

Richard Walker
 Reitaku University
 rwalker[at]reitaku-u[dot]ac[dot]jp



Tangible Benefits From Intangible Practices

ABSTRACT

This paper shows how it is possible to help students engage with the topic of intangible cultural practices in EFL classrooms in Japan, and asserts that the students attained tangible benefits from doing so. It explains why the topic of intangible cultural practices was used and how the teacher proceeded by providing examples of the activities and giving explanations of how they were implemented. Tangible benefits were obtained from a two-class focus on three intangible cultural practices that were candidates for inscription in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) lists of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The benefits include consciousness-raising by broadening students' horizons, furthering cross-cultural understanding, and encouraging solidarity. They also include linguistic benefits such as providing students with the opportunity to develop their vocabulary, use new knowledge in classroom discussions and speeches, and, finally, by applying critical thinking skills to choose one of three cultural practices to support.

Keywords: CLIL, UNESCO, EFL, critical thinking

This short article looks at the ways in which learners attained tangible benefits – consciousness-raising gains, opportunities to use new vocabulary, and the use of critical thinking skills – from a series of classroom activities that focused on three intangible cultural practices that were candidates for inscription in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) lists of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Since the classes were taught in July 2023, their candidacy has been decided and all three, i.e. transhumance farming, traditional glass making, and jamu wellness culture (UNESCO, 2023:1,2,3), have been inscribed into UNESCO's lists. They were regarded as appropriate topics to use for students taking courses on UN-related issues at two universities: a group of EFL students from a College of Law faculty in Tokyo, and EFL students from a Foreign Studies faculty in Chiba, Japan.

INTANGIBLE CULTURAL PRACTICES

While UNESCO World Heritage Sites are well-known to most students today, UNESCO's 'intangible cultural practices' are not. A somewhat unwieldy definition for them is "practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage" (UNESCO, 2003). If presented in manageable ways in the classroom, they can be used to raise awareness of 'practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills' hitherto unknown to students, and deepen understanding of activities whose importance are understated and by their very nature are often unseen and unheard. They can do this while increasing and deepening their vocabulary knowledge, applying and working on their public

speaking skills, and using discussion skills while comparing and contrasting the virtues of specific cultural practices. My intention was that students would use four- skills activities to develop an awareness of being a global citizen and to promote alternative cultural practices to the ones that are found in commercial media - and to do this all in English.

THREE NOMINEES FROM A CHOICE OF FORTY-FIVE

I therefore decided to teach students about three of the forty-five nominations for inclusion from the 2023 Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (ICH1), the results of which were announced at the 8th session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in Kasane, the Republic of Botswana, in December 2023. The three I chose are shown in Table 1. They represent separate areas that hold potential interest for students, and are all topics that lend themselves to discussions and speeches. Doing speeches would help students develop public speaking skills; preparing reasons for why they would choose one practice over another would enhance critical thinking skills; and through doing this they would develop a feeling that they know more about diverse cultural practices.

Table 1: Three practices I chose for class (and their real-world nominators)*

	Intangible Practice	Countries that nominated the practice
1	Transhumance (seasonal droving of livestock)	Albania - Andorra - Austria - Croatia - France - Greece - Italy - Luxembourg - Romania – Spain
2	Handmade glass production	Czech Republic - Finland - France - Germany - Hungary - Spain
3	Jamu wellness culture	Indonesia

*A country which has signed the World Heritage Convention can be a nominator. Nominations are submitted to the World Heritage Centre for evaluation.

WHY WERE THEY CHOSEN?

Transhumance, glass production, and wellness culture were chosen because they provided students with three different practices – covering agriculture, manufacturing and health. *Transhumant practices* were considered worthy of inclusion because these practices have existed for many centuries in multiple cultures (not just those in the nominators' territories) and may even be used to promote sustainable development goals (e.g. SDG 12 on Responsible Consumption and Production). *Handmade glass production* was chosen because it is a cultural practice that, as with transhumant practices, was not expected to be known by students, but is a skill that requires artistry and teamwork within communities and produces products of beauty. Finally, *jamu wellness culture* allowed for recognition of the widespread use of traditional natural medicines made from herbs and spices which, in this case, is specific to Indonesia, but which reflects skills, values, and practices found all over the world.

THE LD30 PRESENTATION

The people who attended my presentation at the LD30 Conference were curious about how these practices could be introduced and taught in a manner so that students could attain tangible benefits. Dexter da Silva commented that finding ways to use such topics is worthwhile in environments where tangible targets for students (perhaps, overly) concern the highly important but primarily work-oriented aim of raising a TOEIC score or some other measurable language learning target.

The courses in which these lessons were taught were innovative (within their contexts) in that they were designed around groups of EFL students representing a UN Member State (of their choice) and doing research around themes in preparation for discussions and speeches. By the time students were taught the classes on intangible practices, they had represented a single UN Member State for most of the semester and had researched contemporary UN-related issues to

prepare for discussions and speeches on the issues. One of the attendees at my presentation asked me how, in this context, it would be possible to show tangible benefits. Although I could, of course, see and hear students discussing and presenting issues *within* class time, the students got into the practice of sending work before (preparation notes) and after class (written reflections) onto a Google Classroom page. The practice was followed throughout the course and this is how I was able to track their progress and evaluate them.

In the presentation, I discussed three questions that concerned the classes on intangible practices. They were taught at two different universities in the same way. The questions were:

1. How did students prepare before class?
2. What activities did they do in class? and
3. What did they produce?

HOW DID STUDENTS PREPARE BEFORE CLASS?

As with previous topics, students prepared by reading and answering questions from a two-page set of information and doing video activities on the three intangible practices which were made available on Google Classroom (see Table 2 and Figure 1). They knew that proper use of the worksheets would prepare them for class. This expectation was common to both courses: students were given information to read and questions to complete before the following week's class.

Table 2: Content of homework given in preparation for class

Page	Activity / Content
1	Reading: (i) What are Intangible Cultural Practices? (ii) Criteria for inscription into the UNESCO list. (iii) The 3 practices
2	Reading on <i>Transhumance</i> farming + link to YouTube video (Preschitz, 2019) with questions
3	Reading on <i>Handmade Glass Production</i> + link to YouTube video (Science Channel, 2017) with questions
4	Reading on <i>Jamu Wellness Culture</i> + link to YouTube video (OGS, 2017) with questions

The screenshot shows a Google Classroom interface. The main content is a worksheet titled "2 Jamu (wellness culture)". It features a table for "Locations" with the entry "Java, Jogjakarta & many parts of Indonesia". Below this is a paragraph explaining that Jamu is a wellness-focused traditional medicine from Indonesia. A video player is embedded, showing a man in a patterned shirt. Three questions are listed: "1. Where is the video shot? Who is in it?", "2. What part of jamu culture does the video highlight?", and "3. What can jamu cure?". At the bottom, there is a small paragraph in Indonesian about jamu being used for children.

Figure 1: Example page

WHAT ACTIVITIES DID THEY DO IN THE CLASSES ON INTANGIBLE PRACTICES?

Lesson one

The lessons on intangible practices covered two lessons. At the end of the first lesson, I introduced the new topic about Intangible Cultural Practices. The students sat in UN Member States groups (some of which were nominees of the three intangible practices) while I explained the difference between World Heritage Sites (which can be perceived tangibly) and Intangible Cultural Practices (which are, by name, intangible!) using a PowerPoint. This lent itself to a discussion about Japanese sites and practices that students were knowledgeable about. Students were then requested to look for sites and practices from the country they represented. They were then put into groups and discussed what they had found. Soon after, the students were informed of their homework which was made accessible on Google Classroom towards the end of class. As usual, I told students that completion of the homework would prepare them well for the output-based activities in the next class and also in writing their reflections on the topic.

Lesson two

In lesson two, students were reminded of what we did in lesson one, and then were informed that we would watch video clips of three intangible cultural practices. If they had done their homework, they would have been able to discuss the merits and demerits of the practices (with other UN Member States). Students were reminded to focus on the questions in the worksheets and to consider which practice their country would prefer to become a UNESCO cultural heritage practice. They were then encouraged to speak to other groups (countries) and share ideas.

After the discussion, we moved towards the next stage: producing short group presentations to outline the reasons for their choices. This was often a culminating activity in the class. I reminded students that giving a speech was something they could write about in their reflection homework, and as a consequence most students clamoured to volunteer. In the classes on intangible practices, to speed up proceedings and to assist the less confident, I used one slide to highlight (and remind students about) connections between cultural practices and specific SDG goals (see Table 3a); and another to provide sets of phrases and hints to help the less confident compose a speech (see Table 3b).

Table 3a: Connections between cultural practices and specific SDG goals

Intangible Practices	Relevance to SDGs
<i>Transhumance farming</i>	Zero hunger (SDG 2), Good health and well-being (SDG 3), Clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), Decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), Sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), Climate action (SDG 13), Responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), Life on land (SDG 15), Partnerships for the goals (SDG 17).
<i>Handmade Glass Production</i>	Quality education (SDG 4), Clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), Decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), Industry, innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9), Sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), Responsible consumption and production (SDG 12).
<i>Jamu Wellness Culture</i>	Good health and well-being (SDG 3), Gender equality (SDG 5), Decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), Sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), Responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), Life on land (SDG 15).

Table 3b: Language support for speech preparation

Structures used to help students make speeches in class time
- Today, we must choose a Cultural Practice to be inscribed as _____
- (Country name) supports _____ because _____
- All of the practices are important because _____
- However, we support _____. We have ___ reasons: _____
- Thank you for listening.

By the time this class was taught, students willingly gave speeches: they did not have to be forced to compose a speech (although the less confident were respectfully coaxed and supported). The success of their speeches relied upon understanding the content they covered for homework, on developing a position with reference to the country they represented, and on participating actively in class. Happily, the majority of students completed the homework and were able to give well-researched speeches.

In previous classes in the course, we had discussed other topics and voted (as UN Member States) on whether we agreed or disagreed with ideas that were raised. In the case of the class on intangible practices, as chance would have it, there were roughly equal amounts of support for each intangible practice. This was clear in viewing the class-time speeches and checking the post-class reflections. In this class, I also confirmed this through an end-of-class vote on which practice should be accepted.

WHAT DID THEY PRODUCE?

In the reflections for this class, students gave support and reflections for all three intangible practices. Below, I provide an example for each one, explain why I included them, and highlight what I think is significant. These significant cases highlight tangible benefits from the class, which fall in the realm of consciousness-raising, vocabulary development, and critical thinking.

Transhumance

In this example, the student expresses an awareness that cultural heritage ‘products’ are in danger of extinction. This shows the results of the topic alone acting to raise her consciousness. On behalf of Mexico, she selected the practice of transhumance and, in her reflection, explains that she has also independently researched Mayan heritage sites. Expanding her interest and deepening awareness of a culture is a benefit, and she goes on to express great interest in such sites and of indigenous cultures in South America. Going beyond what was requested, she goes on to explain that transhumant culture has been practised in Mexico - something not referenced in the worksheet. She also refers to sustainability, to animal rights, and to veganism - the latter of which is practised in some transhumant communities.

Student writing 1

In July 19th class, I learned about Intangible Cultural Heritage. I have things that I learned from this class. Firstly, we searched for tangible and intangible heritage in my country; Mexico. I've never experienced that there are many tangible heritage sites that represent Mayans' culture. Particularly, I'd like to visit Teotihuacan and Guanajuato. These two places are amazing pyramids, buildings and scenery. I definitely feel an emotional and historical vibe from even seeing the pictures. Also, I got interested in Mayan culture.

Secondly, we searched what Mexico has intangible cultural heritages. I learned that Mexico has a precious culture about glass production. It was a beautiful production. ... the process is simple but difficult and needs huge power to produce. However, if I had a chance to create it, I'd like to try to make it. Beside that, I learned many intangible cultural heritage products are exposed to extinction. It's an urgent issue because these cultural things represent their own culture and play an important role in their life. However, it's the same situation in Japan. We have to consider this problem seriously. Finally, we made a speech by ourselves:

Mexico thinks that we have to prioritize and protect transhumance. I have some reasons. First, food is important and essential for our life. We can't hand down other cultural heritage unless we can't eat something. It's kind of like "An army marches on its stomach". Aside from that, we have to keep it sustainable and consider animal rights issues for our future. Nowadays animal rights issues are becoming urgent at the same time, people are getting interested in veganism. For these reasons, Mexico thinks that transhumance is significant so we'd like to prioritize this tradition.

Glass Production

In this example, the student gives a comment on all three intangible practices. As requested, she did not choose a practice backed by the country she represented, Italy. Her choice of glass production was chosen because of Italy's famous stained-glass windows in churches. She uses vocabulary from the worksheet - language that students would not be expected to use (eg: droving, blown glass). In referring to jamu wellness culture she shows understanding of its purported benefits and uses vocabulary we would not normally expect (eg: indigestion). Her comments on transhumance reveal a modern mindset which values convenience over culture (transhumance farming is "hard work" and "we should come up with an easier way"), but she does so using content-specific language (pastoral, nomadic, droving).

Like the previous student, she wrote about learning many new things and refers to the fact that she (or a member of her team) gave a speech from Italy's perspective, and for which her group had to use critical thinking skills to deliver a judgment.

Student writing 2

In July 19 class, I represented Italy. We looked at intangible cultural heritages. In this class, we watched three videos.

First, we learned about Handmade Glass Production. Traditional handmade glass production consists of the shaping and decorating of cold and hot glass. I first learned that the glass is blown, (using) framework, and cold (work) to work (it) to perfection. Glass is fragile and difficult to make

Second, we learned about Jamu. Jamu is a type of traditional medicine from Indonesia, and Jamu can cure pain and indigestion headaches. I was surprised when I first learned about this culture. I thought that this culture could help many people suffering from illness.

Third, we learned about transhumance. Transhumance is the seasonal droving of livestock and occurs within and between countries. It is a type of pastoral or nomadic farming that is based around seasonal movements of livestock between fixed summer and winter pastures. I was surprised because the farmers do this twice a year by foot, and horse. This is a lot of work, so I thought we should come up with an easier way.

After that, we gave a speech. Italy talked about glass production. Italians believe in Christianity and there are many churches in Italy. That's why stained glass, which is often used in churches in Italy, is important. We thought we should continue and (save) this culture. I know a lot about cultural heritage. However, there were many things I didn't know about intangible cultural heritage, so I'm glad I was able to learn about them. I think cultural heritage buildings and technology are wonderful, so I think it is necessary to prevent them from disappearing as much as possible.

Jamu Wellness Culture

The final example is shorter than the other two, and also has a different style. It highlights the development of critical thinking because the writer not only reveals an understanding of the difference between tangible and intangible heritage, he considers the choices of another country, Australia - and understands why they chose transhumant farming. Opting not to comment on glass production, the writer (representing India) explains why his country 'especially' supports Jamu Wellness culture. He is willing to acknowledge another opinion and gives a reason for doing so: namely, the need for 'self-sufficient' cultures in this age of climate change.

Student writing 3

We learned about Cultural Heritage. Cultural Heritage has two things. It is tangible (such as buildings and landscapes) and intangible (folklore, art, language, and work practices). We learned about three intangible cultural heritage: Handmade Glass Production, Jamu and Transhumance.

India thinks we need all of them, however, especially, we need support for Jamu, because India has a lot of infections. Australia supported transhumance, because climate change may cause food shortages to become a problem in the world in the future, and this kind of self-sufficient culture will become important. But rising temperatures have reduced the amount of grass available for grazing, putting the nomads' livelihoods at risk.

Finally, transhumance helps regions and people to conserve a local identity in an ever increasingly globalized Earth. Not only are there tangible reasons to keep this tradition alive, there is also a great potential for cultural, ecological, and educational purposes, creating interest and increasing awareness.

CONCLUSION

The activities on intangible practices came at the end of a course in which we looked at issues currently in discussion at the UN (or in UN bodies such as UNICEF). In my position as a faculty adviser to groups of students interested in topics at the UN, I have developed a lot of knowledge that I could use to help support the students. Transmitting such knowledge is easier said than done, but I found that I could teach engaging classes that resulted in students attaining and producing tangible benefits. There are written attestations that consciousnesses had been changed and that new vocabulary was being used in output-based activities such as speeches and writing reflections. That this was done with a focus on something intangible pleases me!

If I decide to use this topic again, I can choose some of the topics which are being treated for the 2024 cycle of inscription into intangible heritage lists - which include nominations for an Urgent Safeguarding List or the Representative List, and proposals for the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices (ICH 2). At the time of writing there are sixty-seven files to consider. A cursory glance shows there are practices from every continent and include artistic practices, food and drink, and

rituals (three areas I may look into). With the experience of teaching about three intangible benefits in 2023, I feel sure I can construct a meaningful study unit around three new ones. I believe that students should learn about authentic practices that are not visible to the majority of the population, and which have high importance if we are to preserve non-commercial practices with roots in a previous age.

As this paper has shown, difficult topics such as intangible cultural practices can be used in class with sets of activities that are written for specific groups of students. They can lead to positive language learning outcomes. Crucial to its success is making sure that students read about the practices before class. Being primed for the topics through readings, video links, and questions, the students were ready and able to participate in output-based activities such as discussions and public speaking. Key to its success was using tailored material to suit the level of the students and activities that target four skills.

At the end of my LD30 presentation I asked attendees on ways to attain tangible benefits when teaching such a topic. Dexter da Silva helpfully mentioned John Hattie's 'Visible Learning for Teachers' (2012) and after reading the book I believe that I was following some of his good practices such as having high expectations (p.81), focusing on the effect of teaching rather than the method (p.83), and being an activator and evaluator of learning (p.86). Hattie states that visible teaching and learning "occurs when learning is the explicit and transparent goal, when it is appropriately challenging, and when the teacher and the student both (in their various ways) seek to ascertain whether and to what degree the challenging goal is attained" (p.14). I think I achieved that in the activities discussed above - and I have tangible proof. However, further readings of Hattie's book may help me maximise future tangible benefits while teaching this topic – and others.

REFERENCES

- Hattie, J (2012). *Visible learning for teachers: Maximizing impact on learning*. Routledge
- ICH 1 (2023). Examination of nominations for inscription in 2023 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (item 8.b on the agenda). Accessed December 1, 2023 from: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/8b-representative-list-01325>
- ICH 2 (2024). Files 2024 under process. Accessed January 13, 2024 from: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/files-2024-under-process-01303>
- OGS (2020). Jamu: The ancient Indonesian art of herbal healing [YouTube video]. Accessed December 9, 2023 from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=62eD5Q0pnYI>
- Preschitz, T. (2019). Transhumance - Routes of a disappearing life [YouTube video]. Accessed December 9, 2023 from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OFH77T5BMY>
- Science Channel (2017). See how window glass is made the artisional way [YouTube video]. Accessed December 9, 2023 from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXQMc0jsI2E>
- UNESCO (2003). Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Accessed July 1, 2023 from: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>
- UNESCO (2023a). Transhumance, the seasonal droving of livestock [YouTube video]. Accessed December 9, 2023 from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s8BJfOs7R30>
- UNESCO (2023b). Knowledge, craft and skills of handmade glass production [YouTube video]. Accessed December 9, 2023 from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x2HhU-EJwdI>
- UNESCO (2023c). Jamu wellness culture [YouTube video]. Accessed December 9, 2023 from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bOiXDAAeiOU>