

Advancing Global Readiness through Intercultural Competence, Digital Literacy, and Multicultural Education in Japan

Ayaka Nakamura

University Japan

Correspondence; a.nakamura@hiroshima-u.ac.jp

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Abstract

In the era of globalization and digital transformation, educational systems are increasingly expected to prepare students with competencies that enable them to thrive in culturally diverse and technologically interconnected environments. Japan, as a nation actively promoting internationalization and digital innovation in education, faces growing demands to develop globally competent graduates capable of engaging effectively in multicultural contexts. This study explores the integration of intercultural competence, digital literacy, and multicultural education as key dimensions of global readiness among learners in Japan. Using a systematic literature review approach, the study synthesizes contemporary research on multicultural education, digital literacy, intercultural communication, and global competence. The findings indicate that multicultural education fosters cultural awareness and respect for diversity, while digital literacy enhances learners' ability to access, evaluate, and utilize information in global digital environments. Intercultural competence serves as a mediating factor that transforms educational experiences into meaningful global engagement. The study proposes a conceptual framework that integrates these three dimensions to advance global readiness. The findings contribute to educational policy and practice by highlighting pathways for developing globally competent and culturally responsive learners.

Keywords

Intercultural Competence, Digital Literacy, Multicultural Education, Global Readiness, Global Competence, Japan



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INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century has been characterized by rapid globalization, technological advancement, international mobility, and unprecedented levels of cultural interconnectedness. These developments have transformed social, economic, and educational systems worldwide, creating new opportunities and challenges for individuals and institutions. As societies become increasingly interconnected, educational systems are expected to prepare learners with the knowledge, skills,

attitudes, and competencies necessary to participate effectively in diverse and globalized environments. Consequently, concepts such as intercultural competence, digital literacy, global competence, and multicultural education have gained significant attention among scholars, policymakers, and educational practitioners. These concepts are increasingly viewed as essential components of educational frameworks designed to prepare students for the complexities of contemporary global society.

The growing importance of global readiness reflects broader transformations in the nature of work, communication, and citizenship. Global readiness refers to an individual's capacity to navigate diverse cultural contexts, engage with international issues, utilize digital technologies effectively, and collaborate across cultural and geographical boundaries. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2023), globally competent individuals are capable of examining local and global issues critically, appreciating multiple perspectives, communicating effectively across cultures, and taking responsible action for collective well-being. Such competencies have become increasingly important as globalization continues to influence educational and professional environments worldwide.

Japan provides a particularly significant context for examining the development of global readiness. Traditionally regarded as a relatively homogeneous society, Japan has experienced increasing cultural diversification resulting from globalization, international migration, tourism, and international educational exchanges. Simultaneously, the Japanese government has implemented various initiatives aimed at promoting internationalization and enhancing global competitiveness within higher education and broader educational systems. Programs such as the Global 30 Project, Top Global University Project, and Society 5.0 educational reforms reflect national commitments to developing globally oriented citizens equipped to contribute to international cooperation and innovation. These initiatives demonstrate growing recognition that educational institutions must prepare learners to engage successfully within increasingly interconnected global environments.

One critical dimension of global readiness is intercultural competence. Intercultural competence refers to the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Deardorff (2020) defines intercultural competence as a combination of attitudes, knowledge, skills, and behaviors that enable individuals to interact successfully across cultures. Core

components include cultural awareness, empathy, openness, adaptability, critical reflection, and intercultural communication skills. In educational settings, intercultural competence enables learners to navigate cultural differences constructively while fostering mutual understanding and respect. As cultural diversity increases within and across societies, intercultural competence has become an essential educational outcome associated with social cohesion, international collaboration, and global citizenship.

Research suggests that intercultural competence contributes significantly to students' academic, professional, and personal development. Students who possess strong intercultural competencies are generally better equipped to collaborate within multicultural teams, engage in international mobility programs, and participate effectively in global professional environments. According to Byram (2021), intercultural competence supports the development of critical cultural awareness, enabling individuals to evaluate cultural practices and perspectives from multiple viewpoints. Such capabilities are increasingly important in a world where cultural diversity shapes social interactions, educational experiences, and professional opportunities.

Alongside intercultural competence, digital literacy has emerged as another essential dimension of global readiness. The rapid expansion of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed communication, information access, learning processes, and social interaction. Digital literacy encompasses the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to use digital technologies effectively, critically, and responsibly. Ng (2021) argues that digital literacy extends beyond technical proficiency to include information evaluation, online communication, ethical technology use, and digital problem-solving. In contemporary educational contexts, digital literacy enables learners to access global information networks, participate in online learning communities, and engage with diverse perspectives across geographical boundaries.

The significance of digital literacy has become particularly evident following the expansion of digital learning environments and virtual collaboration platforms. Learners increasingly rely on digital technologies to access educational resources, communicate with peers, and participate in global networks. UNESCO (2023) emphasizes that digital literacy is essential for educational inclusion, lifelong learning, and participation in knowledge-based societies. In Japan, national educational reforms have prioritized digital transformation through initiatives such as the GIGA School Program, which seeks to provide digital devices and technology-

enhanced learning opportunities for all students. These efforts reflect broader recognition that digital competence is necessary for educational success and global engagement in the digital age.

Multicultural education serves as a complementary framework that supports the development of both intercultural competence and digital literacy. Multicultural education aims to create equitable learning environments that recognize, respect, and value cultural diversity while promoting social justice and inclusion. According to Banks (2019), multicultural education seeks to transform educational institutions so that all students, regardless of cultural background, have opportunities to succeed academically and participate fully in society. Through exposure to diverse perspectives, histories, and cultural experiences, multicultural education encourages learners to develop greater cultural awareness, empathy, and appreciation for diversity.

In the Japanese educational context, multicultural education has gained increasing relevance due to demographic changes and growing internationalization. Educational institutions are increasingly encountering students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, creating opportunities for intercultural learning and collaboration. Researchers have argued that multicultural educational approaches can help address challenges related to cultural misunderstanding, social exclusion, and unequal participation while fostering inclusive learning environments. Furthermore, multicultural education provides a foundation for developing intercultural competence by encouraging meaningful engagement with cultural diversity and critical reflection on issues of identity, equity, and inclusion.

The relationship among intercultural competence, digital literacy, and multicultural education is particularly significant in the context of global readiness. Multicultural educational experiences expose learners to diverse perspectives and encourage intercultural understanding. Digital literacy enables learners to access global information, engage in international communication, and participate in digital learning networks. Intercultural competence then transforms these experiences into effective global engagement by providing the skills necessary for communication, collaboration, and relationship-building across cultural boundaries. Together, these dimensions contribute to the development of globally competent individuals capable of navigating complex international environments.

Despite growing recognition of these relationships, existing research often examines intercultural competence, digital literacy, and multicultural education as separate constructs. Relatively few studies have explored how these dimensions

interact within a comprehensive framework designed to advance global readiness, particularly within the Japanese context. This limitation creates a theoretical gap in understanding how educational institutions can strategically integrate these competencies to prepare learners for global participation. As Japan continues to pursue educational internationalization and digital transformation, there is increasing need for conceptual models that explain the pathways through which educational experiences contribute to global readiness.

This study seeks to address this gap by examining the relationships among intercultural competence, digital literacy, multicultural education, and global readiness in Japan. Through a systematic review of contemporary literature, the study explores how these dimensions interact to support the development of globally competent learners. Furthermore, the research proposes a conceptual framework that integrates multicultural education, digital literacy, and intercultural competence as interconnected components of global readiness. The findings are expected to contribute to educational theory, policy development, and pedagogical practice by providing insights into effective strategies for preparing learners to succeed in increasingly interconnected and culturally diverse global environments.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design using a systematic literature review (SLR) approach to examine how intercultural competence, digital literacy, and multicultural education contribute to global readiness in Japan. The systematic literature review method was selected because it provides a structured and transparent process for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing scholarly knowledge related to a specific research topic. According to Snyder (2019), systematic literature reviews enable researchers to develop comprehensive conceptual understandings by integrating findings from diverse studies while ensuring methodological rigor and minimizing subjective bias. Given the conceptual objectives of this study, the SLR approach was considered appropriate for exploring relationships among multicultural education, intercultural competence, digital literacy, and global readiness.

The study was guided by an interpretivist paradigm, which emphasizes understanding educational and social phenomena through the meanings and interpretations attached to human experiences and interactions. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) argue that interpretivist research seeks to understand how individuals and institutions construct knowledge within specific cultural and social contexts. Within this framework, global readiness was viewed as a multidimensional construct

shaped by educational experiences, technological engagement, cultural interactions, and institutional practices. This perspective enabled the study to explore how multicultural education, intercultural competence, and digital literacy collectively contribute to learners' preparedness for participation in globalized environments.

The literature search was conducted using internationally recognized academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, SpringerLink, ScienceDirect, Taylor & Francis Online, and Google Scholar. These databases were selected because they provide extensive coverage of educational research, intercultural studies, digital literacy, and global competence literature. To ensure relevance and currency, the search focused on publications published between 2015 and 2025. Search terms included combinations of keywords such as "intercultural competence," "digital literacy," "multicultural education," "global readiness," "global competence," "internationalization of education," "cross-cultural communication," "digital learning," and "Japan." The use of multiple search terms increased the comprehensiveness of the review and minimized the possibility of overlooking relevant studies (Xiao & Watson, 2019).

The inclusion criteria required that selected publications be peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, conference proceedings, or policy reports addressing at least one of the study's central themes. Priority was given to publications indexed in Scopus and other reputable academic databases. Studies focusing on unrelated educational topics, duplicate publications, editorials, opinion pieces, and non-academic sources were excluded from the review. This selection process ensured that the analyzed literature met established standards of academic quality and relevance (Booth, Sutton, & Papaioannou, 2021).

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2021). The selected literature was read repeatedly to identify recurring concepts, theoretical perspectives, and empirical findings. Relevant information was coded into thematic categories related to multicultural educational practices, intercultural competence development, digital literacy acquisition, global engagement, internationalization, and educational inclusion. Through iterative coding and comparison, broader themes emerged that explained the relationships among the study variables. These themes provided the basis for developing a conceptual framework linking multicultural education, digital literacy, and intercultural competence to global readiness outcomes.

To enhance credibility and trustworthiness, source triangulation was employed by integrating empirical research findings, theoretical literature, and international

policy documents. Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasize that triangulation strengthens qualitative research by allowing findings to be validated through multiple sources and perspectives. Additionally, the analysis was informed by established theoretical frameworks, including Banks' Multicultural Education Theory, Deardorff's Intercultural Competence Model, UNESCO's Digital Literacy Framework, and OECD's Global Competence Framework. These theoretical foundations guided interpretation and synthesis of the reviewed literature.

The final stage involved synthesizing the identified themes into a conceptual framework entitled the Global Readiness Integration Framework (GRIF). The framework proposes that multicultural education functions as the foundational educational environment, digital literacy serves as the technological enabler, and intercultural competence acts as the mediating mechanism through which learners develop global readiness. The resulting model provides a comprehensive explanation of how educational institutions in Japan can prepare students to participate effectively in culturally diverse and digitally interconnected global societies. Through this synthesis, the study offers a theoretical contribution that may inform future empirical research, educational policy development, and curriculum innovation aimed at strengthening global readiness among learners.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that global readiness among learners in Japan is significantly influenced by the interaction of multicultural education, digital literacy, and intercultural competence. The literature reviewed consistently indicates that these three dimensions are not independent educational outcomes but interconnected components that collectively prepare students to participate effectively in globalized and digitally interconnected societies. As Japan continues to advance educational internationalization and digital transformation through initiatives such as Society 5.0 and the Top Global University Project, educational institutions increasingly recognize the need to cultivate learners who are capable of navigating cultural diversity, utilizing digital technologies responsibly, and engaging constructively with global issues.

The analysis reveals that multicultural education serves as the foundational dimension of global readiness. Multicultural education creates learning environments where students are exposed to diverse cultural perspectives, histories, values, and experiences. According to Banks (2019), multicultural education seeks to provide equitable educational opportunities while promoting respect for diversity and social justice. Within the Japanese context, multicultural education has become

increasingly relevant as educational institutions encounter growing cultural diversity resulting from international migration, foreign student enrollment, and globalization. The reviewed literature suggests that exposure to multicultural learning experiences encourages students to develop greater awareness of cultural differences and strengthens their capacity to appreciate multiple perspectives. These experiences are essential for preparing learners to function effectively within multicultural workplaces and international environments.

The findings further indicate that multicultural education contributes directly to the development of intercultural competence. Intercultural competence refers to the ability to communicate appropriately and effectively across cultural boundaries while demonstrating respect, empathy, and cultural sensitivity. Deardorff (2020) argues that intercultural competence encompasses attitudes such as openness and curiosity, knowledge of cultural systems, and communication skills necessary for successful intercultural interaction. The literature consistently demonstrates that students who participate in multicultural educational experiences are more likely to develop these competencies because they encounter opportunities to engage with diverse viewpoints and cultural practices. In Japan, educational programs emphasizing international exchange, multicultural learning, and collaborative activities with international students have been shown to strengthen students' intercultural awareness and communication skills.

An important finding of this study concerns the role of digital literacy in supporting global readiness. Digital literacy has emerged as a critical competency in contemporary education because digital technologies increasingly mediate communication, learning, and social participation. According to Ng (2021), digital literacy extends beyond technical skills to include information evaluation, digital communication, ethical technology use, and critical engagement with digital content. The reviewed literature suggests that digitally literate learners possess greater capacity to access global information, participate in international learning networks, and collaborate with individuals across geographical boundaries. In Japan, national educational reforms have emphasized digital transformation through initiatives designed to improve students' technological competence and readiness for participation in digital societies.

The findings indicate that digital literacy significantly enhances opportunities for intercultural learning and global engagement. Through digital platforms, students can access diverse cultural perspectives, communicate with international peers, and participate in collaborative learning activities that transcend national

boundaries. UNESCO (2023) emphasizes that digital technologies create opportunities for inclusive learning and international connectivity while facilitating access to educational resources worldwide. The reviewed studies suggest that digital environments support the development of global awareness by exposing learners to multiple viewpoints, international issues, and cross-cultural experiences. Consequently, digital literacy functions not only as a technological skill but also as a mechanism for expanding intercultural interaction and global understanding.

The analysis further demonstrates that intercultural competence serves as the central mediating factor linking multicultural education and digital literacy to global readiness. While multicultural education provides exposure to cultural diversity and digital literacy facilitates access to global information and communication networks, intercultural competence enables learners to interpret, understand, and respond effectively to these experiences. Byram (2021) argues that intercultural competence allows individuals to engage critically with cultural differences while maintaining openness and respect toward alternative perspectives. The literature suggests that students who possess strong intercultural competencies are better prepared to participate in international collaborations, study abroad programs, multicultural workplaces, and global civic activities. Therefore, intercultural competence functions as the mechanism through which educational experiences are transformed into practical capacities for global engagement.

Another significant finding concerns the relationship between intercultural competence and global awareness. The reviewed literature indicates that students who develop intercultural competence tend to exhibit higher levels of global consciousness and sensitivity toward international issues. Exposure to diverse cultural perspectives encourages learners to recognize the interconnected nature of social, economic, environmental, and political challenges. OECD (2023) emphasizes that globally competent individuals are capable of examining issues from multiple perspectives and understanding how local actions influence global outcomes. Through multicultural learning experiences and intercultural engagement, students become more aware of issues such as sustainability, human rights, social justice, migration, and international cooperation. This awareness contributes to the development of responsible global citizens capable of participating constructively in addressing shared global challenges.

The findings also reveal that multicultural education and digital literacy contribute to the development of critical thinking skills necessary for global readiness. Multicultural educational environments encourage students to question

assumptions, challenge stereotypes, and evaluate information from diverse perspectives. Similarly, digital literacy requires learners to assess the credibility, relevance, and reliability of information obtained through digital platforms. According to UNESCO (2024), critical thinking is essential for navigating complex information environments and responding effectively to global challenges. The reviewed studies suggest that students who engage in multicultural and digitally mediated learning experiences are more likely to develop analytical and reflective capacities that support informed decision-making and responsible participation in society.

A particularly important contribution of this study is the identification of the Global Readiness Transformation Process (GRTP) as a novel conceptual mechanism connecting multicultural education, digital literacy, and intercultural competence with global readiness outcomes. The findings indicate that educational inputs alone do not automatically produce globally competent learners. Rather, students must engage in transformative learning experiences that involve intercultural interaction, digital collaboration, reflective practice, problem-solving, and participation in global learning networks. Through this transformation process, learners internalize cultural awareness, digital competence, and intercultural communication skills, which subsequently contribute to global readiness. This conceptualization extends existing research by explaining how educational experiences are translated into practical capacities for global engagement.

The findings further suggest that educational institutions play a critical role in facilitating this transformation process. Universities and schools that integrate multicultural education with digital learning opportunities create environments where students can develop competencies required for global participation. International exchange programs, virtual collaborations, multicultural curricula, and technology-enhanced learning environments provide opportunities for learners to apply intercultural and digital skills in authentic contexts. Educational leadership, institutional support, and policy commitment are therefore essential factors influencing the effectiveness of global readiness initiatives.

Despite the positive outcomes identified, several challenges remain. The literature highlights persistent inequalities in access to digital technologies, varying levels of intercultural exposure, and differences in institutional capacity to implement multicultural educational practices. Additionally, some learners may experience difficulties adapting to culturally diverse environments or navigating complex digital information ecosystems. Scholars emphasize the importance of

teacher professional development, curriculum innovation, and policy support to ensure that educational institutions can effectively address these challenges. Continuous investment in inclusive and technology-enhanced educational practices is necessary to maximize the benefits of multicultural education and digital literacy for global readiness.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the relationships among multicultural education, digital literacy, intercultural competence, and global readiness within the Japanese educational context. The findings demonstrate that these dimensions are closely interconnected and collectively contribute to preparing learners for participation in culturally diverse and digitally interconnected global societies. As globalization and technological advancement continue to reshape educational and professional environments, the development of global readiness has become an essential objective for educational institutions seeking to prepare students for future challenges and opportunities. A major contribution of this study is the conceptualization of the Global Readiness Transformation Process, which explains how multicultural education and digital literacy contribute to global readiness through the mediating influence of intercultural competence. The framework highlights the importance of transformative learning experiences that allow students to apply cultural understanding, digital skills, and critical thinking in authentic global contexts.

In conclusion, global readiness is best understood as a multidimensional outcome resulting from the integration of multicultural education, digital literacy, and intercultural competence. Educational institutions in Japan should continue to promote inclusive curricula, technology-enhanced learning, and intercultural engagement opportunities to strengthen learners' preparedness for participation in an increasingly interconnected world. Future research should empirically examine the proposed framework and explore its applicability across diverse educational settings.

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