this shifting concept, which may be debated or expanded by further research.

This study contributes a deeper understanding of cultural representation in *Hi, friends!*, and a new theorisation of global citizenship according to the dimensions of cultural awareness, open-mindedness, and social responsibility. Matsuda (2003, p. 436) wrote ‘English is by no means the magic wand for international understanding, but it *could* contribute to it if the language is presented appropriately and used effectively’, and this analysis would suggest replacing the word ‘language’ in that quote with ‘culture’. Local stakeholders can provide much insight into the efficacy of textbook discourse, both in their capacity to shape future publications and their everyday commitment to enriching students’ experience of culture in the language classroom (Yuen, 2011). As educators and policymakers develop more authentic and enlightening textbooks and curricula, they may deepen student engagement with our world of exciting and diverse languages and cultures.

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## Tables with Captions

Table 1. Frequencies of Japanese, non-Japanese, and non-country-specific cultural material across all *Hi, friends!* textbooks

Country	Products	Practices	Perspectives	Persons	Total within country	Percentage of total
Australia	35	7	0	8	50	2.15%
Brazil	9	2	0	8	19	0.82%
Canada	1	0	0	1	2	0.09%
China	28	7	0	9	44	1.89%
Egypt	10	1	0	1	12	0.52%
England	3	0	0	3	6	0.26%
Finland	10	0	0	14	24	1.03%
France	37	2	0	8	47	2.02%
Germany	2	0	0	2	4	0.17%
Greece	4	0	0	0	4	0.17%
India	17	0	0	7	24	1.03%
Italy	9	0	0	1	10	0.43%
Japan	195	17	12	469	693	29.82%
Kenya	5	1	0	4	10	0.43%
Korea	19	10	0	17	46	1.98%
Mongolia	2	0	0	1	3	0.13%
No specific country	520	64	5	655	1,244	53.53%
Russia	7	1	0	7	15	0.65%
Spain	7	2	0	4	13	0.56%
Thailand	5	3	0	2	10	0.43%
The U.S.	31	5	0	8	44	1.89%
<i>Total</i>	<i>956</i>	<i>122</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>1229</i>	<i>2,324</i>	<i>100.00%</i>

Table 2. Frequencies of the four Ps across all *Hi, friends!* textbooks

Type	Frequency	Percentage of total
Products	956	41.14%
Practices	122	5.25%
Perspectives	17	0.73%
Persons	1,229	52.88%
<i>Total</i>	2,324	100.00%



## Figure Captions

Figure 1. Diagram of convergent parallel mixed-method research design

Figure 2. An excerpt from *Hi, friends! 2* (MEXT, 2012b, pp. 6-7)