

## Photovoice for Fostering Global Competence among University Students

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### **Abstract**

As the world is more and more globalized and interconnected, global competence education is becoming increasingly important. Since the global competence framework was released by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2018, numerous studies have been done to demonstrate teaching methods to enhance students' global competence through conventional activities such as dialogue, discussion, and reflection. However, little attention has been paid to how students would benefit from creative activities in the classroom. This study lays emphasis on the usage of photography and employs a visual research method called photovoice as a creative activity. When young people assemble for a photovoice project, what do they capture with their smartphones? How does it contribute to global competence education? From May 2023 to July 2023, twelve university students studying intercultural communication engaged themselves in photovoice exploring the historical and cultural connections between Kumamoto and Hawai'i. Applying the concept of "*conscientização*" (conscientization) proposed by Freire (1970/2003), I argue that "*conscientização*" and cultivating global competence are inseparable from each other. Project participants' accounts of their experience show that taking part in the photovoice project advances their conscientization and simultaneously helps them to obtain some of the global competence capacities specified by OECD (2018).

**Keywords:** global competence, Hawai'i, Kumamoto, photovoice, youth

### **Introduction**

It is of overriding importance in today's world that global competence is cultivated in education. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2018) articulates the necessity of developing global competence that contains the following four components:

1. the capacity to examine issues and situations of local, global and cultural significance (e.g. poverty, economic interdependence, migration, inequality, environmental risks, conflicts, cultural differences and stereotypes);
2. the capacity to understand and appreciate different perspectives and world views;
3. the ability to establish positive interactions with people of different national, ethnic, religious, social or cultural backgrounds or gender; and
4. the capacity and disposition to take constructive action toward sustainable development and collective well-being. (pp. 7-8)

OECD states that fostering these abilities as global competence is indispensable for educational institutions worldwide. Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) (2021) also attaches importance to the implementation of education, which guides students to become globally-competent: "With the advance of globalization, it is necessary to nurture globally-minded individuals who excel in communication skills, subjectivity and understanding towards different cultures ..." (p. 10). Hence, it is crucial to actualize global competence education that prepares students to participate actively in the globalizing and interconnected world.

Since OECD's global competence framework was released, numerous attempts have been made by scholars to demonstrate teaching methods to improve students' global competence through conventional activities such as dialogue, discussion, and reflection (e.g., Arasaratnam-Smith & Deardorff, 2022; D'Antoni & Mayes, 2023; Lantz-Deaton & Golubeva, 2020; Mansilla & Jackson, 2023). On the contrary, little attention has been paid to how students would benefit from creative activities in the classroom. This study focuses on the usage of photography and employs a visual research method called photovoice as a creative activity. Recently, a great deal of effort has been made on the examination of its applicability and effectiveness (Breny & McMorrow, 2021; Delgado, 2015; Latz, 2017). Leavy (2020) delineates the intrinsic qualities of photovoice:

In essence, research participants are given cameras and asked to photograph their environment and circumstances. Of course, research goals and instructions to participants vary greatly, but generally, participants are documenting their circumstances as they relate to a larger goal, such as improving their community, affecting public policy, or increasing self- and

social awareness. (p. 244)

As described here, photovoice can be practiced in various research areas and target diverse stakeholders for creating positive change.

On the other hand, research on photovoice is scarce in the context of Japan. As I discussed elsewhere (Hara, 2023), taking photographs and videos with cellphones/smartphones and sharing them on social media are popular among digital youth living in Kumamoto, Japan. Looking at the case of Kumamoto, it is obvious that globalization has been under way; the number of workers from countries such as Vietnam and the Philippines has been increasing and hit the highest in 2022 (Japan Broadcasting Corporation, 2023). In addition, the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. (TSMC), which is a global supply company, is opening its factory in Kikuyō, and “... it is already changing the atmosphere in Kumamoto Prefecture, from real estate and infrastructure to employment and education” (Oshika, 2023). In this trend of globalization and interconnectedness, acquiring global competence is becoming increasingly important for the youth. When young people assemble for a photovoice project, what do they capture with their smartphones? How does it contribute to global competence education? This paper proposes practicing photovoice as a creative activity that can cultivate global competence of university students.

### **Freire and Photovoice**

Freire’s critical pedagogy is essential for conceptualizing this study. Indeed, the practice of photovoice is inseparable from his philosophy, as Seppälä (2021) clearly explains below:

Photovoice first became popular in health and social work research, and only later more broadly in social sciences. Originally, it drew on ... Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2007/1970) and was strongly influenced by feminist theory and the concept of empowerment. (p. 85)

Freire (1970/2003) holds a critical view on banking education that preserves the power structure giving the teacher the precedence of providing knowledge and assigning the learners to be regulated by absorbing it. He presents an accurate description of what banking education is:

(a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught;

- (b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
- (c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
- (d) the teacher talks and the students listen—meekly;
- (e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
- (f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;
- (g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;
- (h) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;
- (i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;
- (j) the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects. (p. 73)

To evade this mode of education, Freire advocates the necessity of “*conscientização*” (conscientization) and suggests that students need to transform themselves into “... conscious beings” (1970/2003, p. 79). Applying his concept of “*conscientização*” (1970/2003, p. 74), I argue that fostering global competence is inseparable from increasing consciousness of the standpoint where she/he is and the relationship between the self and the world, and practicing photovoice in the classroom contributes to it.

The study of photovoice in Japanese educational settings has been superficial. Therefore, in this study, I, the researcher/facilitator, made an initiative attempt and selected the connection of Kumamoto and Hawai‘i as a photovoice theme. Kumamoto once went through an outflow of its population due to emigration. In the past, numerous Japanese citizens moved from their homeland to destinations overseas to open up a new field of activity. People who left Japan by ship and arrived in Hawai‘i in 1868 were called *gannenmono*, the pioneers of mass emigration abroad in the modern period of Japan (Ogawa, 2019). Kumamoto is known as one of the prefectures that sent many emigrants abroad. In 1885, residents of Kumamoto started emigrating to Hawai‘i, and many people followed the first party afterwards (Japanese Overseas Migration Museum, 2020). According to Iida (1994), those who were from the Kumamoto Prefecture inhabited the islands in Hawai‘i, including Hawai‘i, Kaua‘i, Maui, and O‘ahu, and they formed the second largest group of immigrants in the Island of Hawai‘i (Big Island) after those who immigrated from the Hiroshima

Prefecture. Their descendants have been shaping the communities of Hawai‘i until today.

Twelve university students studying intercultural communication in Kumamoto are zealous to gain skills to become globally-competent citizens in the 21st century (Table 1). It is important for them to see her/himself in relation to Kumamoto that has the 138-year history of emigration to Hawai‘i and pay attention to the relationship between the self and the outer world by being engaged in photovoice and exploring the interconnectedness of Kumamoto and Hawai‘i. Freire makes a precise statement on what is essential to education:

For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other. (1970/2003, p. 72)

Here, both inquiry and praxis are regarded as integral parts of education. According to Freire, “the praxis” denotes “... reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (1970/2003, p. 51). Hence, drawing on the concept of “*conscientização*” proposed by Freire, this photovoice project seeks to promote students’ inquiry and praxis and encourage them to become conscious thinkers with global competence acquired.

Table 1. List of student photographers

Names in pseudonym	Age
Cheese	20
Daifuku	21
Gothic	20
Ken	20
Lil	20
Mimi	20
Mina	20
Omochi	20
Sakana	20
Sana	20
Tiger	20
Ui	20

### Photovoice Project Connecting Kumamoto and Hawai'i

According to a pre-survey conducted in April 2023, none of the students has been to Hawai'i before and made reference to Japanese immigrants. Therefore, in May 2023, our photovoice project started by reading and examining the selected sources such as Haruyama (2009), Iida (1994), Japanese Overseas Migration Museum (2020), and Ogawa (2019) in order to gain an understanding of the history of immigration to Hawai'i and activate students' inquiry. After a series of analyses and discussions on the materials each week, the participants reflected on what they have learned and began thinking what picture would be suitable for representing a message they hoped to convey to the viewers. As praxis, the twelve students took a picture respectively and presented their works, titles, and intentions behind them in July 2023. The photovoice project turned into a short film linking the twelve pictures together (Figures 1-12).



*Figure 1. Identity* by Tiger. © The Intercultural Communication Laboratory, PUK, 2023.



*Figure 2. Movement of culture* by Daifuku. © The Intercultural Communication Laboratory, PUK, 2023.



*Figure 3. Bento culture in Hawai'i* by Sana. © The Intercultural Communication Laboratory, PUK, 2023.



*Figure 4. Wherever I go with one suitcase* by Mina. © The Intercultural Communication Laboratory, PUK, 2023.



*Figure 5. The free sky* by Lil. © The Intercultural Communication Laboratory, PUK, 2023.



Figure 6. *The blue sky and music* by Ken. © The Intercultural Communication Laboratory, PUK, 2023.



Figure 7. *What connects me and Hawai'i* by Cheese. © The Intercultural Communication Laboratory, PUK, 2023.



Figure 8. *Tuna produced by Japanese immigrants' fishing industry* by Gothic. © The Intercultural Communication Laboratory, PUK, 2023.





*Figure 9. Create new culture together* by Mimi. © The Intercultural Communication Laboratory, PUK, 2023.



*Figure 10. Familiar Hawaiian culture* by Ui. © The Intercultural Communication Laboratory, PUK, 2023.



*Figure 11. Foreign country's food* by Omochi. © The Intercultural Communication Laboratory, PUK, 2023.



Figure 12. *The necessity of Japanese education* by Sakana. © The Intercultural Communication Laboratory, PUK, 2023.

A group of Cheese, Ken, Lil, Mina, and Sana proposed placing the pictures in this order and noted down their ideas:

From 1 to 3, they are originally Japanese culture but were taken to Hawai'i by Japanese immigrants. For example, kimono by Tiger, drums by Daifuku, and lunch box by Sana. 4 and 5 represent the freedom to visit foreign countries. From 6 to 11, they show Hawaiian and other cultures that currently permeate Japan. From 12, we can notice that education has an important role to play in communicating the efforts of the Nikkei to the future generations. Education is important in intercultural communication.

While the twelve pictures are arranged as such, the following comments of the student photographers reveal various messages encoded in their works:

Tiger: ... The picture of the yukata I took has a message that familiar things such as Aloha shirts are actually a fusion of various cultures, and their origins are also familiar things such as kimono and yukata. If we encounter a different culture or set of values, we should not give up understanding or reject it, but we should learn deeply and try to understand. I think it leads to respect for other cultures. In addition to this, we should not only inherit good memories and culture but also pass on history to the next generation. We should not forget the first generation who struggled to live in Hawai'i and set their own lifestyle.

Daifuku: ... The reason why *taiko* exists in Hawai'i and people play it is that Japanese immigrants played it there. Why does Japanese culture exist in a far country from Japan? As I said before, one of the reasons is that Japanese immigrants took it to Hawai'i, but the culture keeps existing, so this has something to do with cultural tolerance in Hawai'i. Therefore, I think that the movement of people is the movement of culture. People have their country's identity, so their identity moves to another place when they leave their country. This leads to the movement of culture. This is what I want to tell you through this photo.

Sana: Hawai'i has its own food culture. For example, loco moco and poke bowls are unique to it. However, Hawai'i is also strongly influenced by Japan. Japanese immigrants carried Japanese food culture to Hawai'i. One such example is the Japanese *bento* culture. In Japan, many people enjoy *bento* lunches during events such as cherry blossom viewing and picnic. ... Hawai'i's *bento* culture is said to have originated when Japanese and other Asian immigrants each brought their own *bento* boxes or sold them at lunch in Hawai'i. In addition to the *bento* culture, there are many other Hawaiian cultures that have been influenced by Japan and Japanese cultures that have been influenced by Hawai'i.

Mina: ... For Japanese people, Hawai'i has become known as one of the most popular tourist destinations and a symbol of overseas travel. The opportunity to easily interact with people from other countries and learn about the cultures and values of the other side has increased. I believe that one of the reasons why we can now easily go abroad is because of the history of Japanese Americans and other Japanese people from the past who have connected Japan with different countries. It is very important for us to incorporate such background knowledge. I feel that it conveys to us the importance of not taking any environment for granted and being thankful for it. I also think that we should be more active in intercultural communication.

Lil: ... We learned about the transition of immigration from Japan to Hawai'i and how immigrants used to live there in the past in this course. Nowadays, everyone has the freedom to come and go as they please, choosing between as

many countries as they like. In the same way that we are free to visit foreign countries, many foreigners visit Japan in these days. Cross-cultural exchanges are now possible more freely than ever thought possible in the past. I want to tell you through this picture that because many people have overcome hardships in the past, the present day is full of opportunities to come into contact with different cultures.

Ken: ... My ukulele has “Hawaii” written on it. The sky we see and the sky the people in Hawai‘i see are the same. I put a message that we are connected through the sky in this photo. I bought this ukulele at a second-hand shop near my house. I bought it because I thought I could feel Hawai‘i when I hear the sound of the ukulele. I learned “Hole Hole Bushi” in this class, and when I listened to it at home, the ukulele tone and the Japanese lyrics made me feel comfortable. It describes the efforts of the Japanese in its lyrics. Their hardships have greatly influenced not only the Japanese in Hawai‘i today but also the Japanese people.

Cheese: ... The reason why I took the photo is that it is related to not only Hawai‘i but also me. I learned the hula dance from elementary school to high school, and I actually used it. The songs used in the hula dance are written in the Hawaiian language, so I also learn it a little like “mahalo” and “pua”. I was able to experience Hawaiian culture through hula. There are a lot of people who learn it in Japan, and they enjoy Hawaiian culture and experience it through hula. I learned about Japanese immigration to Hawai‘i and found that they suffered from culture shock. Both Japanese people and Hawaiian people tried to understand each other’s differences, so they ended up overcoming culture shock. Through this, we can see the importance of understanding each other.

Gothic: ... Tuna is the very important key to bringing a new positive impact to Hawai‘i. To establish this impact, it was required to have the skillful techniques of fishing by Japanese immigrants, especially from the Kyūshū and Chūgoku areas including Kumamoto. Although plantations by Japanese immigrants in Hawai‘i are famous, we also need to check the seascape in Hawai‘i at that time. I would like to prove that one of the most significant contributions of Japanese immigration to integration into Hawai‘i was their fishing industry.

Japanese immigrants' skills of fishing excavated new possibilities in Hawai'i.

Mimi: This picture I took at café is a poke bowl (*don*), famous food of Hawai'i. I learned the first generation suffered from cultural differences and hard work in the sugar cane fields, missing their hometown. But they grew their feelings toward life in Hawai'i. Not only did they recreate the culture, but they created their own culture by mixing Japanese, Hawaiian and other immigrants' cultures. ... Before attending the project, it was just my favorite Hawaiian food, but now, it reminds me of this story about Japanese immigration to Hawai'i. I want to tell them that your pain created new culture and your descendants are so proud of you. Thank you for being a bridge between Japan and Hawai'i.

Ui: ... What I want to tell Japanese immigrants in Hawai'i through this picture is that Hawaiian culture was brought to Japan and it creates a place where people can be connected to each other. I used to work at this café, and met and talked with a lot of people from different countries. We had not only Japanese customers but also American and East Asian customers. I met an elderly American man, and he told me the cafe reminded him of his homeland. I think that Hawaiian music, meals, vibes, and Japanese customer service make the café a comfortable place for him and everyone. There were hard times for Japanese immigrants in Hawai'i but thanks to them, we can enjoy the culture. I want to tell them that I appreciate it.

Omochi: ... I took this picture because it can show both of what I learned through this project and how my identity has changed since I was born. We can experience many countries' cultures even in Japan, and these cultures are changing by being connected with Japanese culture such as a snack in Hawai'i, which is made by mixing popcorn and Japanese *okaki*. Our identities are also changing by foreign cultures. For example, I like British culture and history, so I think that would be one of my identities. I didn't know about Europe when I was born, then I became familiar with European cultures, thanks to this society where cultures are mixed. In this way, our identities are changing as society changes. We have to accept these changes and form our own identity.

Sakana: ... Language is one of the most important elements that compose our identity, particularly when we are not in our home country Japan. As you know, after the war, Japanese language schools were established, and the community was extended. And even now, the community is continuing until today. In this way, Japanese language school and Japanese education are essential to support them and not to lose their identity as Japanese. Thanks to the efforts of the first and second generation of Japanese immigrants, Japanese language education can be continued, their Nikkei community is protected, and their culture remains deeply rooted in the society even now.

As shown above, it is obvious that each student gives careful consideration to the relationship between her/himself and the outer world by participating in the creative activity. In this way, the photovoice project attaches importance to a combination of inquiry and praxis, and helps each learner to increase awareness of the standpoint where she/he is through the examination of the interconnectedness of Kumamoto and Hawai'i.

### Discussion

The student photographers' accounts of their works and intentions suggest that the photovoice project connecting Kumamoto and Hawai'i is effective in their "*conscientização*", that is, becoming "... conscious beings" (Freire, 1970/2003, p. 79). It is meaningful to look at what Gothic, Lil, Mimi, and Omochi mention about their learning for three months:

Gothic: Before the project, my perception of Hawai'i was on the surface. However, after the project, I am aware of the history hidden behind the scenes. I can think why Hawai'i has a strong connection with Japan.

Lil: I thought Hawai'i was full of unfamiliar things and cultures, but I know that Japanese culture is also prevalent there and the connection between Hawai'i and Japan is strong. I have learned that the diverse cultural societies of today owe everything to the efforts and suffering of people in the past.

Mimi: I feel that I only knew superficial information about Hawai'i. But now, I know the history of immigration and the people in Hawai'i accept their own backgrounds, love their islands, and are proud of their ancestors. Now I

think my body, soul, family, and house are made by my ancestors' lives. I feel connection with them strongly. They survived difficulties and passed life to me. I really want to thank them now.

Omochi: I've learned to think critically through the photovoice project. There are backgrounds in any real-life situations we have, and we can expand our knowledge by analyzing them with theory.

Thus, it becomes clear from the above words that practicing photovoice as a creative activity raises the consciousness of the students.

This conscientization is closely linked with the acquisition of global competence containing the four components specified by OECD (2018). Promoting their "*conscientização*", the photovoice project enables the students to obtain "... 1. the capacity to examine issues and situations of local, global and cultural significance (e.g. poverty, economic interdependence, migration, inequality, environmental risks, conflicts, cultural differences and stereotypes) ..." (OECE, 2018, pp. 7-8). Cheese, Ken, Sana, and Ui share their learning experiences:

Cheese: My perception changed. A lot of Japanese people immigrated, and they suffered from culture shock, discrimination, and so on. Thanks to their efforts, Japan and Hawai'i have a good relationship. I had known the good relationship before. However, after I knew the background, I came to like Hawai'i more, and I want to thank the Hawaiian people because they also made efforts to understand Japanese culture.

Ken: I learned that the first-generation Japanese, known as *gannenmono*, experienced very difficult immigration issues in Hawai'i, and the second generation suffered from discrimination and other problems not only in Hawai'i but also in Japan.

Sana: I have learned that people who step into an intercultural environment go through several stages of adaptation, that some people suffer from different dual identities in their own culture and in other cultures, and that some people have problems with the dominance of the English language. I thought English was convenient because it is a language that people around the world can understand at some level, but I have to look at the problems that some people

have with it.

Ui: Before this project, I had no idea what Japanese immigrants in Hawai'i went through. I learned Japanese people in Hawai'i were struggling to preserve their culture by creating "Hole Hole Bushi", for example. When we see many cultures remain together in one place, we tend to think it's beautiful but we should look at history deeper and see what happened actually in the past. These facts are something we can't see superficially.

In this way, their learning reflections show that taking part in the photovoice project leads them to acquire the first capacity of global competence.

The participants are also able to gain "... 2. the capacity to understand and appreciate different perspectives and world views ..." (OECD, 2018, p. 8). This can be seen in what Sakana and Tiger remark:

Sakana: In my past impression of Hawai'i, it was just about good things, but after this project, I learned there were many efforts and difficulties of Japanese immigrants in the past. Many things close to me are related to other cultures and customs. Then, I came to think that it is important to communicate with various people and understand diversity.

Tiger: Before the project, I didn't know about Hawai'i well and had vague images. However, I learned a lot of Hawai'i and the importance of cultural exchange and communication. I especially learned how to understand other cultures deeply and enhance my knowledge through the presentation and the project.

It becomes apparent here that the second capacity of global competence is obtainable by probing into the historical and cultural interconnectedness of Kumamoto and Hawai'i through the photovoice project.

Furthermore, practicing photovoice helps the students to earn "... 3. the ability to establish positive interactions with people of different national, ethnic, religious, social or cultural backgrounds or gender ..." (OECD, 2018, p. 8). The comments of Daifuku and Mina are relevant to this point:

Daifuku: Through the photovoice project, I felt the connection between Japan



and Hawai'i. In the beginning of this project, I didn't know what picture I should take. But as I increase more knowledge of Hawai'i, I know there are many things in Japan, which are connected to Japanese immigrants in Hawai'i. I think this project will help me communicate with people from abroad.

Mina: I learned to connect with people through the project. I know from reading various articles such as "Hole Hole Bushi" that it is never easy to pass on culture. I believe that Japanese immigrants in Hawai'i must have tried to connect and communicate. That is why I feel that we should not only value our own culture but also the cultures of other countries. It is also important to try to read the thoughts and feelings of other countries and the significance of the message they are trying to convey. The more we connect with such people, the closer we will be to each other and the better we can understand each other's cultures.

Here, it is reasonable to suppose that a combination of inquiry and praxis makes it possible for the students to acquire the third ability of global competence, and thereby prepares them to move to the next phase of attaining "... 4. the capacity and disposition to take constructive action toward sustainable development and collective well-being" (OECD, 2018, p. 8) in order to become entirely globally-competent.

## Conclusion

In this study, I have initiated a photovoice approach in the Japanese university classroom, and attempted to incorporate it as a creative activity into global competence education for university students. The photovoice project, launched in May 2023 and completed in July 2023, dealt with the historical and cultural connections between Kumamoto and Hawai'i. Borrowing Freire's concept of "*conscientização*", it has become clear that the photovoice project elevates students' inquiry and praxis, and enables each one of them to become a conscious thinker who is aware of the standpoint where she/he is and the relationship with the self and the world. In addition, this paper has demonstrated that "*conscientização*" and fostering global competence are inseparable from one another. The comments of the student photographers have made it apparent that participating in the photovoice project activates their conscientization and at the same time, helps them to gain some of the global competence capacities indicated by OECD (2018).

To further pursue photovoice as a creative activity in global competence education,

the following points need to be taken into consideration. First, it is necessary to establish a measure to evaluate the acquisition and development of students' global competence before and after engaging themselves in photovoice. Next, the researcher/facilitator is required to allow time from the beginning to the completion of a creative attempt without haste. Creation consists of a combination of careful inquiry and praxis, and for that, it is essential to carry out reading, examination, discussion, reflection, presentation, and photo-taking. These are all vital for practicing photovoice aiming to cultivate global competence. This paper has shown that the university students who went through the process as such took pictures, and a variety of messages were encoded in their works. Hence, the researcher/facilitator should pay her/his respects to the diversity of the participants and maintain the classroom as a space where their diverse voices are fully acknowledged.

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