



Analysis of Effectiveness of Active Learning based Collaborative Educational Program among Universities: A Case Study of Nepal-Japan Project

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Abstract: The Nepal-Japan Project (NJP), launched in 2002, is a collaborative educational program between university students from Nepal and Japan that emphasizes active learning through fieldwork and school activities. Japanese and Nepalese students are paired one-on-one to design and implement educational programs, analyze findings, and present results, fostering student-centered learning. This study evaluates NJP's effectiveness in enhancing active learning, intercultural competence, and professional growth. A questionnaire survey conducted after the program revealed that participants from both countries became more proactive and improved their communication skills and international relationships. However, challenges such as difficulty adapting program content for younger students and limited time were identified. The findings highlight NJP's uniqueness as a model of international, active-learning-based collaboration and provide insights for future program improvement.

Keywords: Nepal-Japan Project, NJP, Collaborative Educational Program, Active Learning, Effectiveness and Case Study

1 INTRODUCTION

As higher education becomes increasingly globalized, there is growing interest in collaborative learning programs that bridge national and cultural boundaries. These programs allow students from diverse backgrounds to learn from one another, promoting cross-cultural understanding and personal growth. In response to complex global challenges, particularly those related to sustainability and environmental issues, higher education institutions are increasingly shifting towards creating environments that are not only student-centered but also participatory and globally oriented, preparing students for an interconnected world. A central pedagogical approach gaining traction in this context is Active Learning (AL), which emphasizes student initiative, critical thinking, and reflection. The Central Council for Education in Japan defines AL as "proactive and interactive learning" (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2016). Building on this idea, Kazamaki

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(2017) introduces Learning for Action (LfA), which views learning as a transformative process that fosters not just knowledge, but also ethical values such as sustainability, social justice, and multicultural coexistence. LfA encourages learners to become active participants in shaping a more just and interconnected global society.

The Nepal-Japan Project (NJP) represents a distinctive application of AL within an international, collaborative framework. NJP is a student-centered field research program that began in 2002 with the goal of deepening university students' understanding of social and environmental issues in developing countries. Through experiential and collaborative learning, NJP immerses students in both academic research and intercultural exchange. Faculty and students from multiple universities in Japan work alongside faculty and students from universities in Nepal, working together in an immersive environment that blends fieldwork, community engagement, and reflective practice (Bushell & Goto, 2006; Goto et al., 2014). A distinctive feature of NJP is its project-based learning (PBL) approach, in which students design and conduct surveys, collaborate with local university students to collect and analyze data, and implement school programs, with faculty providing guidance rather than direct instruction. This format meets the definition of active learning outlined by Yamauchi (2019) and fosters skills like critical thinking, collaboration, leadership, and self-reflection. Additionally, NJP adopts a unique "one-on-one" pairing model, in which each Japanese student is paired with a Nepalese counterpart. Within this arrangement, Nepalese students conducted the surveys in the Nepali language and subsequently translated the responses into English (Nishihara et al., 2014; Aria et al., 2017; Shimizu et al., 2018; Saito et al., 2020). This collaborative structure facilitates mutual learning, shared responsibility, and sustained intercultural engagement, thereby extending beyond the scope of conventional study-abroad experiences.

Since its inception, NJP has evolved through sustained inter-university collaboration. The project's first field visit to Nepal took place in March 2003 as part of Japan's "Cyber Campus Development Project" and later received recognition through MEXT's "Support Program for Distinctive University Education," highlighting its innovative approach to environmental and global education (Bushell et al., 2006). In 2005, NJP established formal partnerships with Nepalese institutions, particularly National College (NC), affiliated with Kathmandu University, marking the beginning of reciprocal student exchange programs. Since then, Japanese and Nepalese students have jointly conducted field research, developed environmental education programs for schools, and participated in a wide range of cross-cultural activities. The involvement of NC students, especially in interpretation and cultural mediation, has been instrumental in fostering mutual respect and strengthening local ownership of the program (Sugano et al., 2011). Over time, NJP expanded through broader institutional collaboration. Partnerships evolved from Musashi Institute of Technology and the University of the Sacred Heart in 2011 to Waseda University and the University of the Sacred Heart in 2012, with Sophia University joining in 2017. Each March, Japanese university students visit Nepal, accompanied by faculty members, to conduct field surveys and implement school-based programs, among other activities planned and designed by Japanese students in collaboration with Nepalese university students. At the end of each day, students discuss and analyze the outcomes of their activities and share their findings through evening presentations. In the summer, Nepalese students subsequently visit Japan to experience Japanese

culture and participate in academic and institutional visits. Despite temporary disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022), NJP resumed in 2023 with revised strategies addressing contemporary educational and environmental challenges. As of 2024, the program continues as a two-credit overseas field study course offered by participating Japanese universities. Although NJP has been implemented for more than two decades and has generated positive anecdotal evidence of student growth, systematic empirical research on its educational effectiveness remains limited. Prior studies indicate that learning outcomes from immersion-based international programs can be mixed without rigorous evaluation and intentional pedagogical design (Alcaraz, 2021). Similarly, Sugie and Mitsugi (2021) emphasize the need for systematic assessment in intercultural, cooperative, project-based learning contexts.

Addressing this gap, this study examines NJP as a case study of an AL-based collaborative educational program, analyzing its structure, implementation, and educational impact through participants' experiences and reflections. The rationale underlying NJP is grounded in the recognition that addressing global environmental challenges requires more than technical or scientific knowledge. It demands intercultural competence, ethical sensitivity, and civic engagement. By empowering students to co-design and implement environmental education programs, conduct joint research, and critically reflect on sustainability issues in both urban and rural Nepal, NJP nurtures globally conscious leaders. Over time, the project has developed into a dynamic learning ecosystem involving faculty, students, alumni, NGOs, local teachers, and community members, creating a sustainable platform for long-term international engagement and global education. Accordingly, this paper explores the structure, implementation, and educational impact of the NJP as a case study, contributing to the broader discourse on effective models of active learning based collaborative education in higher education.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Active Learning (AL) and Student-Centered Pedagogy

Active learning (AL) is firmly grounded in student-centered learning theories that emphasize learner autonomy, engagement, collaboration, and reflection (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Cannon, 2000; Pedersen & Liu, 2003; Bushell & Goto, 2011; Mizokami, 2014). Barr and Tagg's (1995) shift from a "teaching paradigm" to a "learning paradigm" reframed higher education as a process focused on what students learn rather than what instructors teach. Building on this perspective, subsequent studies have demonstrated that student-centered approaches foster higher levels of motivation, critical thinking, problem-solving ability, and deeper conceptual understanding (Cannon, 2000; Pedersen & Liu, 2003; Mizokami, 2014).

Empirical evidence further confirms the effectiveness of AL in enhancing educational outcomes. Meta-analyses and large-scale studies indicate that students engaged in active and collaborative learning environments achieve higher academic performance, demonstrate stronger analytical and problem-solving skills, and exhibit greater engagement than those in traditional lecture-based settings (Prince, 2004; Freeman et al., 2014). These benefits are particularly significant in interdisciplinary

and applied learning contexts, where students are required to integrate theoretical knowledge with practical experiences.

2.2 Philosophical Foundations of Active and Experiential Learning

The philosophical foundations of active learning (AL) are deeply rooted in the works of Paulo Freire and John Dewey. Freire (1982) critiqued the traditional “banking model” of education, in which learners are treated as passive recipients of knowledge, and instead proposed a “problem-posing” approach grounded in dialogue, critical inquiry, and the co-construction of knowledge. In this model, teachers and students function as partners in learning, collaboratively examining real-world issues through reflection and action.

Similarly, Dewey’s concept of democratic education frames learning as a communal, experiential process that prepares individuals for active participation in civic and social life (Dewey, 2001). Dewey emphasized that meaningful learning emerges through experience, reflection, and interaction with one’s environment, ideas that strongly align with experiential and project-based learning models. Extending these perspectives, Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory conceptualizes learning as a cyclical process involving concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. This framework is particularly applicable to international, field-based programs such as the NJP, where students repeatedly engage in action and reflection within unfamiliar cultural contexts.

These philosophical principles are embedded in the design of NJP. Faculty members serve primarily as facilitators, while students from Japan and Nepal collaborate as co-investigators. Through activities such as field surveys, school-based environmental education programs, and daily reflective discussions, students take active ownership of their learning processes. In line with Dewey’s democratic education, NJP immerses participants in new cultural and social environments, where they form meaningful relationships and confront practical challenges, including language barriers, coordination issues, and differing educational systems. Such experiences not only enhance self-awareness but also foster empathy, intercultural competence, and a deeper understanding of learning as a shared and participatory endeavor.

2.3 Active Learning in Intercultural and International Contexts

AL is especially effective in intercultural and international learning environments, where students must navigate linguistic differences, cultural norms, and diverse perspectives. Ito and Kawazoe (2015) argue that AL fosters transferable competencies, such as communication, teamwork, and critical thinking, that extend beyond the university and are essential for future professional success.

Intercultural competence, defined as the ability to interact effectively and appropriately across cultures, is a central outcome of international collaborative programs. Deardorff’s (2006) model identifies attitudes such as openness, respect, and empathy, along with skills such as adaptability and communication, as key components of intercultural competence. Research indicates that structured

interaction, collaborative tasks, and guided reflection significantly enhance these outcomes (Vande Berg et al., 2012; Sugie & Mitsugi, 2021).

However, scholars caution that short-term international programs do not automatically lead to deep intercultural learning. Without intentional design and reflection, students may engage only superficially with host cultures (Iskhakova & Bradly, 2022). This underscores the importance of structured, project-based collaboration, as exemplified by NJP.

2.4 Project-Based Learning (PBL) and NJP

Project-based learning (PBL) is widely recognized as an effective strategy for integrating AL with real-world problem solving. In PBL environments, students take responsibility for planning, implementing, and evaluating projects, while instructors act as facilitators (Yamauchi, 2019). Research has shown that PBL enhances leadership, collaboration, and self-efficacy, particularly in interdisciplinary and international settings (Yang et al., 2024).

NJP exemplifies this approach through student-led field surveys, collaborative data analysis, and school-based environmental education programs (Bushell et al., 2010 & 2011). The one-on-one pairing of Japanese and Nepali students facilitates sustained interaction and mutual dependence, encouraging the negotiation of meaning and shared ownership of learning. As Masayuki, Brenda, and Naomi (2005) argue, such international collaborations broaden students' perspectives and contribute to both personal and professional development.

While previous descriptive studies have highlighted NJP's innovative structure and educational potential (Bushell et al., 2006; Sugano et al., 2011; Bushell & Goto, 2011), systematic evaluation of its learning outcomes remains limited. Building on existing literature on AL, experiential education, and intercultural competence, this study contributes empirical evidence on NJP's effectiveness as a model of international, active-learning-based collaboration in higher education.

3 METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods case study design to evaluate the educational effectiveness of the NJP in promoting active-learning-based collaborative program in higher education, intercultural competence, and professional growth among university students. The mixed-methods approach enabled the integration of quantitative outcomes and qualitative insights, allowing for a comprehensive examination of both measurable learning outcomes and participants' experiences.

The qualitative component focused on participants' reflections, perceptions, and experiences, while the quantitative component assessed perceived learning outcomes using structured survey items. Together, these approaches provided a comprehensive understanding of how NJP fosters active learning, intercultural competence, and professional growth.

3.1 Participants

Participants included 42 university students who took part in NJP in March 2025. This group comprised 21 students from Japanese universities (Waseda University and the University of the Sacred Heart) and 21 students from National College (NC), affiliated with Kathmandu University, Nepal. All participants were enrolled in relevant undergraduate or graduate courses and participated voluntarily based on their interest in international collaborative learning.

In addition to students, faculty members involved in program facilitation contributed contextual insights through observation notes and informal discussions. Prior to data collection, all participants provided informed consent. Ethical considerations were addressed by ensuring anonymity, confidentiality, and voluntary participation throughout the study.

3.2 Data Collection

Multiple data collection methods were employed to capture participants' learning experiences comprehensively and to enable data triangulation, thereby enhancing the validity and credibility of the findings.

The primary data collection instrument was a post-program survey questionnaire, administered to all 42 student participants upon completion of NJP. The survey was designed and distributed using Google Forms and consisted of 20 items combining quantitative and qualitative questions. The questionnaire addressed the following areas:

- Learning outcomes and skill development
- Reflections on past and current participation in the program
- Challenges faced during the implementation of programs
- Suggestions for future program improvements

The quantitative component utilized dichotomous (yes/no) questions, four- and five-point Likert-scale items to measure students perceived learning outcomes, such as development of active learning skills, intercultural awareness and communication, collaboration and teamwork, critical thinking and problem-solving, and professional and personal growth.

The qualitative component consisted of open-ended questions that invited participants to reflect on their experiences, challenges faced during the program, meaningful learning moments, and suggestions for improvement. This mixed structure enabled the collection of both standardized responses and rich narrative data.

Additional data sources included NJP program documents (e.g., activity schedules, project outlines, and student presentation materials) and faculty observation notes recorded during field surveys, school-based environmental education programs, group discussions, and evening presentations sessions. These materials provided contextual information and supported the interpretation of participant-generated data.

3.3 Program Activities as Learning Context

During the NJP, students participated in collaborative field surveys (Pic.1) focusing on tourism development and infrastructure in Kathmandu, the capital city, and Pokhara, a renowned tourist destination, Nepal. Students also implemented a

participatory environmental education session (Pic.2) for fourth-grade elementary school students in Pokhara, addressing waste management and sustainable practices. To measure the effectiveness of this session, a pre- and post-program questionnaire was administered to the elementary students to examine changes in knowledge and attitudes toward waste management.



Pic. 1. Questionnaire survey using one-on-one pairing model



Pic. 2. School Program explaining about waste management

University students worked in “one-on-one” Japanese and Nepalese pairs to conduct surveys and educational sessions designed by the Japanese team with the suggestion of Nepalese students. After each day’s activities, students engaged in group discussions, analyzed results, and presented their findings during evening reflection sessions, reinforcing the active learning cycle.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis followed a systematic mixed-methods procedure, integrating quantitative and qualitative analyses.

Quantitative survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, to summarize participants’ perceived learning outcomes across key domains such as intercultural competence, collaboration, and critical thinking.

Qualitative data from open-ended survey responses, reflective journals and observation notes were analyzed using thematic analysis. All qualitative data were first organized, anonymized, and read repeatedly to gain familiarity. An inductive coding process was applied, beginning with open coding to identify meaningful units related to learning experiences, challenges, interactions, and perceived impacts. These codes were grouped through axial coding into broader categories, such as student autonomy, collaborative learning, intercultural communication, reflection and self-awareness, and application of theory to practice. Through iterative comparison and refinement, these categories were further synthesized into core themes representing the central educational outcomes of NJP.

Quantitative and qualitative results were integrated during the interpretation phase. Survey trends were examined alongside reflective narratives to identify convergences and discrepancies, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how and

why NJP influenced student learning and ensured that findings were grounded in both numerical evidence and experiences.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

Several strategies were employed to ensure methodological rigor. Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data, reflections, and documents strengthened construct validity. Survey instruments were reviewed by faculty members experienced in active learning and international education to ensure content validity. Reliability was supported through standardized administration of questionnaires and consistent data collection procedures.

Peer debriefing among researchers was conducted during the coding process to reduce subjective bias, and representative participant quotations were retained to enhance transparency and credibility.

4 RESULTS and DISCUSSION

The analysis of the post-program survey responses from the 42 university participants (21 Japanese and 21 Nepalese students) provides valuable insights into the impact of the NJP. Quantitative data were used to compare perceived learning outcomes between the two groups, while qualitative reflections provided contextual depth. The findings highlight key outcomes across various areas, including learning experiences, intercultural competence, challenges faced, and suggestions for future improvements. Below, we delve into these findings in detail.

4.1 Learning Outcomes and Personal Growth

NJP has played a pivotal role in fostering both academic and personal development among participating students from Nepal and Japan. Fig. 1 summarizes students' perceived knowledge and skill gains across key learning domains.

Analysis of Likert-scale survey items revealed consistently high levels of agreement across both groups. More than 90% of respondents reported improvements in communication skills and the development of friendships with international peers. Descriptive statistical analysis of Likert-scale items revealed consistently high mean scores across all learning domains for both Japanese and Nepali students (Table 1). Independent sample t-tests were conducted to examine group differences, and no statistically significant differences were found between the two groups ($p > 0.05$). This indicates that the NJP provided comparable learning benefits for students from both national contexts. The absence of significant group differences suggests that the program's active learning design effectively supported intercultural and collaborative learning outcomes regardless of students' cultural and national backgrounds. This finding supports prior research demonstrating that active learning environments promote engagement, collaboration, and critical thinking across diverse learner groups (Prince, 2004; Freeman et al., 2014).

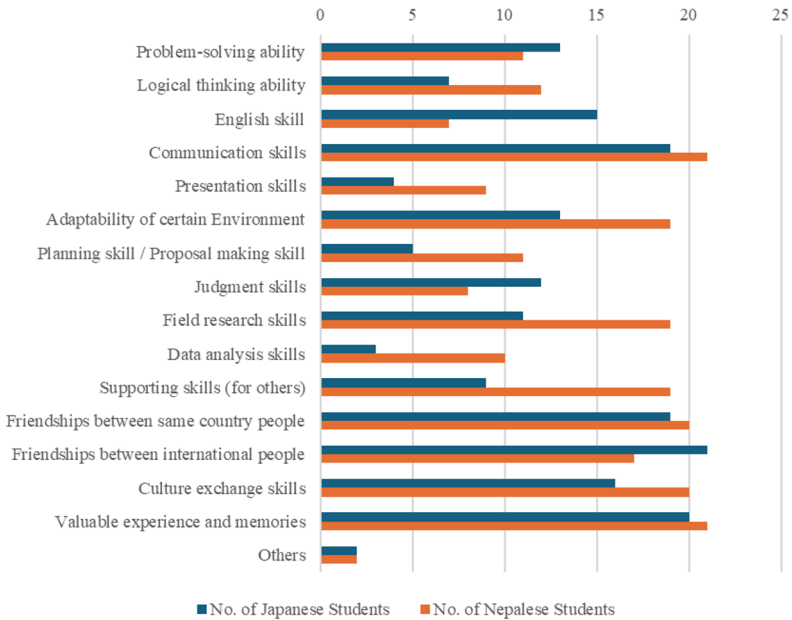


Fig. 1. Knowledge gained by participating in NJP

Table 1. Comparison of perceived learning outcomes between Japanese and Nepalese students participating in NJP (N = 42)

Learning domain	Japanese students (n = 21) Mean (SD)	Nepalese students (n = 21) Mean (SD)	t	p
Communication skills	1.48 (0.50)	1.00 (0.00)	-1.96	0.06
Intercultural awareness	1.72 (0.55)	1.24 (0.44)	-1.78	0.08
Collaboration & teamwork	1.48 (0.50)	1.72 (0.56)	-1.41	0.17
Leadership development	1.79 (0.63)	1.61 (0.58)	-1.01	0.32
Critical thinking & problem-solving	1.84 (0.49)	1.48 (0.51)	-1.95	0.06
Personal & professional growth	1.52 (0.51)	1.24 (0.44)	-1.73	0.09

Note: Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree). Independent-sample t-tests indicated no statistically significant differences between Japanese and Nepali students across learning domains ($p > 0.05$).

Japanese students highlighted a transformation from initial passivity to active participation, reporting increased confidence in English communication and intercultural interactions. This supports evidence that short-term programs, when intentionally designed with active learning components, can yield significant gains in intercultural competence (Alcaraz, 202). Nepali students emphasized growth in adaptability, leadership, and empathy, outcomes that resonate with Deardorff's (2006) model of intercultural competence, which identifies empathy, openness, and adaptability as central to cross-cultural engagement.

Notably, while some studies have underscored the limitations of short-term mobility programs in achieving deep intercultural outcomes (Vande Berg et al., 2012; Iskhakova & Bradly, 2022), NJP demonstrates that carefully structured, project-based collaboration can foster meaningful growth within a limited timeframe. NJP's pairing model and reflective practice have proven effective in driving both personal and professional development. The emphasis on experiential engagement and reflection is consistent with meta-analytic evidence showing that structured reflection enhances intercultural competence outcomes.

The program's AL approach empowered students to take the lead in designing and conducting field surveys and school programs. This autonomy was particularly effective in developing leadership, teamwork, and critical thinking skills, echoing prior research highlighting the role of cross-cultural experiential learning in strengthening communication and professional competencies (Yang et al., 2024).

Qualitative reflections further substantiate these statistical trends:

- Japanese students noted a shift from passivity to active involvement. They gained confidence in using English for communication, became more comfortable in intercultural settings, and learned to assert their opinions while respecting others. This experience broadened their worldview, challenged cultural assumptions, and encouraged greater self-expression.
- Nepali students similarly reported significant personal and professional growth. Many described improvements in communication, adaptability, and collaboration in multicultural settings. Previously introverted students became more confident and open, developing leadership, public speaking, and organizational skills. Exposure to diverse cultures nurtured empathy and patience, while hands-on responsibilities deepened their sense of accountability and preparedness for future professional challenges.

Taken together, the convergence of quantitative trends and qualitative reflections indicates that NJP functioned as a transformative learning experience, supporting the development of globally oriented competencies among participants.

4.2 Reflections on past and current participation in the program

Students who participated in the NJP more than once reported experiencing deeper personal and professional growth compared to first-time participants. Japanese students highlighted increased confidence in leadership and teamwork, while Nepali students emphasized enhanced organizational and communication skills, particularly in coordinating field surveys and school programs. These findings align with Sugie and Mitsugi (2021), who argue that intercultural cooperative project-based learning is most effective in strengthening competencies when participants progressively assume

leadership responsibilities. The reflections also support Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory, which underscores that learning is cumulative and deepened through cyclical processes of experience, reflection, and practice.

For students engaging in the NJP for the second time, both Japanese and Nepali participants described notable advancements compared to their initial experience:

- Japanese students reported significant progress in communication skills, especially in English. They described a shift from shyness and passivity to greater confidence and proactivity. Many assumed leadership roles refined their self-management abilities and became more capable of supporting peers while relying on teamwork. Building stronger connections with Nepali counterparts also led to a more nuanced appreciation of intercultural group dynamics.
- Nepali students similarly experienced greater confidence and enhanced leadership abilities during their second participation. They expressed feeling more comfortable managing logistics, conducting field surveys, and engaging in intercultural collaboration. Those in leadership positions, such as survey or school program coordinators, reported substantial gains in organizational and communication skills.

Overall, the reflections of repeat participants suggest that iterative engagement with NJP facilitates long-term growth, enabling students to take on expanded responsibilities, strengthen friendships, and cultivate higher levels of collaboration, adaptability, and intercultural understanding. These outcomes underscore the importance of sustained or repeated experiential learning opportunities in maximizing the transformative potential of international, project-based programs.

4.3 Challenges faced during program implementation

Despite the positive outcomes, students also faced challenges that limited program effectiveness. Japanese students reported difficulties with unclear role definitions, last-minute scheduling changes, and occasional language barriers. Nepali students, in contrast, highlighted issues with translation accuracy, respondent bias during surveys, and the difficulty of aligning lesson content with local educational levels. These challenges are consistent with prior research on intercultural collaboration, which underscores communication and coordination as persistent barriers in project-based learning contexts (Sugie & Mitsugi, 2021; Peraza, A. & Furumura, Y. 2022).

Importantly, however, these obstacles did not undermine the overall learning experience. Instead, they created opportunities for problem-solving and adaptability, echoing Hammer et al's (2003) argument that overcoming intercultural difficulties fosters resilience and competence.

A closer examination of the survey and school program components reveals how challenges differed across tasks and participant groups. Both Japanese and Nepali students faced various challenges during the survey and school program components, though the specific challenges differed in nature and intensity:

Survey:

- Japanese students generally found the survey process manageable due to prior preparation and support from their Nepali counterparts. However, some faced

challenges related to low respondent availability, language barriers, and occasional passivity in leadership roles.

- Nepali students encountered more technical issues, such as difficulty finding participants, misunderstandings from unclear translations, and respondent bias. Some students also noted weaker communication with their Japanese peers compared to previous years, which hindered smooth coordination.

School Program:

- Japanese students faced difficulties with unclear role definitions, last-minute scheduling, material management, and assumptions about what their Nepali counterparts understood. Coordination challenges and language barriers occasionally impeded the smooth delivery of lessons.
- Nepali students, who took the lead in classroom facilitation, faced challenges related to time pressure (as the allocated time was shorter than anticipated) and the complexity of the lesson content for 4th-grade students. For example, the 5Rs waste management framework introduced by the Japanese students was new and somewhat complex for younger children.

Despite these challenges, both groups demonstrated adaptability, collaboration, and strong problem-solving abilities. Their reflections highlight the importance of improving pre-program planning, strengthening cross-cultural communication, and designing simpler, age-appropriate teaching materials for future iterations of NJP. These adjustments would not only mitigate common obstacles but also enhance the program's overall effectiveness in achieving its intercultural and educational goals.

4.4 Suggestions for future Program Improvement

Survey:

Both Japanese and Nepali students found the survey program to be well-organized but recommended several areas for improvement:

- Japanese students suggested reducing last-minute changes, avoiding repetitive questions, improving survey formatting, and enhancing engagement during implementation.
- Nepali students recommended improving question clarity, reducing redundancy, translating forms into Nepali, avoiding mid-program design changes, and ensuring better early communication and contextual alignment. Both groups emphasized the need for clear instructions, culturally appropriate questions, and better role coordination.

School Program

Feedback on the school program focused on the need for better communication before the field visit and more effective material organization:

- Japanese students recommended simplifying lesson content, conducting mock lessons in Japan before the program, and clarifying facilitator roles.
- Nepali students called for aligning lesson content with the students' grade level, sharing all materials in advance, reducing the number of teaching resources, proofreading materials, and accounting for differences in educational systems.

- Both countries' students stressed the importance of preparation, age-appropriate content, and smooth coordination to enhance the effectiveness of lesson delivery.

In conclusion, Students recommended clearer communication, earlier sharing of teaching materials, simplified lesson plans, and improved translation of surveys into Nepali. Such recommendations align with previous studies that emphasize the need for contextual adaptation and pre-departure preparation in international collaborative programs (Paige et al., 2009). Incorporating mock lessons and enhanced cross-cultural orientation may further strengthen the program's impact.

4.5 Implications for AL

Overall, the Nepal-Japan Project (NJP) demonstrates the strong potential of active learning in cross-cultural contexts. By positioning students as co-investigators and facilitators, the program promotes self-directed learning, leadership, and intercultural competence. The one-on-one pairing model is particularly effective in fostering mutual respect, accountability, and collaboration, echoing the principles of experiential and project-based learning (Kolb, 1984; Prince, 2004). Compared to traditional classroom-based approaches, NJP offers a transformative, field-based model that responds to the needs of global education while cultivating essential 21st-century skills.

The results of this study affirm that NJP serves as an effective example of AL in an international, cross-cultural context. By engaging students as active participants in fieldwork, community engagement, and reflective discussions, the program enhances core competencies such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and leadership. The one-on-one pairing model, which encourages collaboration and mutual respect between students from different countries, is particularly effective in promoting intercultural competence. The combination of fieldwork, community engagement, and reflective discussions promotes the development of essential soft skills such as teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving, all of which are crucial for students' personal and professional growth in an increasingly globalized world.

These outcomes are particularly significant within the context of higher education, where students are expected to navigate complex global challenges with both technical expertise and intercultural sensitivity. As prior research suggests, such integrative approaches to learning prepare students for personal growth and professional success in diverse environments (Freeman et al., 2014; Alcaraz, 2021; Sugie & Mitsugi, 2021). NJP thus illustrates how international collaboration through active learning can be a powerful tool to foster cross-cultural understanding, long-term personal development, and the practical skills necessary for thriving in a globally interconnected society.

5 SURVEY CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study affirm that NJP serves as an effective example of active learning in an international, cross-cultural context. By positioning students as co-investigators and active participants, the program fosters engagement, reflection, and self-directed learning—core principles of the AL pedagogy.

The one-on-one pairing model, which encourages collaboration and mutual respect between students from different countries, is particularly effective in promoting intercultural competence. The combination of fieldwork, community engagement, and reflective discussions promotes the development of essential soft skills such as teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving, all of which are crucial for students' personal and professional growth in an increasingly globalized world.

These outcomes are especially significant in the context of higher education, where students are increasingly expected to address complex global challenges. The NJP demonstrates how international collaboration through AL can be a powerful tool to foster cross-cultural understanding, personal growth, and the practical skills necessary for success in a globally interconnected society.

6 LIMITATIONS

While NJP provides meaningful insights into active learning and intercultural collaboration, this study is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged.

6.1 Sample Size and Scope

The findings are based on data collected from 42 university students (21 Japanese and 21 Nepalese) participating in the 2024 NJP. While this provides a valuable snapshot, the small and specific cohort limits the generalizability of the results. The participants may not represent the broader population of students engaged in international collaborative learning programs.

6.2 Self-Reported Data

Data collection relied primarily on student self-assessment through questionnaires. Such responses are inherently subjective and may be influenced by social desirability bias or participants' emotional impressions shortly after the program. This can affect the reliability of responses related to personal growth, skill development, and program effectiveness.

6.3 Short-Term Evaluation

The survey was conducted immediately after the completion of the program, capturing only short-term effects. Long-term effects on personal, academic, or professional development were not measured. this time.

6.4 Language and Communication Barriers

Despite efforts to ensure cross-linguistic understanding, language differences between Japanese and Nepali participants may have resulted in some nuances being lost or misunderstood, and the clarity of data interpretation due to translation.

6.5 Program Variability

Since NJP is adapted each year based on feedback and student input, elements such as survey topics, school program content, and team dynamics may vary from one

iteration to another. This variability can make it difficult to compare outcomes year-to-year or to identify which specific components consistently contribute to learning outcomes.

7 REMARKS

7.1 Model of International Collaboration

The NJP exemplifies meaningful international collaboration in higher education. By integrating active learning, intercultural exchange, and real-world application, it effectively addresses global challenges and contributes to the personal and academic growth of students from different cultural backgrounds. The project's innovative approach strengthens students' understanding of sustainability, social responsibility, and environmental challenges, offering valuable educational experience.

7.2 Active Learning in Practice

This program highlights the effectiveness of active learning when combined with fieldwork and reflection. It strengthens students' critical thinking, collaboration, and leadership abilities. Both Japanese and Nepali participants demonstrated how student-led inquiry and hands-on problem-solving can cultivate skills essential for future global leadership.

7.3 Intercultural Competence and Personal Development

NJP's unique one-on-one student pairing model plays a crucial role in fostering intercultural competence. Both Japanese and Nepali students gained deeper insights into each other's cultures, making meaningful connections and learning to navigate the complexities of cross-cultural environments. This personal growth is essential in a world that increasingly values global awareness and cooperation.

7.4 Challenges and Growth Opportunities

While the NJP has been highly successful in many respects, it is also important to acknowledge the challenges faced during the program. Issues such as role clarity, coordination, and language barriers highlighted areas for improvement. Strengthening communication before, during, and after the program, along with providing clearer instructions and more culturally adapted teaching materials, will further enhance the program's effectiveness and sustainability.

7.5 Scalability and Future Potential

The lessons learned from the NJP can be applied to other international education programs seeking to promote active learning and global citizenship. The combination of fieldwork, intercultural exchange, and reflective learning can serve as a model for similar initiatives, not only in the context of environmental education and social issues but also across other academic disciplines and global challenges.

With ongoing feedback, thoughtful adaptation, and a continued focus on student-centered learning, the program is well-positioned to deepen its impact. As

global challenges grow more complex, initiatives like NJP will play a vital role in preparing students with the skills, perspectives, and values needed to navigate and address them.

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