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Worldview—An Investigation of Japanese and Irish Children’s Geographical Knowledge and Understanding

Shelagh WADDINGTON¹

Maynooth University, Maynooth, IRELAND

Takashi SHIMURA²

Joetsu University of Education, Niigata, JAPAN

Abstract

Understanding of other cultures and countries is widely regarded as an important aspect of world citizenship and geography is argued to make a valid contribution to the development of this. The aim of this study is to explore the understandings of Japanese and Irish students of other areas of the world, both nearby and more distant. Students at the end of junior secondary school and in their final year in school were asked to locate countries, and to record knowledge of them. They were also asked to identify the country (apart from their own) in which they would most like and least like to live. As there is currently much focus on the impact of media on understanding, they were also asked to identify the main source of their knowledge. Analysis of the data revealed common understandings, misconceptions and stereotypes, but also significant differences between the various groups. Evidence was found that study of geography to a higher level did appear to affect the depth of understanding. While this study focused on only two very different nations, the commonality of perceptions suggests that these are likely to be widespread and, therefore, of relevance to all of those concerned with global citizenship.

Keywords

Geography, Social Studies, World Understanding, Misconceptions, Ireland And Japan

¹Corresponding author: Dr Shelagh Waddington, Maynooth University, Geography Department, Maynooth, Co. Kildare, Ireland, Shelagh.waddington [at] mu.ie. ORCID: 000-0002-3738-1746

²Professor Takashi Shimura, Joetsu University of Education, Department of Education, Joetsu, Niigata, Japan. Shimura [at] juen.ac.jp. ORCID: 0000-0003-0668-1372

In 1912 Ridgley (p.13) commented that ‘A complaint quite commonly made against the present day teaching of geography is this: Students do not know where places are; they can not locate on a wall map the great cities of the world, or other important places.’ This complaint has continued to the present day in various forms. Although virtually no present day educators or, probably, members of the general public, would argue for a return to the rote learning of ‘capes and bays’ or the five most important exports of a country, it is a cause for concern that locational knowledge is often not widely learned. This anxiety has continued up to the present day, for example in a national survey undertaken in the USA (Council on Foreign Relations, 2016, p.4) ‘revealed significant gaps between what young people understand about today’s world and what they need to successfully navigate and compete in it’. Earlier others made a similar point, e.g. Gillmor (1980) whose report on the Irish response to the ‘Place Vocabulary Research Project’ stated that the study arose out of a basic conviction that ‘the acquisition of a basic knowledge of world places should be a component in the education of a student and that this should attained in the context of general geographical training’ (p. 58).

The reasons for this concern have focused commonly on the need for this type of knowledge to enable people to become active and involved global citizens. Following World War II considerable importance was attached by World leaders to education for peace, led predominantly by UNESCO. It was expected that ‘geography well taught will indirectly lead children to appreciate and respect people of other countries’ Scarfe (1950, p.28). Others at the same time also reviewed the importance of the exploration of stereotypes, e.g. Klineberg (1951), or Piaget and Weil (1951) – the present study also aims to explore these stereotypes. As noted by Catling and Willy (2009) it is important to explore meaning understood by children if these stereotypes are to be re-examined. Gillmor (1980) noted that ‘basic place vocabulary should be considered a requisite for global citizenship’ (p.59). Somewhat later, Gould and White (1986) suggested that such ignorance could be a factor in racial prejudice developing in children. Following from these ideas, one of the significant objectives for geography education has been the promotion of international understanding. This aspiration is reflected in the aims of the current geography programmes in many countries. For example, the new Australian Federal curriculum (ACARA (n/d)) included geography as a compulsory subject for students from foundation to approximately 15 years in response to concerns that young Australians were not sufficiently aware of both basic understanding of Australia’s role in the world or of other countries, including those close to Australia, or those which were of importance to the country.

The New Zealand the Social Science Curriculum (which includes geography) states that it enables students to develop the knowledge and skills to enable them to: better understand, participate in, and contribute to the local, national, and global communities in which they live and work; engage critically with societal issues; and evaluate the sustainability of alternative social, economic, political, and environmental practices. Ministry of Education, 2014 no p.- on line.

Ontario's, programme has the vision that 'the social studies, history, geography, and Canadian and world studies programs will enable students to become responsible, active citizens within the diverse communities to which they belong' (Ontario, 2013, p.6).

Place knowledge , including basic location, can not under any circumstances be regarded as the only aspects required for this, basic geographical knowledge is clearly required before wider understanding of citizenship within the community is possible. Not, of course, the rote learning approach, but basic locational and general understanding of places can not be dismissed as unnecessary for full understanding of the world. This would apply particularly to the geographer, as 'It [Place locational knowledge] provides the foundation within which the discipline is rooted. The geographer must have a basic understanding of the world around him/her before he/she can comprehend the processes at work in that environment.' Torrens, (2001, p.49) Bednarz et al. (2016) further conclude 'that locational knowledge can generate a far more holistic understanding of the subject', and Booth (2019, p.81) supports this by noting that 'locational knowledge can play a major role in bridging the divide between content and concepts'.

A further justification for children acquiring geographical knowledge and understanding relates to a general understanding of life, for example understanding the weather forecast or travel enjoyment. A number of studies have examined perceptions and knowledge of 'other', e.g. Inokuchi and Nozaki (2005), who examined American perceptions of Japan and Taylor (2009) English perceptions of Japan. A further set of studies has explored knowledge and understanding of a number of countries, e.g. Gillmor 1980, 1994. Barrett and Farroni (1996) studied understandings of Italian and English children because they considered that Europe would be the future working area of children within the EU, rather than their own country. There have, however, been limited studies of reciprocal knowledge, e.g. Reynolds and Vinerek (2016) who investigated the perceptions of Swedish and Australian children. In the present study, it was decided to consider both reciprocal knowledge of the two participant countries, and also the knowledge of other countries, thus combining both of the Gillmor and Reynolds and Vinerek approaches.

A further aspect of interest in the study was the influence of combined studies programmes on geographical knowledge compared with the teaching of geography as a single identifiable subject. For example in South Africa, Le Grange and Beets (2005, p.273) argue that if 'for example, the teacher teaching human and social sciences has a history background then history may be foregrounded in the classroom.' The contrast of approach in the two countries in the present study provide the opportunity to explore this possibility.

Another aspect of place study considered in the present study is the factors which influence the knowledge and understanding of each place. These have been suggested as relating to geographical location and to the sources of the knowledge. In terms of location , for example, Donovan (1993) reported that distance, country size, insularity and distinctive shape, plus media profile were involved while Torrens (2001) identified a wider range of possibilities, and subsequently reported that the places most readily

identified were those close to [the study site], on the edge of a landmass, in more developed nations, with a large area, with a stable geography, and an island setting' (p.59). Others have suggested a wide range of sources of knowledge, for example Taylor (2015) apart from media, suggested input from family or friends, artefacts and perhaps direct experience were influential. She also noted that learning about more distant places was more likely to be through mediated sources than by personal experience.

Why Japan and Ireland?

Like almost all other countries, both Japan and Ireland also make reference to the importance of civic engagement. In the Irish context the Senior Cycle syllabus refers to the need 'to develop and promote active citizenship and to encourage lifelong learning, in society at local, national, European and global level' (Department of Education, 2003, p.2) and at Junior Cycle to 'a positive attitude towards participation in democratic processes, particularly those which influence decision making (Department of Education, 1989, p.8). While in Japan the subject of Social Studies (which includes geography) was established after World War II with the aim of assisting in the creation of a peaceful and democratic society and the current curriculum documents' aims include '...to foster the basic attribute as a citizen and a nation that is necessary for those who live in international society and create a democratic and peaceful nation and society (Monbukagakusyo, 2008, p.31).

Japan and Ireland were also regarded as being particularly suitable for this study because they had both similarities and also significant contrasts. The school systems of Japan and Ireland display similarities in that they both involved a transition at approximately 15 years of age from a junior to senior secondary programme and they both have a national curriculum which is followed in all schools, and which includes a general rationale for each of the programmes plus detailed guidance for each individual subject. Geography is included within the compulsory core programme until the end of the Junior Secondary programme, but becomes an option after that time. However, there are also significant differences between the programmes in the two countries. In Japan geography is taught as part of a combined subject (Social Studies [SS]) from the start of school until the end of the Lower Secondary programme, while in Ireland it is part of a combined subject in primary school (Social, Environmental and Scientific Education [SESE]) (Pike, 2015), but is taught as a separate subject after this point as Junior Certificate [JC]Geography(Lower Secondary) level and then at Leaving Certificate [LC] (Upper Secondary) level Waddington, 2011). Concern has been expressed about the negative impact on knowledge of geography being part of a combined subject and, thus, this study facilitated a comparison between two differing systems. Take up rates for geography in Senior Secondary programmes vary between the two countries with a considerably higher percentage taking the geography in Ireland (35.8% in 2016 in Ireland) than in Japan (21-25% in 2012- based on textbook supply ratios and students taking the subject in the National Center for University Admissions) (Asakawa, 2015) .

The actual approach to geography in the Junior secondary programme showed a marked contrast between the two countries, with Japan having a more global coverage,

starting from the local area (Monbukagakusyo, 2008), while in Ireland the syllabus is based on thematic topics, with example studies to be drawn at local, national and/or international levels as appropriate (Department of Education, 1989). The Irish programme does not attempt global coverage.

The two countries represent several contrasts which further encouraged their selection. These include geographical location (one in Western Europe and the other in Asia), and (although this is, of course a generalisation) a considerable difference in area, population, economy, culture, history and social organisation.

Research Questions

On the basis of the literature, the following research questions were devised:

1. Which of the countries likely to be familiar to either or both teams of students are best known to them?
2. What aspects of these countries or types of understanding about them are identified?
3. What factors influence this knowledge?
4. Does continuing study of geography in school have an impact on knowledge and/or understanding of these countries?

Methodology

Research Design

As noted by Taylor (2015, p. 111), ‘Where students are only required to give a short, ‘off the top of the head’ description of the place, then it is not surprising if their responses involve stereotypes.’ Clearly, this provides support for the idea that interviews or longer written answers or other forms of data collection would have provided more detailed understanding of the knowledge of the respondents, time and resource constraints made this impossible. Also, while schools were willing to facilitate the completion of a questionnaire survey, they were not generally willing to ‘sacrifice’ the time needed for interviews or longer written responses to take place. Previous studies have either used a single method, such as asking children to draw a map (e.g. Axia et al. (1996) and Weigand (1998) or writing a short note about the country (Inokuchi and Nozaki (2005) or a considerable variety of tasks, which required a considerable investment of time, e.g. Barrett and Farroni (1996). It must be acknowledged that any individual method has limitations, ‘depending on whether the assessment procedure relies upon the child’s recall, recognition or interpretative skills’ (Barrett and Farroni, 1996, p.258) and also on the format in which the questions and answers are to be presented. As a compromise between a single method, such as a multiple choice questionnaire, and a varied and detailed interview it was decided to include a number of methods of data collection within a single instrument. These included:

- locational knowledge – based on a world map on which students were asked to locate nine countries – their own, the ‘partner’ country, three near to Japan, three near to Ireland and also the USA. The decision to restrict the number of countries was essential as it would be a virtually impossible task for anyone to provide information about all countries in the world. In the present study, a more limited set

of criteria were used. The current choice was based on proximity to the home countries plus the USA, which, it was assumed, would be known to all of the students in some way.

- Ideas about all of these countries – which involved supplying up to three pieces of information about each one. While the time/space for such answers was limited, this did encourage students to write a short sentence or a phrase, rather than a single word. This was designed to explore level of knowledge and also to examine stereotypes, commonalities and misunderstandings; main sources of information about the countries – using a multiple choice format of possibilities to explore whether the type of school curriculum had influence and also the effects of other data sources.
- Identification of most and least favoured countries for residence, apart from the home country. This involved stating the country and then giving reason[s] for this choice (for full details of format of instrument, see Appendix 1).

Selection of Respondents

Since it was clearly impossible to involve all of the relevant student groups in the two countries a much smaller number was selected. These were selected on the basis of willingness of schools to participate, and also to provide a range of school types in Ireland. Two cohorts of students were surveyed in Japan and in Ireland during the school year 2015-2016— one group at the end of their Lower Secondary [LS] programme (aged approximately 15 years) and a second group towards the end of Senior Secondary [SS], when they were aged approximately 18 years. This latter group included both those who had continued to take geography [Geog.] and those who had not [No Geog.]. This was to facilitate comparisons based both on increasing age and also on perceived interest in geography. In all groups there were both male and female respondents. Schools were selected on the basis of the willingness of the principal and of the classroom teachers to allow their students to participate. In Ireland this proved more problematic at SS level, when several principals considered that time pressures prevented participation.

Approximately the same number of Senior Secondary [SS] students was surveyed in Ireland and in Japan, while in Lower Secondary [LS] a greater number was involved in Ireland than in Japan [Table 1].

Table 1
Study Participants by Location, Age and Education Level

School level		Japan	Ireland
Lower Secondary [LS]		84	156
15 years			
Senior Secondary [SS]	<i>Not taking geography</i>	36	32
17-18 years	<i>[No Geog.]</i>		
	<i>Taking Geography</i>	40	45
	<i>[Geog.]</i>		
Total respondents		160	233

The surveys were administered by classroom teachers during normal lesson time and took approximately 15 minutes to complete. Parents and/or guardians were asked to give permission for the students to participate and both them and the students were provided with guidance about the nature and purpose of the work. Ethical approval was obtained from both participating universities.

Data Analysis

The completed surveys were analysed by the researchers using IBM SPSS 25 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). This enabled both summarising of answers to indicate basic categories of replies, e.g. preferred countries or favoured media for obtaining information. It further allowed correlations to be explored between answers, e.g. type of information provided and level of study of geography and to compare results between the two countries. Nominal data responses, e.g. level of study of geography or understanding of the status of each other's country, were allocated a code and entered directing into the program. Other, more qualitative responses, e.g. reasons for wishing to live in a particular country or information provided about countries were coded using a classification system based on the areas of study identified in the Japanese National Curriculum Standards for junior high schools adopted in 2008 (Shimura, 2009) [Table 2]. These basic categories were further developed to allow for classification of answers which were related to, but not directly identified in the initial list, e.g. religion or international relations. Ideally, the two authors would have shared classification for both data sets, but, unfortunately, language difficulties made this impossible. Issues which arose in classification were shared and agreement reached about these. Following this work, these data were also entered into SPSS and analysed in the same way as the nominal data.

Table 2

Categories of Information (Based On Monbukagakusyo, 2008, Translated Shimura, 2009)

Basic categorisation	Additional detail/ inclusions
Economic	<i>Resources, transport, trade</i>
Population, politics	<i>International relations</i>
Sports, culture	<i>Including lifestyle/ flag</i>
Food	<i>Drink, cuisine</i>
Location	<i>Territory, neighbours, capital city</i>
Nature	<i>Environment, disasters</i>
History, Language	<i>Religion</i>

It was hoped to classify the responses also by the degree of propositional knowledge compared to affective responses as Taylor (2015) noted that 'even in short answers there is a likelihood of people providing more than just propositional knowledge and this affective knowledge is likely to provide more nuanced understanding of images of countries than the more factual material.' However, this did not, finally, prove possible as very few statements seemed to represent affective knowledge.

Following this analysis results were reviewed to explore differences and similarities between:

- All respondents in the two countries;
- The three different groups in each country (lower secondary [Ls], senior secondary not taking geography at that level [no geog.] And those in senior secondary school who continued to take geography [geog.]);
- The relevant groups, e.g. Ls, in the two countries.

Results of this exploration are reported below.

Findings

Research Countries

Basic understanding of other students' home countries. Irish students almost all reported that they had heard of Japan, but only approximately 75% of Japanese students reported that they had heard of Ireland. The overwhelming majority of Irish students stated that Japan was a country, while the Japanese students displayed much less certainty about the status of Ireland as a country. Only 38% of Japanese LS students, and 45% of Geog. students considered Ireland to be a country, although somewhat surprisingly, almost 70% of the No Geog. group did so. The Senior Secondary geography teacher who administered the questionnaires in Japan suggested that this may be because the No. Geog. group knew very little about Ireland and so were unaware of the existence of Northern Ireland as separate from the Republic and so would be unlikely to consider any other option than that of a country. The Geog. students would, however, be more likely to have greater knowledge of the actual situation.

A reasonable proportion of both nationalities showed some basic understanding of the geography of the other respondent country, with 28.6% of Japanese students and 36.5% of Irish students considering that the relevant country was an island. Although, of course, this is not totally accurate as Japan consists of several islands, while the island of Ireland also includes Northern Ireland, which is part of the United Kingdom. A number of Japanese respondents (19% of the total) noted that Ireland was a region, perhaps indicating their knowledge of the presence of Northern Ireland (part of the UK) also being located on the island of Ireland.

All Countries' Place Locational Knowledge

Students were asked to locate nine countries on a world map, the two home ones plus the others selected for study. For almost all countries those students studying Geography beyond the compulsory stage [Geog.] were more likely to be able to identify the correct location than other students [Figure 1 and Figure 2]. The exception was location of China by students in Ireland, where those who were *not* studying geography [No Geog.] performed better than either of the other groups, although recognition was over 90% for all three categories [Figure 2].

There was clearly a large discrepancy between the two groups in terms of ability to locate the 'partner' country, with far more Irish students locating Japan successfully (60.7% for all students, with LS students having the highest success rate and No Geog. SS students the lowest) [Figure 2], compared to those in Japan able to locate Ireland (24.7% for all students with LS students having the lowest rate, and Geog. SS students

with the highest) [Figure 1]. There are a number of factors which might be expected to influence the recognition rate in Ireland, including school experiences, although these do not include direct study of Japan. The emphasis is particularly in relation to the study of plate tectonics, as the Pacific Ring of Fire is a particular focus for the Junior Certificate [LS] programme. Furthermore, these students would have been in school at the time of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, which were widely reported in the media and discussed in many school classrooms. This provides some evidence of the effects of media coverage, particularly of disasters on knowledge of different countries. Although most Irish students did locate Japan successfully, there were 11 other countries wrongly identified. These were generally island nations in the same global region, e.g. Philippines or Papua New Guinea.

There have not been even remotely comparable events in Ireland to those in Japan, and Ireland is a much smaller and, arguably, a less globally significant country. Furthermore, while the Lower Secondary geography curriculum in Japan has a regional base, with global coverage, there is little detailed study except of a limited number of countries, not including Ireland. No Japanese students suggested that they had any personal/ family contact with Ireland. Of those who failed to make an accurate identification, several selected two other Atlantic islands, Iceland and Greenland, while another group identified the UK as Ireland. This indicates some understanding of Ireland in terms of location, since all three of these other countries are actually in the Atlantic Ocean and are islands. The name of Iceland may also have contributed to error.

The location of other countries provides some support for the assertion by Torrens (2001) in that the most identified by Irish students were UK, France and Germany (which were close to 'home' and the USA and China (both large). The Japanese students' highest identifications were for South Korea (nearby) and also of China and the USA. All of the well identified nations were also on the edge of a landmass.

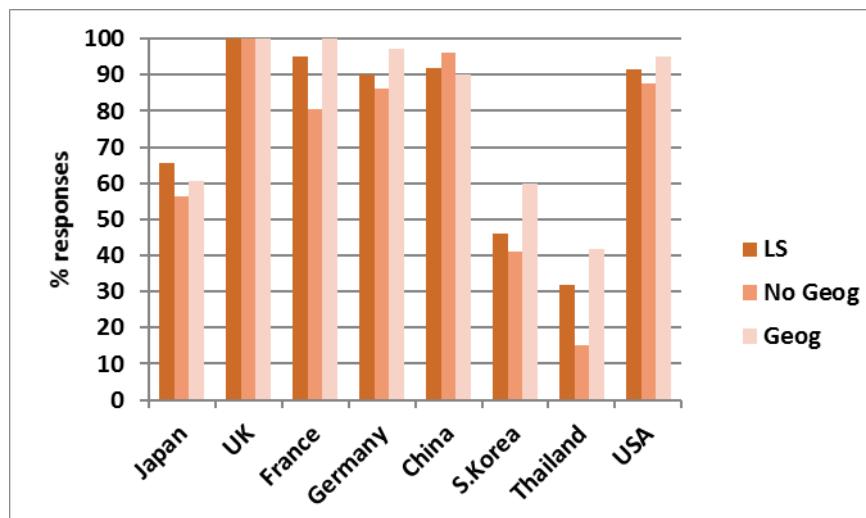


Figure 1. Irish students' place locational knowledge

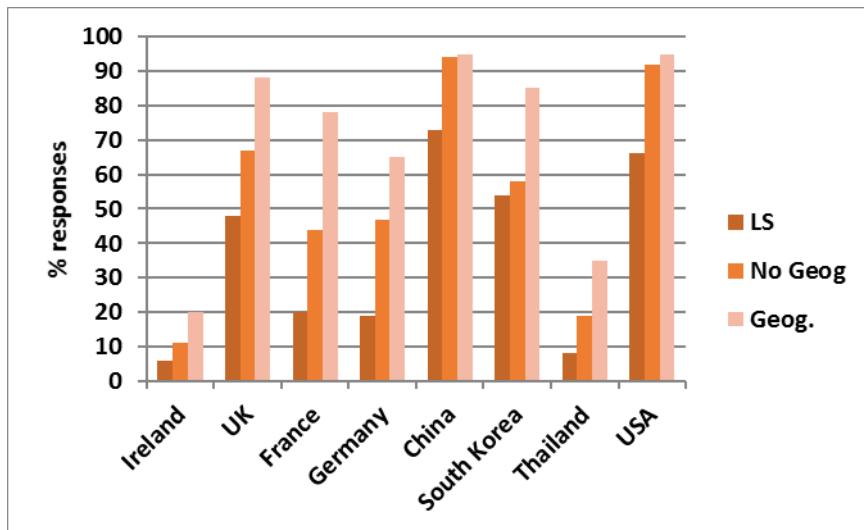


Figure 2. Japanese students' place locational knowledge

What Students Know About Other Countries

There was a wide variety of information cited for each of the countries. To facilitate analysis, all responses were classified into a limited number of categories according to the scheme outlined above [see Data Analysis]. Apart from the two partner countries three others have been selected for detailed consideration in the present study, as space does not permit reference to all of those investigated here.

Partner countries. The Japanese groups made few suggestions about their knowledge of Ireland (Figure 3). These particularly related to location. Some did suggest that it was close to the UK, but others referred to a near Polar location. The Polar location is likely to relate to those who identified Iceland's or Greenland's location rather than that of Ireland. Of course, the similarity of name of Iceland and Ireland, coupled with the greater visibility of the former may also have been influential.

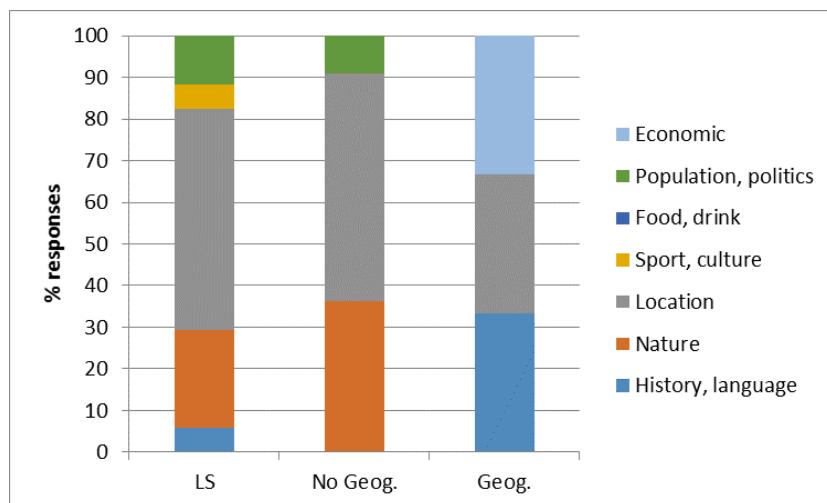


Figure 3. Japanese students' knowledge and understanding of Ireland

Interestingly, those studying geography in senior high school [Geog.] made the fewest suggestions. This presents a contrast to the Geog. students' greater knowledge of Ireland's location, however, it is possible that these students may be more aware of their lack of accurate knowledge about how Ireland is different from the other countries of Europe and so decided that without this they had no contribution to make. This would support the contention that the Japanese Geog. group are more likely to use less subjective information, e.g. music videos, to make statements about other countries.

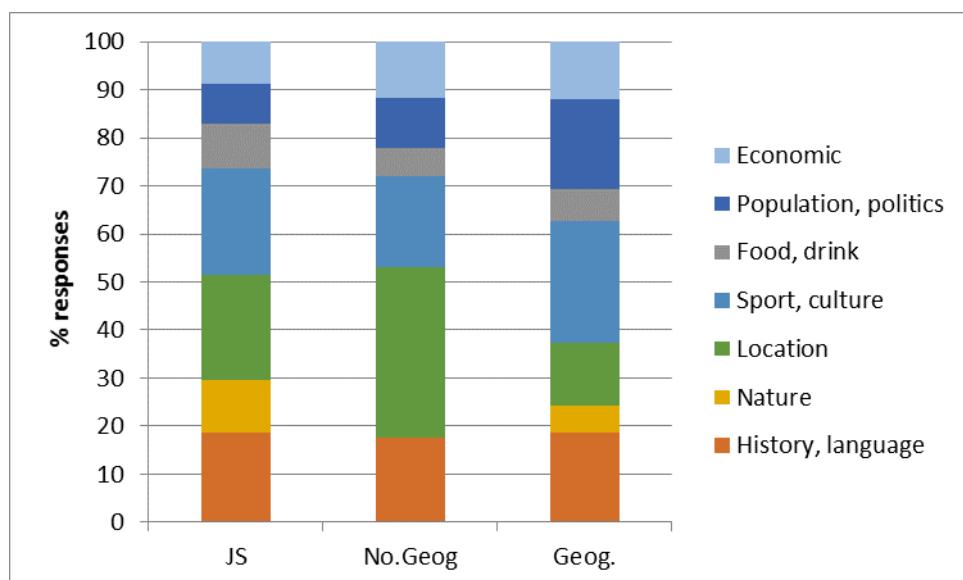


Figure 4. Irish students' knowledge and understanding of Japan

Irish students made a much larger number of statements about Japan than the Japanese about Ireland (Figure 4). Both LS and No Geog. concentrated most on location details, particularly naming the capital city. In the Geog. group, while some did refer to location, this was more sophisticated, e.g. near to Russia and China. Forty five percent of comments by LS students noted that 'they speak Japanese'. This decreases for both older groups to 33% No Geog. and only 6% of Geog. respondents. Within both older groups there is also an increasing focus on history – particularly on WWII and atomic weapons. This does not, however, relate to the History programme at either LS or SS levels, where there is no reference at all to Japan. The food category particularly focussed on sushi – a fairly popular meal choice in Ireland, while other Japanese food is rarely available. LS students' references to population relate to the size and/or density of the population but with limited accuracy, while the two of Geog. group refer to stage 5 of the Demographic Transition Model, and two to longevity. Japan's high suicide rate is mentioned by four Geog. students, but only by one No Geog. and no LS respondents. All of this suggests a more sophisticated understanding of the material. Some students also identified films, manga comics and popular music being made in the country. Almost no students in either country made statements which could be regarded as anything other than propositional knowledge, and any affective statements were generally very vague, e.g. 'I wouldn't like to live there'.

China. As with other countries, a large category of knowledge reported by Irish students was locational, particularly naming the capital city (although a few named this as Hong Kong!). This error may relate to the use of Hong Kong as a case study of a developing world city in the Junior Cycle programme. Another major aspect was language, particularly within the No Geog. group. Some of these older students noted that Mandarin Chinese, plus other versions of the language were spoken in different parts of the country. There was a considerable focus on food and drink, with many referring to the food served in Chinese restaurants in Ireland, although this did also include the ‘spice bag’ – a vaguely Chinese meal, which apparently originated in Ireland. While Chinese food is no longer the most popular non-Irish cuisine in Ireland (a position now held by Italian food) it still remains a major dining choice and there are both take-away and more formal restaurants in virtually all Irish towns, so all students would be familiar with this type of food.

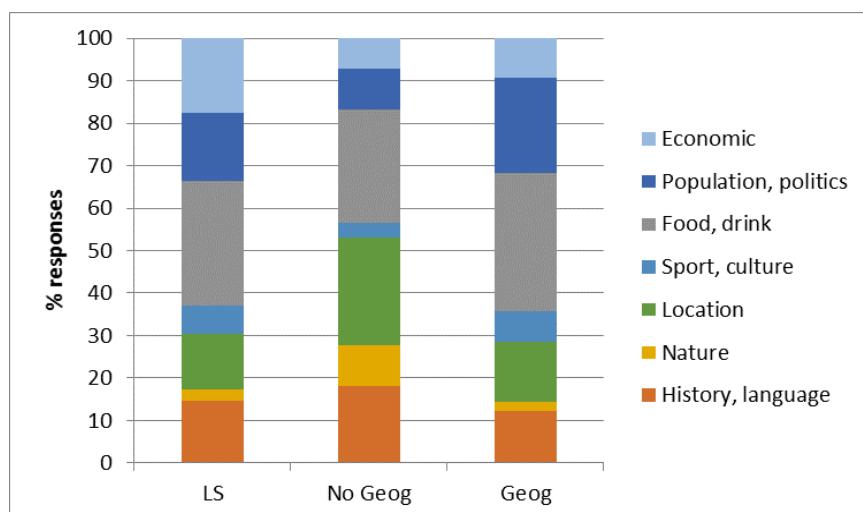


Figure 5. Irish students’ knowledge and understanding of China

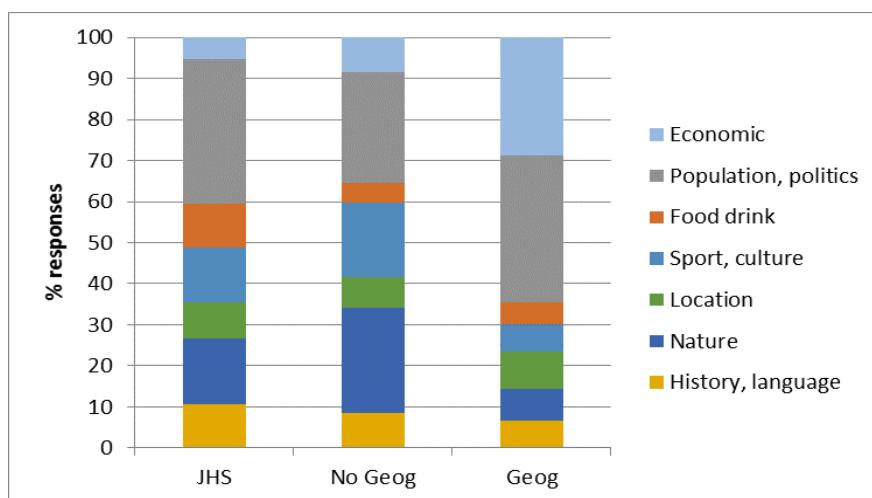


Figure 6. Japanese students’ knowledge and understanding of China

Within all Irish groups the ‘one child policy’ was cited and also a general sense of political and social control, particularly amongst the two older groups. All of the references to nature/ environment by Irish students related to pollution, with the No Geog. group reporting this most commonly.

Japanese students focussed particularly on politics and international relationships, especially amongst those who continued to study geography. While some Irish students also mentioned this, the greater concentration by Japanese is likely to reflect the somewhat controversial diplomatic relations between that country and China. Both Japanese and Irish students refer to human rights issues.

Economic aspects are an increasing focus for Japanese students as their geography education advances – with a large change between LS and Senior Secondary [SS] students, particularly those in the Geog. cohort. This is not paralleled in the Irish case, although discussion of China as a potential trading partner and supplier of cheap manufactured goods is widely known and reported in Ireland. Only Japanese students refer to any aspect of agriculture in their responses to this question, these were coded within the Economic category, as numbers were small. This is likely to be related to the Senior High school curriculum which includes study of agriculture in China. This wider diversity of information offered by Japanese students than by Irish ones may reflect the specific study of China undertaken in the LS Geography programme. There is no comparable study within the Irish LS programme, and, certainly, the range of answers is more limited by the latter students and, indeed, all Irish students. No Japanese students referred to food in their responses – a definite contrast to the Irish participants. This is likely to be because some foods are common to both Chinese and Japanese cultures, for example tofu, ramen, mabo and shumai (dumplings), and so considered to be Japanese rather than Chinese in origin.

France. All groups (both Japanese and Irish) were able to provide considerable information about France. There were, however, notable differences in the type of information, which was provided, probably due to the very different exposure of Irish and Japanese students to France and to French life.

One source of such information in the Irish case is that approximately 55% are likely to have studied French as part of their LS programme and a number would have continued with this study in Senior Secondary school. These courses include some reference to French culture and life in addition to learning the language. It is less clear that geography within the LS course would provide a great deal of knowledge, although there are a number of ways in which France is may feature in both LS and SS geography programmes, e.g. the Paris Basin and Paris as an example of a European City. Almost 50% of LS students identified school as the source of their knowledge, with over 40% of the two older groups doing the same. It was expected that visits and family/friends would also be major sources of information as France and Ireland are relatively close together and France is, generally, a popular holiday destination. More than 9% of the Irish Geog. group reported that visiting France was a major source of information, but few members of the other two groups did so. However, both the No Geog. and the LS (20.4%) cohorts reported that they learned from family and friends.

There are also fairly frequent contacts between France and Ireland in relation to sports, particularly soccer and rugby union, which was reflected in the proportion of answers within this grouping. France and Japan would have less sporting contact, although a small number of Japanese soccer players may play in France and the two countries are involved in both rugby and soccer tournaments.

Japanese students would not have similar possibilities for learning about France, which may have influenced the type of information reported. This is because relatively few Japanese students learn French and the country is not a major focus of any geography course. Furthermore, no Japanese students reported that they had visited France and only 3% of the Geog. group that they had learned about the country from their family or from friends. All groups noted cultural features, particularly the Eiffel Tower, the Louvre Museum and the Arc de Triomphe. Disneyland Paris was also mentioned quite frequently by Irish students, particularly the LS group. Although only a small number cited visiting France as a source of information, it is quite possible that a number had actually visited this resort as it is a major attraction for Irish families.

Respondents in both countries referred to historical events and heritage. Within the Japanese group the No Geog. students – who had chosen to take history- made more of these than the other students, referring particularly to the French Revolution, Mont Saint-Michel and to literature (or possibly the stage musical) Les Misérables. The Geog. group focused more on the current situation in France, for example birth rate, agricultural exports, immigration issues and EU membership. No comparable differentiation was noted in Ireland, although there was certainly a limited, trend for older students to give more specific answers.

In Ireland those in the Geog. group focused more on the two World Wars, while the No Geog. group's comments showed greater variety, including the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars. A small number of the younger students also made historical references to the French Revolution and to other aspects of history. It is possible that the JC students, who would virtually all have completed the LS history programme would have gained this insight from that course. The older students would also have taken this course, but, unlike in Japan, some students a choice does not have to be made between studying Geography and History, so some students in both the No Geog. and Geog. would be still studying History. It is not, therefore, possible to attach meaning to the wider range of knowledge offered by one group compared the other. There was, however, limited evidence of a greater depth of knowledge shown by older students than those in the younger age group. Cuisine was also an important for both nations, with references to French bread by Japanese students and to croissants by the Irish and to wine by both. However, Irish students also referred to two specific items of food – frogs' legs and snails, both of which would be regarded by most Irish people as bizarre and unattractive foods. There were no references to such foods by Japanese students. Among younger Irish students locational knowledge statements were generally confined to Paris being the capital city or the France was in Europe, plus some identifying its EU membership. Some older students provided more detailed locational detail, e.g. it is bordered by Spain, Germany or the Alps or River Seine is there. In general, Japanese

students gave less locational detail about France, referring to Paris and to Germany as a neighbouring country.

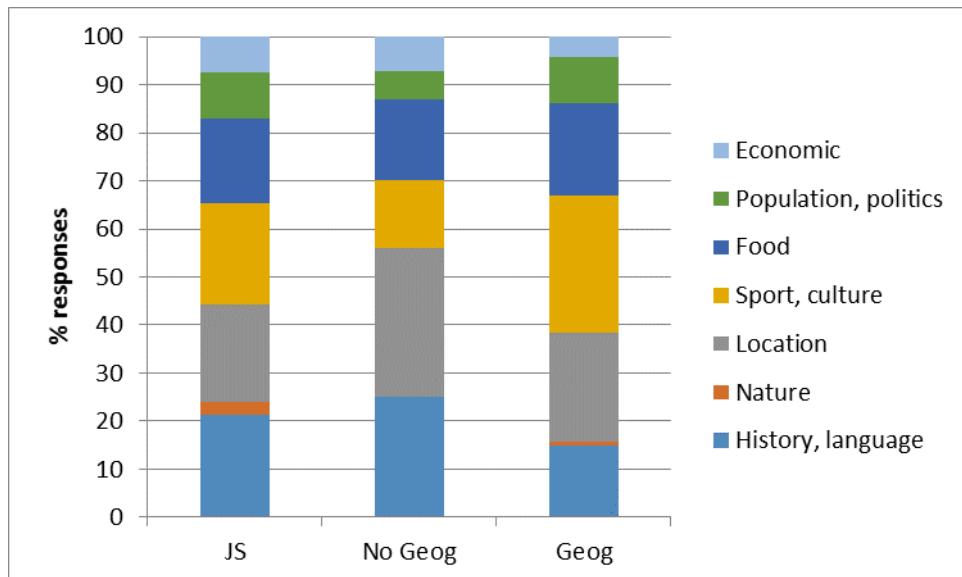


Figure 7. Irish students' knowledge and understanding of France

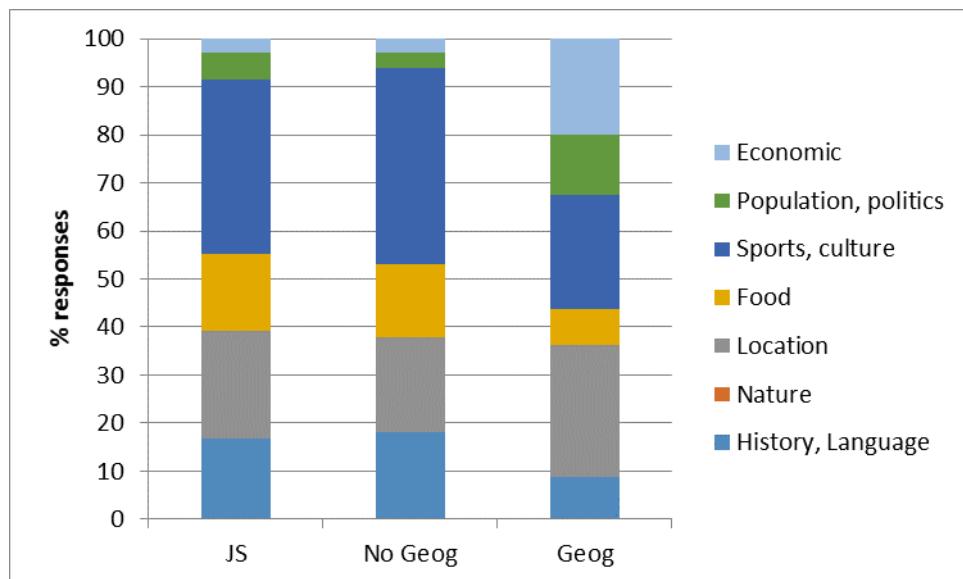


Figure 8. Japanese students' knowledge and understanding of France

U.S.A. Both Irish and Japanese students made considerable references to economic, sports/ culture and population/ politics in their responses (Figures 9 and 10). There was a clear increase Japan in the importance of resources/economic/transportation/trade category between JS students' responses (6% of all answers) and those by Geog. students (20%), with No Geog. students recording 12%. This is likely to be influenced by the presence of the USA or North America as a topic in both JS Social Studies and in SS Geography programmes.

There was no corresponding relationship between age/ experience and economic responses for the Irish students and there is no detailed study of the USA in the Irish school programme. However, the members of the youngest group were most likely to state the currency, while the Geog. students made reference to the size of the US economy or to different aspects of the economy, e.g. agricultural production or energy usage ('one US citizen uses 61 times the amount of energy used by a Nigerian citizen each day'). Many responses for all groups in the population/ politics category related to Barak Obama – as the first black president of the USA, or about the possibilities of Donald Trump being his successor. There were very few references to population, a distinct contrast to responses for China. Within the Japanese cohort there was a decline in the importance of sports/ culture from JS (35%) to the Geog. group (20%).

All Japanese student groups focused much more on political responses than the Irish students, particularly relating to the US as a world superpower and to the presence of US military bases in Japan. The older students were more likely to refer to the environment, language, religion and history, resources and the economy than the younger students. The No. Geog. Group showed a greater tendency to identify past events such as World War II, while the Geog. group displayed a much more varied knowledge. This may reflect the No. Geog. students' focus on History aspects rather than on Geography in their programme. Also the education system in Japan and modern culture in general is much more obviously influenced by the USA than those of Ireland.

The references to the US in military terms and military history is in complete contrast to the Irish groups, whose history and experience of the US is totally different from that of Japanese students, as no reference was made to either of these topics in the Irish responses. Within the Irish cohort there was no such relationship, with JS students giving 20% of responses within this sports and culture, while Geography students including 23%, and those not taking geography recorded only 9% here. The information offered focussed on media, for example 'many celebrities are from the US' or that the US 'controls large amount of media, particularly within the older group. The younger group referred to theme parks and to similar attractions. One Irish student also noted that they 'don't have a very good grasp of geography'!

In both countries, all groups referred to the obesity levels within the population to some extent and some of these included reference to food eaten. There are also considerable reference to violence and use of guns. Considerably more Japanese students in all age groups refer to food and drink in their answers than Irish students. However, in both countries the most common references are to fast food or hamburgers, and these appear in greater numbers amongst the younger students. Only within the youngest group of Irish students was any reference made to nature/ climate, where two people referred to extreme weather, while one noted that the US 'has a very good environment'. This is in contrast to the Japanese cohort, where the Geog. group made more reference to nature/ environment than either the No Geog. students or the youngest group.

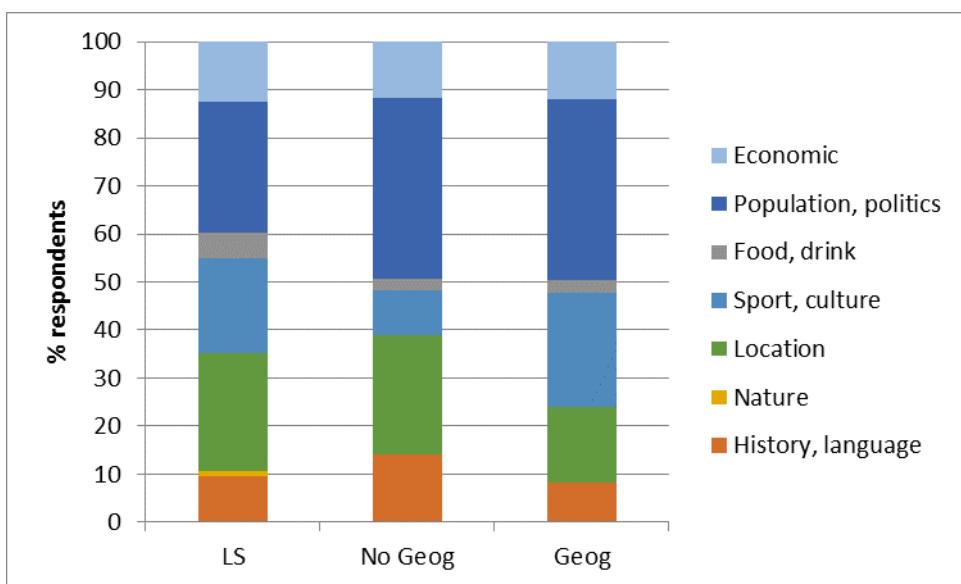


Figure 9. Irish students' knowledge and understanding of USA

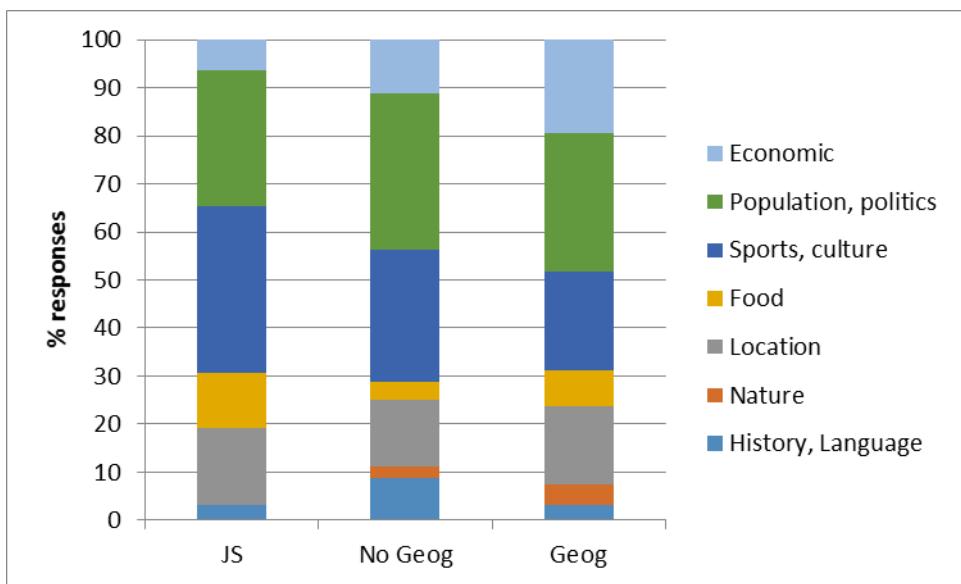


Figure 10. Japanese students' knowledge and understanding of USA

Sources of Knowledge about Countries

There was considerable variation both between the two countries and between the groupings within those countries. Overall, Irish students reported that they gained a great deal of information from the Internet, with a maximum rating of 44% of all information on the USA from those continuing to study Geography [Geog.] and 42% of the No Geog. group using the Internet to learn about Japan. In comparison the greatest use of the Internet by Japanese students to learn about Ireland was by 14% of LS students. Indeed, the No Geog. group in Japan did not cite the Internet as a source of information at all for China, France or the USA.

Japanese students recorded a consistently higher selection of school as the main learning source, particularly among those taking Geography in senior high school. The usage was over 60% for all countries except for Ireland, when it was 59%. The No Geog. cohort recorded the lowest percentage importance of school, followed by the JHS group, and the Geog. group citing school most. This may reflect the ‘global’ coverage of the Japanese LS curriculum which would provide a basic level of data about many countries.

Somewhat disappointingly, the Irish cohort generally recorded school much less commonly as the major source of learning. In Ireland it was only in relation to France that the impact of school approached the Japanese levels, LS 51%, No Geog. 52% and Geog. 47%. Areas of France may be used as examples or case studies in both the JC and LC programmes, thus students are definitely exposed to this information at both phases of their geography education. The lower percentage of Geog. students than the other groups naming school as the major source reflects the greater variety in the information sources cited. In general, Irish students refer to accessing a wider variety of sources of information than their Japanese counterparts. In both cohorts media sources including Internet, TV, newspapers and films were reported as being sources of information.

Earlier studies, for example, Taylor (2015 p.110) noted that ‘Knowledge about distant places is more (but not exclusively) likely to be gained through mediated sources than direct experience , while Barret and Oppenheimer (2011, p.7) stated that ‘beliefs about other national groups [come] from many different sources, including television, films, books, school work, teachers, parents, visits to other countries, and personal contact with foreigners’, while also suggesting that they also ‘var[y] as a function of their social class, nationality, ethnicity and geographical location.’ p.7.

These general findings about sources of information were varied was confirmed in the current study for the Irish students, for example, 53.8% of responses by these students about Japan were media related, while only 24.2% of those for France. There was, however, no such obvious relationship in the Japanese data, TV programmes were more important for the Japanese cohort, particularly amongst those who were no longer taking geography. These programmes are possibly tourism related or they may refer to music-related or other videos under this classification rather than as Internet-related as some appeared a little confused about this, stating that they had viewed a video, but did not specifically state it was via the Internet.

Countries Where Students Would Most Like To Live

There was considerable similarity in choices for countries which were desirable for living [Table 3]. For all students except those in Japan who were not studying Geography in Senior High School [No Geog.], the most popular country was the USA. The other obvious similarity is that all of the most popular nations were western style, although there were some variations with age and level of study of Geography.

Within the Irish groups there is a general bias towards English-speaking nations, apart from Spain (a popular holiday destination). This appears to support the commonly

held belief that Irish people are reluctant to learn foreign languages (although most would actually study one, particularly French, at least in lower secondary school). A recent strategy produced in Ireland made specific reference to this issue noting the necessity to ‘heighten awareness of the importance of learning foreign languages and... motivate more of our learners to embrace this opportunity with enthusiasm and enjoyment’ (Department of Education and Skills, 2017, p.5). Despite the emphasis on English-speaking, only relatively small numbers of Irish students considered that the UK was a desirable place to live. A very large proportion of Irish families would have experience of family members living in the UK and of travel there. However, it is likely that the historical relationship between the two countries would influence this limited desire to move there.

In the case of Japan, while the Western style is clearly demonstrated, in SS there is greater emphasis on European rather than English speaking nations. This is particularly marked in relation to France and to some extent to Italy. All SS students study world history as it is a compulsory subject, and so it may be suggested that the historical status of Paris and the classical heritage of Rome influence their choices.

LS students, like the Irish cohort, are clearly oriented toward English-speaking countries, probably because they have just begun to learn English and because they have limited knowledge of world history at this point.

Table 3
Countries Where Students Would Most Like To Live (% Responses)

	Japanese students			Irish students		
	Senior Secondary			Senior Secondary		
	Lower Sec.	No Geog.	Geog.	Lower Sec.	No Geog.	Geog.
USA	32	17	28	33	35	35
Australia	12	3	8	11	20	13
France	11	19	23	4	3	6
Italy	4	17	13	3	0	0
Spain	4	6	0	9	10	16
New Zealand	2	6	3	3	0	3
Germany	2	3	5	6	5	0
South Korea	1	0	5	2	0	3
UK	1	0	5	8	5	0
Canada	0	0	0	4	0	6

U.S.A. All groups of students referred to aspects of American life and culture, for example, film stars and that fun was a part of the attraction of the country. They also focussed on the use of English as the main means of communication. In both Japan and Ireland younger students placed greater emphasis on this than older students. In Japan this is likely to be related to the students just beginning to learn English at this time, while in Ireland, as noted above, the lack of confidence about speaking another language may be influential. Irish students' reasons also included family connections (including three who had lived there, one of whom stated they were a US citizen) and

the possibility of employment and general life opportunities. These latter aspects clearly reflect the long history of Irish connections with the USA, with emigration (permanent or temporary) taking place for several hundred years. No Japanese students reported such connections.

Irish students also refer to the weather mainly that it is sunny and warm, reflecting the availability of relatively cheap holidays from Ireland to such locations as Florida, again this was particularly marked in the LS group in Ireland.

Australia. There was more intercountry diversity in reasons for wishing to live in Australia than the USA. Japanese students may identify Australia as a venue for study abroad as it is generally less expensive than other English-speaking options, it is closer to home than the US or UK, so the time difference is relatively small. They also consider the climate to be similar to Japan and it is a relatively safe country. Both Japanese and Irish students referred to the wildlife and nature of the country as being an attraction.

By contrast, Irish students considered the climate to be very different from their home – but in a positive manner, i.e. that it was sunnier and warmer. Irish students, however, identified the beaches and the sights which could be seen as well as the social life available. While there is a long history of emigration from Ireland to Australia there were no references to family influences. This is particularly striking as many Irish people have migrated to Australia either temporarily or permanently following the financial crisis beginning in 2007 and many of these report that the experience has been positive.

France and Spain. The two countries which were selected by the next highest percentages of respondents, France by Japan and Spain by Ireland were selected for rather different reasons. Irish students were again influenced by the weather and the attractions of the coastal and island resorts, which are popular holiday destinations as they are generally warmer than Ireland and relatively close to home. The ‘party islands’ of Ibiza and Majorca (particularly the resort of Magaluf) are also likely to be familiar to school students as they are popular destinations for groups on post school-leaving holidays. While none of the respondents had reached this stage of their lives, they would certainly be familiar with the concept. Some students reported that they were learning Spanish in school and so would be comfortable with communications.

Amongst Japanese students the Geog. group also mentioned Spain’s climate and topography, while not laying the same stress on sea and sand holidays as Irish students. Considerably more Japanese students regarded France rather than Spain as the most desirable country in which to live SS students, particularly the No Geog. group who were studying History rather than Geography, were generally interested in the France’s historical and cultural heritage. Respondents in all of the Japanese groups made reference to France as a ‘fashionable country’. References were also made in this response to French cuisine, mostly comparable to the answers given in relation to knowledge of France in the earlier question – see what students’ know about other countries: France (above).

A much smaller cohort of Irish students ranked France as the most desirable country, but their answers were somewhat similar to those of the Japanese group. Of the three students who referred to the French climate, one noted that currently it was not dramatically affected by climate change – a point not referred to by any other respondent about any other country.

Countries Where Students Would Least Like To Live

The two least attractive countries for living, China and North Korea, were common to both nationalities (Table 4).

China. China was considered to be overcrowded and polluted or had environmental problems by many students in both countries. There was a considerable difference in Japan between the Geog. group and the No Geog. group in the number of students who did not wish to live in China (25% Geog. compared to 33% No Geog.). When reasons for their decisions were explored, it was found that the No Geog. group stated information provided by the media and more based on subjective, emotional judgements.

However, those of the Geog. group's images included a much wider variety of information, based on a wider number of sources, including school geography, possibly reflecting the suggestion that more learning leads to the development of a less personal/stereotyped image. No comparable variation was found between groups in Ireland.

North Korea. A large proportion of students in both Ireland and Japan did not wish to live in North Korea (Table 4). This was most marked amongst the youngest students in both countries, with those studying geography at senior level being less likely to make this selection. However, the reasons for their judgement were similar for all groups, focussing on the political organisation of the country (particularly the rule of Kim Jong-un), on war, violence and the lack of human rights and freedom. The comments about South Korea by Irish students were generally similar to those for North Korea, suggesting that these students were generally confused about the two countries, although one student did state that South Korea was too close to North Korea. Some Japanese students also recorded that the North Koreans did not like Japan.

There was absolutely no confusion between the two countries displayed by Japanese students, indeed a small number of them (1%) stated that they wished to live in South Korea. It is certainly true that media reporting influences attitudes to North Korea, as in Ireland, and the somewhat subjective and emotive tone of such reports is strongly involved in the development of such attitudes. At the same time, South Korea is well known by Japanese people for a variety of reasons in addition to school, including the presence of South Koreans in the country, the popularity of Korean TV programmes and music and the common availability of Korean food. Both tourism and other economic links are also important between the two countries.

U.S.A. An interesting finding was that, while the USA was amongst the most desired countries for many students, it was also selected by a number of students as being the one where they would least like to live (6% of LS and 3% of all HS Japanese respondents and 4% LC, 3% No Geog. and 14% Geog. in Ireland). Indeed, it was the

only country which featured in both categories. There was predictably some overlap between information known about the country in the earlier question and the responses to this one. A large number of students referred to gun control and crime issues as reasons for their unwillingness to live in the US, while cost/lack of health care and obesity were other aspects. There were also some references to the political situation in the USA, particularly by Irish Geog. group. While this focus on politics may relate to the timing of the survey of older Irish students as it was closer to the US presidential elections than for the other groups, it is unclear why this should have disproportionately influenced the Geog. students disproportionately. While Japanese students did make some reference to the candidates in the forthcoming election, their surveys were completed earlier in 2016 than the Irish SS one, and so their interest was not as engaged as that of the older Irish students.

Other countries. Many students in both countries revealed that they were unaware that Africa is not a single country, and in both nations the reasons revealed stereotypes which are common amongst the general population. These included warfare, disease, famine, poverty, drought and a lack of medical facilities, although Japanese students had a clearer focus on poverty than did Irish ones. A few did name specific countries, for example one student named Sudan noting that that the ‘economy was pretty bad, there was almost no government and a lack of food and water’. Amongst older students, gender inequality was also noted. It is arguable that this situation reflects media focus on Africa – famine, disease and warfare being frequent foci for news programmes and charitable appeals. A clear indication from this evidence is that both groups require further education on the differences in areas of Africa, even within individual countries.

Table 4
Countries Where Students Would Least Like to Live (% Responses)

	Japanese students			Irish students		
	Senior Secondary			Senior Secondary		
	Lower Sec.	No Geog.	Geog.	Lower Sec.	No Geog.	Geog.
China	2	33	25	16	13	14
North Korea	27	23	13	28	22	20
USA	6	3	3	4	3	14
Africa	2	3	9	6	6	9
Brazil	1	0	8	0	0	0
Iran	2	0	6	0	0	0
South Korea	0	0	0	9	0	6
Iraq	0	0	4	2	6	7

Japanese students did not wish to live in Brazil because it was so far from Japan. One also noted that it had a lot of forests – perhaps suggesting that this person also regarded it is less economically developed or very different from their current environment. A clear difference between Irish and Japanese respondents was that Iran was regarded as being undesirable by Japanese students as its security was poor, with a great deal of conflict and terrorism, but no Irish students noted this country. The Irish students did, however, have similar reasons for not wishing to live in Iraq, and no

Japanese students cited this country. Indeed, it is possible that the two countries were confused by some students as the names are so similar and they are in the same general world area, which has serious security issues overall. They are also both Islamic countries and Islam has been much linked (not, of course, accurately) in the media with terrorism and warfare.

Discussion

The overall results of the survey findings support the results of previous studies that age plus the continuing study of geography correlate with ability to locate countries accurately and to the degree of sophistication of the information recalled. For example, Axia et al. (1998) noted this in a study of European knowledge where children of 8 years had some knowledge of their own country but did not know much about other countries, while 10 year olds knew considerably more. They also noted that study of Geography in school was a contributory factor to this improved understanding. It is, of course, not possible to say whether or not this relates to what is learned in schools, or to a general interest in the world, and, thus, greater likelihood to be interested to find out locations of places. In the Japanese cohort, the younger students always performed less well than all of the older students in terms of location. However, in Ireland, those who are no longer studying geography [No Geog.] performed less well than both those who have just completed the compulsory study or those who are continuing to study geography. It is possible that these students were generally less interested in geography than those taking the subject beyond junior cycle and so did not retain as much knowledge over time, while those who had just completed the lower secondary course had not yet forgotten what they had learned during their course. In relation to the older students it is, of course, not possible to say whether this improvement relates to what is learned in schools, or to a general interest in the world, and, thus, greater likelihood of being interested in learning locations of places and general information about them. The authors would, therefore, argue that the longer time geography is studied in schools, the more likely students are to develop a more sophisticated world view, as discussed above in relation to attitudes to China by Japanese students, for example.

The importance of school as a source of learning about other countries is merely one of a number of alternatives. Japanese students generally reported greater importance of learning in school than Irish students, but even for them it is just one of several such sources. Indeed, this finding supports other studies which confirm that 'school life is becoming increasingly marginal to how students inform, present and position themselves as social actors' (Morgan, 2001, p.284). He identified libraries, television, movies, Internet, newspapers, magazines, toys, and advertising as sites where learning may take place. The current study did not identify libraries, magazines and toys as being of importance, all of the others were cited to some degree, confirming the need to 'needs to examine both in-school and cultural pedagogy.' (Morgan 2001, p.284).

In general there were common stereotypes reported by respondents, some of which did include a degree of truth, e.g. French people *do* eat snails and frogs (although not as an exclusive diet) and there *are* issues about gun control in the USA, but these are hardly the most important information about these countries and are unlikely to have

been learned from work in school, but rather from other sources, particularly the various media, noted in this study. Evidence from this study supports a recommendation by Morgan (2001, p.290) that 'the basic media literacy technique of relating media messages to the political, social and economic interests of those producing them, needs to be encouraged as a matter of course by teachers of all subjects'. Since teachers of Geography use a wide variety of media within the classroom, it would be reasonable to suggest that this is a subject where this media literacy could be developed successfully. Unless this is done then it will be difficult to tackle those initial prejudices, stereotypes and misconceptions which students bring to school. Schools can not, of course, tackle all of the information/ understanding issues within society, but it remains the case that further efforts must be made to address these. It also appears that some common understandings (or misunderstandings) are evident in both countries. Young people's images of countries which are formed from viewing movies, reading manga or listening to music produced there, are possibly a start (and one which addresses the issue of relevance) but clearly much more is required to move students on to a fair understanding of distant places.

Acknowledgement

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Biographical statements

Shelagh WADDINGTON; My interest in geography education began when I started teaching in secondary education, following my degree in geography from University College London and my teaching certificate from Christ Church College, Canterbury. This was in the 1970s in England when there was a great deal of innovation and curriculum change in the subject. I was stimulated to learn more about the subject and completed an MA in Geography Education at the London Institute of Education. Following my move to Ireland, I continued my interest in curriculum change and developments in the teaching of the subject, when I began to work in the Education Department of Trinity College Dublin, and subsequently in both the Geography and Education Departments in Maynooth University. In the latter institution I both lead the Geography module for secondary school teachers and worked with beginning teachers during their school practice. I completed a PhD in 1995, in which I explored curriculum development in Ireland and have since continued to investigate the teaching and learning of geography both within Ireland and internationally. My main interests within the general area are on the development of curricula and on the responses/ effects of such development.

Takashi SHIMURA is a professor in the Social Studies Department at Joetsu University of Education. He previously taught at senior high school level for 17 years, and then joined the academic faculty at the University in 2002. His major fields of research include comparative curriculum study and initial teacher training study. In 2015, he co-edited Geography Education in Japan with his colleagues, published by Springer, and contributed 'Primary geography education in Japan: curriculum as social studies, practices and teachers' expertise' for RIGEO 5(2). Particular recently, his interest is the history of social curriculum development movements in postwar England. The latest related paper is 'The rise and fall of the movement to establish the integrated subject "Social Studies" in England from the 1970s to 1980s' on Forum: Trans-National Journal of Education of Culture 4:40-59 issued by Japan-UK Society for Educational Research in Tokyo.

Appendix I.
Questionnaire

What do students know about other countries? A survey of Japanese and Irish students

You should be aware that the information you give in this survey will be used in the current project, exploring students' knowledge and understanding of foreign countries. It may also be used in follow-up studies. Your answers are completely anonymous and no report/other use will enable you to be identified in any way. The information sheet which is on the back page here provides more details about the work. You may choose not to take part in the survey and you may withdraw at any time during the survey if you wish.

Thank you for your help.

Please tick the boxes below to indicate that you understand and agree to this.

I understand the information briefing that I have been given.

I agree that my answers may be used in the ways detailed above.

Please answer all of the questions

- 1a) Please tell us if you are male or female **[Tick correct box]**
- male female
- 1b) Please tell us if you are currently taking Leaving Cert. Geography.
- Yes No

- 2a) Have you ever heard of Japan?
- Yes No

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- 2b) Which of the following statements is correct for Japan?
- Japan is the name of a country. Yes No Don't know
- Japan is the name of an island. Yes No Don't know
- Japan is the name of a region in a country. Yes No Don't know

3. Please will you tell us anything else which you know about Japan

Where did you learn *most* about Japan **[Tick one box only]**

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| a | In school | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b | Internet/ on-line | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c | TV programmes | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d | Newspapers | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e | Movies/ films | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| f | Family/friends | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| g | Other source – what is this please? | <input type="checkbox"/> |

4. Please tell us up to three things which you know about each of the countries named here. Then tell us where you learned most about each country – you may just write the letter in the Learned Most box, e.g. if you learned most in school, write a.

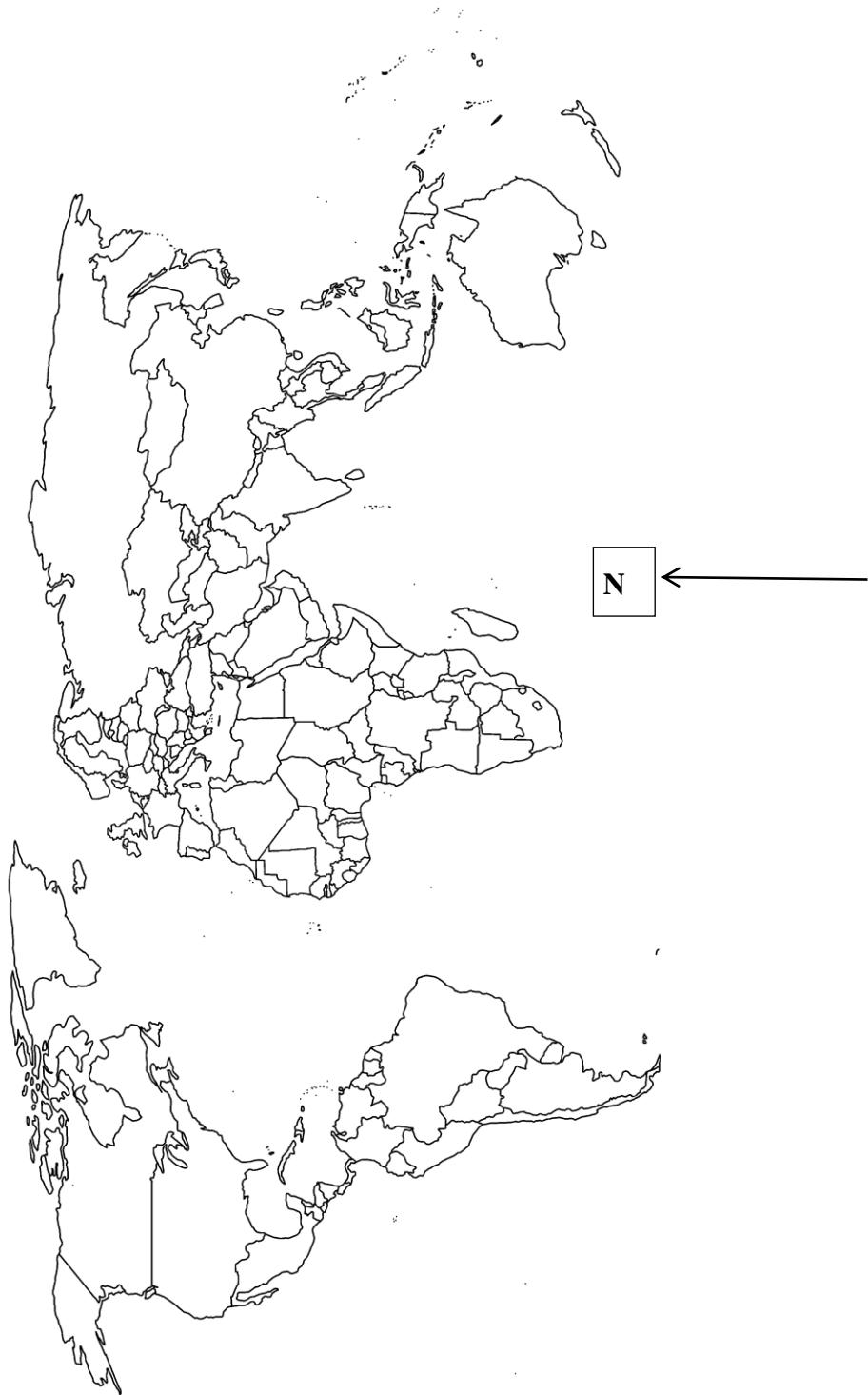
a	In school
b	Internet/ on-line
c	TV programmes
d	Newspapers
e	Movies/ films
f	Family/friends
g	Other source – what is this please?

Name of country	Things which I know about this country	Learned most
UK [England, Scotland, Wales & N. Ireland]	1. 2. 3.	
France	1. 2. 3.	
Germany	1. 2. 3.	
China	1. 2. 3.	
South Korea	1. 2. 3.	
Thailand	1. 2. 3.	
USA	1. 2. 3.	

Turn to the next page

5. Please mark all of the countries - Japan, Ireland, UK, France, Germany, China, South Korea, Thailand, and the USA - on this map. N.B. the map is turned around – see the north arrow!!!

Don't forget to name each one, not just mark it on the map!!



And finally

6. **Apart from your own country**, in which country **anywhere** in the world would you **most** like to live? [It need not be one of those named in this survey]

Country name _____

Please tell us why you would like to live there

7. **Apart from your own country**, in which country **anywhere** in the world would you **least** like to live? [It need not be one of those named in this survey]

Country name _____

Please tell us why you would **not** like to live there

Thank you very much for taking part in our survey.