

**The Effectiveness of an Online International Cultural Exchange Program for Enhancing Elementary School Students' Understanding of Food Culture in Japan**

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**ABSTRACT :**

In the context of growing globalization, fostering mutual understanding and respect for different cultures has become increasingly important. However, children residing in Japan have limited opportunities to engage with people from different cultures, hindering their direct exposure to diversity. To address this issue, this study aimed to develop, implement, and evaluate an online international exchange program for home economics education in elementary on deepening students' understanding of food culture and increasing their attachment to the community through interaction with people of diverse cultural backgrounds and values.

The program was implemented for 64 fifth-grade students in Y elementary school in Yamaguchi Prefecture, in January 2023. First, the students studied Japanese food culture and its historical influences from China and Korea. Next, they engaged in discussions on mutual food culture with people from five different countries (China, Korea, Thailand, Mexico, Germany, and France) using a web conference system.

To assess the effectiveness of the program, the International Understanding Scale (IUS) was administered before and after the program. The IUS is a modified version of ICU2000 (Suzuki et al.) that is comprehensible to elementary school students. Factor analysis was conducted on the collected data, and 3 factors, namely "International Exchange," "Cross-cultural Understanding," and "Attachment to the Community," were extracted.

The results of the paired-samples t-test on the questionnaire data indicated that the international exchange and cross-cultural understanding factors were significantly higher after the program than before. These findings suggest that the program is an effective educational tool for home economics education in elementary schools, providing early exposure to fostering globalism.

**Keywords:** Home economics, Cross-cultural understanding, Attachment to the community, Use of ICT in Education