

Lesson Design for Online Mediation for University Students

Mayumi Kubota

Kansai University, Japan
mkubota@kansai-u.ac.jp

Yuka Suzuki

J.F. Oberlin University, Japan
ys110@obirin.ac.jp

The purpose of our research is to develop the materials of mediation and to propose the lesson design of online mediation. Before developing the materials, it was decided to find out the abilities of the university students in terms of mediation. Thus, in this study, first the topics of the conflicts raised by the Japanese university students are investigated. Secondly, the university students are asked to do a role play and their abilities of mediation are recorded with Zoom. Then, the usefulness of online mediation compared to face-to-face mediation for lesson design will be discussed. As the results, several cases of conflicts were collected among 150 university students and analyzed first. They were found to be culture specific. In the role play, the students showed traditional Japanese method of conflict management, that was arbitration. Based on these findings, the direction of lesson design was discussed.

Keywords: conflict, lesson design, mediation, online, university students

Introduction

Conflict resolution

In Japan, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) was enacted and tried in 2007. Since then, it is expected to use it by introducing some mediation training developed in the USA (Suzuki, 2017). According to Yashiro & Suzuki (2004), there are six ways to deal with conflicts. They are avoidance, negotiation, mediation, arbitration, litigation, and fight. (1) Avoidance means taking no action to resolve the problem. (2) Negotiation means that the parties discuss about the problems each other and come up with a solution. (3) Mediation is the one when a third party intervenes to facilitate the discussion between the parties and to derive a solution. This third party is called a mediator that acts as a kind of moderator. (4) Arbitration is a traditional Japanese method of conflict management in which a third party intervenes and offers a proposed solution. (5) Litigation is where conflicts are brought to court and a judge renders a decision based on the law. (6) Fight is the worst conflict where the problems are solved only by force. As I stated above, Japanese traditional conflict resolution is mainly arbitration while in the USA, mediation is common (Yashiro & Suzuki, 2004; Suzuki, 2017).

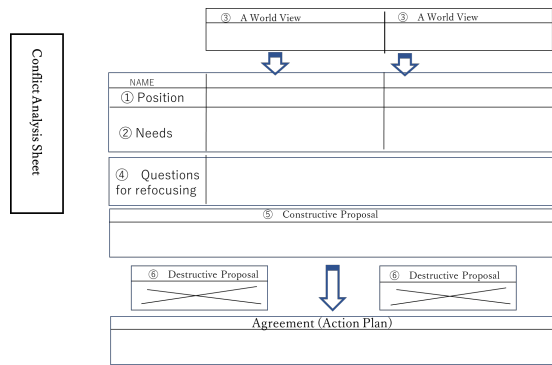
In Japanese education, introducing mediation systems is expected to be one of the solutions to prevent bullying at schools, because successful mediation requires trust and rapport (Suzuki, 2017). Ikejima (1997) also stated the practice of listening to others and creating empathy are the key elements of educational practice of mediation to eliminate bullying at schools. Then, Ikejima & Takeuchi (2011) created video material for elementary school students to learn about peer mediation and tries to spread the peer mediation in Japan as the president of the Japan peer support association.

In facilitative mediation, a mediator, who does not have specific authority in the decision-making power, assists in solving problems related to a specific conflict. Instead of focusing on differences of superficial opinions between participants, the focus is on what both participants really care about or are interested in. Through discussion, their relationship may transform from negative and destructive to positive and constructive. Figure 1 shows the flow of negotiation to solve a conflict (Suzuki, 2017, p. 254).

Thus, the goal of facilitative mediation is to reach creative win-win solutions. In facilitative mediation, a mediator is responsible for managing the process of interaction, by being neutral, respecting each party's self-determination, providing a safe environment for negotiation, and ensuring confidentiality to enable open and honest communication. Thus, it is said that the mediator is in charge of the process, while the participants are in charge of the outcome (Zumeta, 2020). Therefore, facilitative mediation will be a good practice for the students to listen to the others carefully in order to create resolution among participants.

“OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030” emphasize to treat the students as an agency and nurture their competencies such as creativity. Thus, introducing facilitative mediation to the university students will become one of the effective educational interventions.

Figure 1
A Conflict Analysis Sheet (Suzuki, 2017, p.254)



Yarn (2014) reviews the integrated conflict management system introduced at the University System of Georgia in 1994 in order to reduce the costs of disputing. According to him, it is possibly the largest comprehensive system, and technical advice and support were provided for this initiative about twenty years. However, it was difficult to maintain the same system due to the lack of “people who have the knowledge motivation, and authority to initiate substantial system change” and the complex politics” (Yarn, 2014, p.95).

Therefore, in this study, before introducing any conflict management system for university students, it was thought that online training for facilitative mediation might be easier and useful for university students. In addition, Kubota & Suzuki (2021) presented that online mediation with Zoom afforded more listening behavior. Online mediation makes the participants sit in front of the devices such as a personal computer or a tablet and listen to others carefully, once both of the participants agree to attend the mediation. Thus, online mediation also has several benefits compared to face-to-face mediation.

The purpose of this study is twofold. First is to investigate the topics of the conflicts raised by the Japanese university students in order to make a teaching material in the future. Secondly, it is to investigate the university students’ abilities of mediation in the online mediation role plays with Zoom. Thirdly, the utilization of online facilitative mediation as a lesson design in Japanese university education is discussed based on the findings.

The research questions are. 1) What kinds of conflicts do the university students encounter? 2) What are the current abilities of university students in terms of online mediation?

Research Design & Methods

Zoom, a cloud-based video conferencing service was used in this study for mediation role plays with four groups of three participants and the interview were conducted right after the role plays. Although available in Zoom, the chat and sharing functions were not used during the mediation.

In each group, one participant became the mediator and the other two became Elder Sister Ms. Y and Younger Sister Ms. S. Four sets of the mediation role plays were recorded for analysis. Immediately after the four role plays, about 20 minutes interviews of four participants were conducted one by one with Zoom.

For the mediator, four university students who studied communication theory in Kubota’s seminar were selected. Although they studied communication theory, they have not studied any mediation or negotiation theory at the time of this study.

In the interview, the participants were asked.

Please tell me your impression about your role play? 1) Was it easy to solve the conflict? Why do you think it was easy or why do you think it was difficult to solve the conflict? 2) While you are interacting with two sisters, could you come up a new idea to solve the conflict? 3) Could you give me your impression of playing a role plays with Zoom? 4) Do you think you can apply what you have experienced today for your daily life?

The interviews were semi-structured and changed according to the participant responses. The data of the four role plays were analyzed by using conflict analysis sheet (Figure 1) given by Suzuki (2017, p.254) and the interviews were analyzed in terms of finding mediation skills from the perspective of verbal and nonverbal communication.

The scenario of the role play was written by the second author, Suzuki, who specializes in teaching collaborative mediation. In the scenario, one participant was the mediator and the other two became sisters (Ms. Y and Ms. S). One day before the role play, the instruction paper where the following scenario was written was given to four participants.

A kind woman (Ms. Y) who lived near your house asked you recently. “I fought with my sister recently. My sister got angry and returned to Yokohama, however, I would like to meet her again and make up our relationship. However, if I meet by myself then I might not be able to talk smoothly, so could you join our meeting as a third person?” Ms. Y’s younger sister is called Yuka teacher (Ms. S). She was your class teacher when you were an elementary school student. You haven’t met her after she got married and moved to Yokohama about five or six years ago, however, you are corresponding each other through Facebook by checking the photo uploaded or just pressing ‘like’ buttons. The meeting will be conducted with Zoom. You are willing to cooperate to make the meeting smoothly between them.

Then, it was instructed that the first turn should be taken by the mediator by saying the followings.

“Yuka-sensei (Yuka teacher in Japanese), it has been a while. My name is ○○ (your name). I hope you are well. I’m here today because I was asked to cooperate in a discussion with your sister.”

Two roles of sisters, Ms. Y and Ms. S were played by the professional role player Prof. Y and the second author respectively. Since the students met Ms. Y and Ms. S for the first time with Zoom, the informal conversation by sharing something interesting that happened recently were shared for about 5 minutes before conducting role plays.

Results and Discussion

Research 1

In the class of “communication and action,” about 150 students studied the fundamental framework of cooperative negotiation and asked to submit the cases of conflicts. So, for this research, the cases were classified by the topics. The most common conflict was the conflict with their own parents regarding the process of the next level of education, either high school or university as well as having a pet at home or using a game at home, etc. The next one was the conflicts that related to the part time jobs like re-arranging the due dates, and payment etc. There were some conflicts among friends, but there are not many conflicts related to the romance. International students raised the conflict with their roommates about sleeping time since they work for the part time job at the different time in a day.

Hullman and Kwiatkowski (2021) tried to determine the structure of a proposed facilitative peer mediation program on a university campus and conducted the research with 32 students. In this research, the following topics were used for discussion among the focus groups. For example: A “book that was borrowed and never returned”, “a roommate who has not been paying her portion of the shared rent”, “two roommates arguing about dividing up the last electric/gas bill”, “an argument between the new and former romantic partners”, and “iPad that was returned damaged” (p.214). In this research, the distinction between personal conflicts versus business-type conflicts emerged as well as cultural value of privacy and agency when making decision about mediation (p.215). Thus, it is important to note for treating private matters and cultural value differences when the mediation topic is determined for the teaching materials.

Therefore, in this study, the topic of the main conflict is about one orange on the table at Ms. Y’s house, and the participants have to use honorific form of Japanese language since they are elder women (Ms. Y is about 70 years old).

Research 2

Four role plays were conducted with Zoom and recorded for the analysis in order to find the current university students’ skills of mediation. Table 1 shows the results from the perspectives of time, needs, empathy, communication skills and I-statements.

Since the participants were told that the time spent for role plays will be about 15 minutes at maximum, the researcher stopped the role play when the flow of mediation came to the end. As a result, Ms. A, Ms. B, Mr. C and Mr. D spent 9:44, 14:14, 16:35 and 15:43 minutes respectively. Within these time span, all of the participants showed the neutral position, however, Ms. A, Ms. C and Mr. D showed the neutral position by taking both sides while Mr. C showed the neutral position without taking both sides. All four participants demonstrated arbitration to solve the conflicts. They believed that they are the third person who need to persuade two sisters and propose some solutions.

“Needs” in Table 1 means that whether the participants could ask reason of the conflicts. The main conflict is about orange on the table in this scenario. Three out of four participants could ask the reasons sooner or later. As for a mediator, it is one of the important skills to clarify the main conflict situation by asking the reasons from both sides. Since two sisters are in the situation of quarrel, they are eager to insist their own interpretation with strong feeling, it is not an easy task to elicit their opinions equally from both sides. However, by listening carefully, they could asked the reason at the right timing.

Table 1
Description of participants and features of mediations

Participants	Time (minutes)	Needs	Empathy	Communication skills	I - statement
Ms. A	9:44	Yes	Yes	Back channeling	No
Ms. B	14:14	Yes	Yes	timing (turn taking), honorific language	No
Mr. C	16:35	No	No	listener's interpretation	No
Mr. D	15:43	Yes	Yes	onomatopoeia	Yes

“Empathy” is one of the techniques to create the trust among the members. Ms. A showed her empathy by saying “I know exactly how you feel because I am also an eldest daughter and a spoiled brat, so when I want to be recognized for something, I immediately take action and leave the house”. Ms. B also provided her mediation experiences among her younger brothers. In case of Mr. D, he showed his empathy by saying that he was envious, because his siblings and he don't talk much about such things (means the important orange on the table).

Regarding communication skills, all four participants were good at listening. They supported the speakers by nodding and back channeling. About taking a turn to speak, Ms. B had a hard time to take it. because she concerned overlapping her voices with Zoom very much. However, she knew that if she doesn't interrupt, both sisters kept talking, thus, she tried to find a timing. Mr. C tried to persuade sisters by saying the interpretation of the speaker's utterance differ depending on the persons' value system, thus, the speaker should know that the meaning of the speakers' utterance might not convey the same meaning to the listeners. Mr. D used several onomatopoeia such as ‘Gusa’, ‘Gutto’ or ‘Mutto’ by saying that if he heard such a sharp way of saying, Mr. D is the only mediator used a lot of I-statement such as I think~ (Suzuki, 2017). I-statement shows empathy and can create trust easily.

As Suzuki (2017) mentioned, the four participants demonstrated arbitration to solve the conflicts, that is common strategy in Japan. Therefore, it can be said that it is necessary to train the university students for facilitative mediation. Regarding communication skills, four participants could use several techniques and/or theory such as back channeling, different interpretations among people etc. In other words, it was proved that they could apply what they have studied at the University.

However, the analysis of case study submitted by 150 students in research 1 revealed that the students are weak at writing the conflict solution although they used the framework of cooperative negotiation (Figure 1). For example, “I talked to my parents about not going to college because I want to be a famous musician in the future. However, my parents say that I should go to college because the probability of success as a musician is low. But I want to be a musician.” The solution that he wrote is that he will go to the university while he practices as a musician. Like this example, it is not deep enough to clarify the needs of both sides. Therefore, it will be necessary to train the university students to facilitate the creative solution logically among the parties.

Online mediation

Four participants did online mediation with Zoom for the first time. Under COVID-19, they are accustomed to use Zoom at classes or job interviews. However, in this mediation role plays were conducted. They need to interact adequately (like using honorific form) with two elder women (two sisters). Ms. B had a hard time to accustomed to Zoom features. For example, the speaker's face is shown with a green framework, and that bothered her. She could see her own face with two sisters together and she couldn't stop watching her own face while talking and that made her uneasy. In addition, there was a recording mark at the corner, that also made her nervous.

Ms. A mentioned that she cannot use body movement and gestures while talking with Zoom compared to face-to-face situation. Thus, she mentioned that a lack of nonverbal communication with Zoom might affect their conversation.

The good feature of Zoom is adjustability of changing the timing of turn taking without letting the participants know. In this study, two sisters made the silence between their turns intentionally longer for the third and fourth role plays. Mr. C mentioned that it was not difficult to take a turn with Zoom. He believes that it will be more difficult to take a turn in face-to-face situation since they are in the middle of quarreled. This impression was opposite to that of Ms. B. Therefore, changing the timing of turn taking between professional role players (two sisters) were very effective. Especially it was done with Zoom, the length of silence became very outstanding for the participants.

Mr. D mentioned his way of mediation in the interview as following.

When I mediate between club members at a club activity, I call both parties one by one to find out what happened and how they feel. This way, I can get information out of both parties by saying, "I understand, I understand," and I can put a good face on both parties. Then, when the two parties have changed their minds, I suggest two parties to talk together. However, in this role play, it was difficult to do because I could see the change in the other person's facial expression while I was talking to the other. I could see what they wanted to say even while I was talking. If I were face-to-face, it would be easy to immediately come up with counterarguments, etc. and arbitrate, but with the Zoom, it was difficult to create that atmosphere.

Therefore, online mediation with Zoom is not suitable for arbitration, but, suitable for facilitative mediation, since both parties need to listen carefully and solve the conflict with the support of mediator. According to Suzuki (2017), one of the technics to elicit the opinions from both parties is to show empathy. If you could listen to others carefully, then, you can get a lot of information. The more accurate information you have about the other party, the clearer the direction of problem solving becomes. It has been noted that people who are considered expert negotiators are very good listeners.

For the future

The usefulness of online mediation compared to face-to-face mediation is that makes the participants listen to the others carefully, since they are aware of the necessity of avoiding overlapping. However, without any training of facilitative mediation, the university students end up doing arbitration, that is the Japanese traditional mediation. Figure 1 is the conflict analysis sheet proposed by Suzuki (2017). By using several conflict cases, the students can practice analyzing conflict. Kubota & Suzuki (2021) found that even using Zoom is not common and not easy for everyone, it is better to consider some stumbling blocks. Therefore, to present the video of several conflict cases, QR code might be easy to access. After the practice of analyzing conflict, the training of a mediator will be introduced. For example, making I-statement, reframing, using positive expression etc. (Suzuki, 2017). Developing such teaching materials is the next stage of our research.

Conclusion

The Japanese university students can use arbitration to solve the conflict. The main conflicts for the university students are the conflicts with their parents or part time job members. Thus, it will be useful to train the students for facilitative mediation in order to nurture their communication competences such as listening to others and creating for a solution. It will be the next stage to create the teaching materials for facilitative mediation in this research.

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