



CHAPTER 7

Transformation of International University Education Through Digitalisation During/ After the COVID-19 Pandemic: Challenges in Online International Learning in Japanese Universities

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INTRODUCTION

The internationalisation of higher education, especially the provision of international education by universities, has been a common challenge for countries and universities around the world in the past three decades due

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to increasing globalisation. After world university rankings emerged at the beginning of the twenty-first century, various governments in East Asia encouraged their universities to strengthen their international education and research profiles and thus achieve higher status in the global knowledge economy. Simultaneously, the number of students in East Asia demanding an international learning environment increased rapidly, along with the growth of middle-class families with high learning aspirations. In addition to the search for degrees in advanced countries for migration and career purposes, the number of students demanding short-term study-abroad experiences to acquire intercultural competencies, including basic foreign language communication, has increased dramatically.

Japan provides a good example of the active and diverse internationalisation of higher education, with strong governmental support. In 1983, the Japanese government introduced its plan to accept 100,000 international students into various types of universities and educational institutions, followed by a subsequent plan, introduced in 2008, to accept 300,000 international students by 2020. The country achieved this goal in 2020, with a massive number of international students learning at Japanese-language schools that are not part of formal higher education. In reality, they are intended to allow unskilled workers to enter Japan with student visas. The Japanese government and universities have also attempted to increase the number of students via outbound study-abroad experiences, but most of these study-abroad experiences have been short visits, without any associated credits being awarded by the host universities and institutions.

In the age of globalisation, undergraduate education is expected to develop international perspectives and mobility in a broad sense, fostering graduate school enrolment, career development in global enterprises, and entrepreneurship. Student mobility, however, was extremely restricted or entirely suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic, especially for short-term studies and visits. Instead, online classes, as an emergency alternative to standard international education in universities, spread rapidly.

Faced with the COVID-19 outbreak, which occurred first in China, the largest neighbouring country, and then in Europe and North America, the

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Japanese government asked educational institutions of all levels to suspend face-to-face instruction at the end of February 2020. The national government then declared the first state of emergency on 18 March of that year. This led to the cancellation of overseas travel, the emergency return of Japanese students studying and visiting abroad, the suspension of student visas issued to foreign students, and the postponement of new academic terms. These developments were followed by the rapid increase in emergency online learning due to campus closures, which could now include the online participation of international students outside Japan.

However, the government and universities quickly recognised that the ongoing phenomenon of the wide usage of online learning was linked to an irreversible and accelerated process of digitisation or digital transformation in higher education, including international education in universities. Moreover, various interactions and co-learning that transcended national borders and geographical distances could rapidly expand in cyberspace.

The contexts of international university education are highly diverse, involving various higher education systems and institutions. In anglo-phone countries, the degree of damage caused by the pandemic to the financial resources of international students has become a crucial factor affecting international student marketing. Furthermore, several types of transnational education services, including massive open online courses (MOOCs), have become inseparable components of mainstream university education.

In Japan, as with its East Asian neighbours, although the initial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been relatively mild, cross-border student mobility has been strictly monitored and controlled by the respective state governments. Moreover, the ongoing, rapid digitalisation of society poses a fundamental question regarding whether Japanese universities can continue to attract international students to their educational programmes in their current form, which is deeply embedded in national and local society, culture, and language and the Japanese labour market and academic communities. In Japan, for example, online international education is mostly provided as non-commercial, intercultural co-learning; however, the outsourcing of language education to overseas providers through online learning is becoming more widespread.

This article discusses the following question from the perspectives of higher education systems in Japan, which have strong national identities, academic traditions, and languages: *what transformations are the*

COVID-19 pandemic and its countermeasures bringing about regarding the internationalisation of university education?

This article combines a case analysis of institutional responses with a conceptual and theoretical discussion of the internationalisation of higher education curricula (Leask, 2015). To identify major patterns in the responses and transformations of international education (e.g., student exchanges and international co-learning), the authors examined the responses of various types of universities that actively provide international education in Japan.

The authors believe that the application of online learning to Intercultural Collaborative Learning (ICL) activities will be the key to developing international education in universities. Thus, the authors examine the progress of university internationalisation in Japan prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Then, based on interviews with approximately 20 experts in Japan and abroad, which were conducted by the authors between February and March 2021, as well as information and opinions exchanged at various symposia and meetings, the authors will analyse nationwide trends and individual universities in Japan as practical cases. The authors first examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the international mobility of students and international education in universities by summarising nationwide trends and examples of initiatives at individual universities. They then evaluate the case studies of two universities that are promoting ICL activities in various contexts, paying special attention to the potential of online international education. Finally, by focusing on international education's goal of understanding others who are different, the authors discuss the prospects for international education in Japanese universities in the post-pandemic era.

UNIVERSITY INTERNATIONALISATION IN JAPAN

In most East Asian countries, including Japan, secondary education curricula are strongly guided by the national curriculum and guidelines posed by the national government based on a strong tradition of nation-building through education. In this context, undergraduate programmes must provide their home students with international experience so that they can study and work in a global context after graduation. For these purposes, it is not enough simply to increase the international mobility of students by sending home students abroad and accepting incoming international students. What is needed is the linkage of these students'

international mobility with the internationalisation of university curricula. The purpose of curriculum internationalisation is not only to improve communication skills in common languages (English in many cases) but also to promote multicultural understanding and adaptation. Universities must provide a global learning environment that includes a diverse student body and, in turn, promote international student mobility in a way that supports their curricula. This will provide a global learning environment so as to attract more diverse students.

International student mobility also promotes ‘internationalisation at home’, or ‘campus internationalisation’, which internationalises not only students who study abroad but also the university education provided by home universities and campus environments, including the education for students who do not move internationally (Beelen & Jones, 2015). However, this interaction between international and home-country students can only be effective if universities intentionally embed it into their curricula. In other words, the internationalisation of curricula is necessary, and its scope must extend beyond regular lectures and seminars to include extracurricular activities, life in international student dormitories, and the international ‘hidden curriculum’ embedded in university study and life (Leask, 2015).

The connection between students’ international mobility and the internationalisation of university curricula has been recognised in earnest by some Japanese universities since the 1990s, beginning with the establishment of small private universities and colleges to provide international liberal arts education in English. Miyazaki International College (MIC), for example, was established in 1994 to provide international liberal arts education, recruiting students mostly from ordinary secondary schools teaching in Japanese. The classes at MIC are taught in English, with teams of teachers comprising international instructors using English and instructors who can also communicate in Japanese for learning support. All MIC students are expected to participate in study-abroad programmes designed mainly to improve English language communication skills. The undergraduate programmes on the home campus are designed as preparation for study abroad and follow-up after returning home.

Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University was established in 2000. Half of the students are international students, mainly from Asia, and domestic students are required to take classes in both English and Japanese. Chiba University—a national comprehensive university located in the Tokyo

metropolitan area—launched international liberal arts programmes in 2016. It later declared that it would provide all students with study-abroad opportunities by 2020.

The government has also been promoting the internationalisation of universities through a series of projects: the Project for Establishing Key Universities for Internationalisation (Global 30), which has been operational since 2009; the Project for Promoting Global Human Resource Development, from 2012; and the Project for Fostering Top Global Universities, since 2014. Through these projects, the Japanese government has promoted the idea of fostering students' international experience as the core component of educational programmes. Many universities in Japan have provided some form of international education opportunities, both overseas placements and classes in English at home campuses; however, these are usually optional classes and programmes based on voluntary participation. Programmes and courses in English, which were initially provided for returnees or international students with insufficient Japanese language proficiency, are occasionally open to students whose primary language is Japanese. Nevertheless, many of the programmes and courses in Japanese are intended for Japanese students but open to international students, without any modifications to suit the needs of international students. In fact, there is limited demand for an international curriculum on the part of Japanese society, and most inbound international students are coming for short stays or are already deeply assimilated into Japanese social customs through regular degree-seeking classes taught mainly in Japanese.

National policies for internationalisation and the promotion of international education tend to rely on the extrinsic demands of society and industry beyond universities, such as demands for economic revitalisation and employees who can actively engage with the globalised knowledge economy. The idea of constructing these international education programmes as intrinsic to the practices of university education has not been widely established within or outside universities. Discussions about global human resource development in Japan have emphasised understanding and utilising different cultures from the beginning. However, there is a large gap between 'cross-cultural understanding' in Japan, which is discussed in conjunction with the formation of a 'Japanese identity', and global leadership in multicultural settings; hence, although discussions regarding global citizenship formation and education have developed in Japan, they are not based on the integration of home and

foreign cultures. It is unlikely that university education that consciously incorporates symbiosis between social groups, reflecting complex differences in their socio-economic environments as a major issue for universities and the overall societies surrounding them, has taken root widely among people involved in Japanese university education and Japanese society overall.

IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON STUDENT MOBILITY

The limitations suddenly imposed on students' physical mobility due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic since the end of 2019 have changed the nature of higher education and its internationalisation dramatically. International education in undergraduate programmes was particularly hard hit. The international mobility of students at the graduate level is mostly associated with the international joint supervision of doctoral research or courses with clearly defined purposes, such as master of business administration (MBA) and other professional programmes. By contrast, bachelor's degree study-abroad programmes, especially exchange programmes of one year or less, and short-term study visits and training programmes that do not involve credits provide students with experience in cross-cultural and linguistic communication, as well as cognitive knowledge and skills were less affected. Studying and living abroad foster international perspectives, interests, and attitudinal changes among students. These short-term study-abroad programmes are also expected to change students' orientation towards long-term study abroad and international careers (Roy et al., 2019).

The COVID-19 outbreak, which prompted the rapid spread of online education as an urgently needed alternative throughout university education in Japan and abroad (Shleicher, 2020), has led universities to rapidly expand their provision of online education and training internationally and actively utilise such courses provided by exchange partners (Shleicher, 2020). According to a study by the International Association of Universities (2020), 60% of learning activities involving physical international student mobility worldwide were estimated to have been replaced by online activities by 2020. Although online international education existed before the pandemic, COVID-19 led to the widespread development of infrastructure for the daily use of online media for university education in general, at least in developed countries, such as Japan, and some emerging countries. This has rapidly expanded the use of online media in international

education and made it available to a wider range of students. The use of online education is not limited to cognitive learning, such as languages and lectures, but it also includes ICL, which encourages interaction between students from different cultural backgrounds, and Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), a teaching method whereby multiple universities collaborate to support students' international collaborative learning online. COIL is expanding to include those education providers that aim to cultivate international attitudes, perspectives, and teamwork. To achieve these goals effectively, it is essential to establish a cross-departmental support system for information and education within universities and conduct faculty development for departments and individual faculty members.

The impact of COVID-19 on the recruitment of international students and Japanese and other universities sending students abroad proved extremely difficult to understand and predict in the short, medium, and long terms because the rates of infection in each country and states' responses, such as vaccination, changed constantly. In the early stages of the global outbreak, Marginson—a leading international expert on higher education research—argued that we should be prepared for a five-year decline in student mobility, factoring in the expected economic fallout (interview by Mitchell, 2020), and that those involved should be prepared for a medium- to long-term impact.

The United States (US), in particular, experienced a significant decline in the number of international students due to the spread of the disease, the social turmoil in the country, and measures taken by the Trump Administration to restrict visas for international students. Australia experienced a rapid decline in the number of international students due to sweeping entry restrictions and the resulting loss of income, and the country sought to rapidly expand its international student market online. In China, which greatly influences the global market for international students, there was a temporary decline in the desire to study abroad and an increased tendency to consider neighbouring countries, including Japan, as study destinations (Mok et al., 2021).

In Japan, the spread of COVID-19 was reported in January 2020 as an incident in China, a neighbouring country. Then, the infection spread to Europe and North America, both of which Japanese students tend to visit for study and personal travel. By February or March, most universities in Japan had already finished their semesters. Although they had already secured new students for the 2020 academic year before the spread of the

infection, measures were taken to cancel, postpone, or scale down graduation and entrance ceremonies. According to a survey by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT), as of 12 May 2020, 86.9% of universities, including junior colleges and colleges of technology, postponed the start of classes for the new semester that were planned to start in April, but 80.4% started classes by 20 May. Of these, 90.0% were online classes, 6.8% were combined face-to-face and online classes, and only 3.1% were face-to-face classes. This situation stood in contrast with the situation in Japan's primary and secondary schools, which reopened 99% of their classes in June 2020. While the Global and Innovation Gateway for All (GIGA) school concept was advocated by the government, the provision of face-to-face classes was strongly encouraged by MEXT for primary and secondary education. Also, during the first state of emergency, from 7 April to 25 May 2020, the government and universities strongly recommended that students stay at home and not move across prefectures due to the high likelihood of transmitting the infection. Student dormitories were subject to severe restrictions, including closure. Because online classes do not require commuting, many students attended classes from their parents' homes or other distant locations, rather than obtaining lodgings near the campus. In addition to the government's emergency grant to all national citizens, the universities provided their own financial support to both domestic and international students because the COVID-19 outbreak decreased opportunities for part-time work and students needed to own computers and access Wi-Fi to attend classes.

The number of international students enrolled on 1 May 2020, announced by MEXT and the Japan Student Services Organisation (JASSO) in March 2021, was released with this comment: 'Due to the effects of the new coronavirus infection, some students were unable to travel to Japan at the scheduled time and were forced to take online classes overseas.' On 1 May 2020, the number of non-regular international students (e.g., Japanese language training, research, and exchange/short-term students) was 13,683 (9700 undergraduate students and 3983 graduate students), representing a decrease of 46.2% from the previous year. However, the number of full-time international students enrolled in bachelor's degree programmes increased by 4.1% to 70,709 because these students were enrolled and began to study online, without actually entering Japan.

IMPACT ON INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION AND INITIAL RESPONSES

International education in Japanese universities was particularly affected by the pandemic. Firstly, international travel for students, which was considered essential for international study and experience, was severely restricted, and even if students could enter the desired country, they had to be quarantined there for two weeks. International education programmes that moved students across borders for less than a month were effectively rendered meaningless by the quarantine period required before and after study. Furthermore, the extent and progress of the pandemic varied greatly by country, by region, and by university. Regarding the acceptance of international students and sending students abroad, even if the infection situation on a university campus was not serious, it could be serious at the destination or departure point for students, educational activities could be impossible due to significant activity restrictions or quarantine requirements, and/or medical care could be inadequate. Undergraduate international students, who tended to receive support from their families, often found that their studies were suspended or postponed, first for safety reasons and then because effective education and training activities could not be guaranteed.

The previously mentioned tense situation had a particularly serious impact on efforts to link the international mobility of students with curricula (i.e., educational programmes that incorporated overseas study and training), which had been increasing in recent years. In the case of students who studied abroad for a period during their bachelor's degree programmes while remaining affiliated with their home universities, exchange programmes usually lasted for one or two semesters at most (about one year). In fact, according to a survey by the Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO), in the 2018 fiscal year, before the outbreak of COVID-19, 66.5% of students sent abroad from Japanese universities stayed less than one month, and 97.6% stayed for less than six months. In the 2019 fiscal year, the overall number of students decreased by 6.8% as compared to the previous year, but the number of students who studied abroad for less than one month also decreased by 6.9%. The percentage of total students who studied abroad remained almost unchanged, at 66.4%. However, the number of students who studied abroad for more than three months, which involved earning credits, decreased significantly, by 9.6%, while the number of students who studied abroad for one month to less

than three months increased by 0.3%, which may indicate that some of the more-than-three-month visits were shortened or terminated halfway due to the unexpected pandemic.

Second, international students were placed in a more difficult learning situation than domestic students (survey conducted by the Association for International Student Education). Initially, around the time of the declaration of the state of emergency, entry restrictions were imposed on people travelling to Japan from various countries, just when students were about to begin their studies in Japan, which also coincided with the time when international students who had temporarily returned to their home countries during the spring vacation should return to Japan. Many of the newly enrolled non-regular international students were accepted for online classes. According to a survey conducted by the Association for International Student Education in July 2020, 41% of responding universities had already decided to stop accepting international students in the 2020 academic year at the end of July. According to a survey conducted by Asahi Shimbun and Kawaijuku in July 2020, 65% of the responding universities dealt with international students who were unable to enter Japan by offering online learning classes, 27% did so by postponing their enrolment, and 13% did so by extending their leaves of absence. The rate of implementation of these measures tended to be higher when large numbers of international students were accepted by a university. The authors conducted interviews with international educators from 2020 to 2021 and found that students were forced to shift their study schedules to early mornings or late nights due to time differences, leading them to abandon their studies. Also, there were cases in which access to the online platforms used by the host universities was restricted.

Third, there were many cases of international students living in Japan whose learning and living infrastructure was damaged by the COVID-19 outbreak. Many regular international students were already living in Japan, including new entrants who had entered Japanese language schools. However, as mentioned earlier, international students who had temporarily returned to their home countries during the spring vacation faced the difficulty of re-entering Japan and visa restrictions. Even if they had already entered and remained in Japan, the international students tended to face difficulties in living because their dormitories were closed to prevent infection. In addition, if they lost their opportunities to work part-time, their livelihoods and economic security would be damaged. The government and many universities distributed emergency financial aid, but the fact that

the criteria for granting aid to international students differed from those for domestic students caused problems. Also, the spread of the disease, especially through the movement of people across national borders, led to widespread discrimination and exclusionary violence against foreigners and ethnic minorities in many countries (Gao & Sai, 2021), and Japan was no exception.

Finally, a question arises regarding whether universities can fulfil their functions as international educational institutions under such circumstances. In the case of undergraduate programmes, especially those in the Japanese language, online communication in general is more stressful and less effective than face-to-face communication. The Japanese language education offered at Japanese universities is generally based on the direct teaching method, whereby Japanese is taught in Japanese; therefore, in beginners' classes, the learners' Japanese vocabulary is limited, and non-verbal communication is further limited online, leading to poor levels of pronunciation and instruction. Online classes may not be exclusively negative, because classes are easier than ever to record and tape. However, online learning omits many cross-cultural experiences, such as extracurricular activities and off-campus interaction with local communities, that are impossible in cyberspace. Students in their home countries studying with international students also lose the opportunity to interact directly with their peers beyond the online world.

Under these circumstances, universities have been attempting to devise various methods of creating international learning environments. To avoid disrupting learning, universities first used online classes as an emergency measure and then resumed face-to-face classes or a combination of online and face-to-face educational activities at the request of the government. International education amidst a halt in physical international travel prompted universities to work on measures to prevent infection and ensure students' safe residence and travel, explore online alternatives, and distribute educational materials both via postal mail and online. When the entry of international students temporarily resumed in the fall of 2020, host universities had to support the students during quarantine and travel from the airports. Universities focused on providing infrastructure, financial support, and other assistance to make learning and teaching activities possible during the pandemic.

It was extremely difficult from the official statistics to reflect the actual situation relating to the international mobility of students overall and at each university because the rates of COVID-19 infection and measures for

dealing with them differed widely across the country and local contexts, such as prefectures and municipalities.

From the universities' perspective, all students should be provided with fair and impartial support for learning and living regardless of nationality and other attributes, and the nationalities of infected people were rarely revealed in university announcements. However, local government announcements disclosed age, gender, occupation, student status, whether the person was a foreign national, and whether the person had travelled abroad or not. In news reports, the route of infection was often described in detail. The travel of students and faculty to foreign countries was also closely scrutinised by the government and society if it was potentially associated with infection.

According to Tohoku University's Survey of International Student Life, conducted in November and December 2020, 91.2% of undergraduate courses taken by international students were online or on demand, 68.2% of students had experienced reduced incomes from the part-time jobs, and the percentage of students' face-to-face interactions with friends on campus had decreased from 67.9% to 14.3%. The aforementioned figures are averages for all international students, regardless of nationality. To understand and support the actual study conditions and lives of individual international students, communication through the consultation and support system for students, including the faculty member in supervision and peer students assigned to each international student, was vital.

Akita International University (AIU) was one of the first universities to declare that it would begin offering 100% online classes in the 2020 academic year. This university, which recruits mostly students from Japan and provides a bachelor's degree programme in English, requires students to study abroad for one year. Also, AIU accepts exchange students from international partner universities and provides extracurricular exchange with their home students in campus-based dormitories. The university proceeded to address the COVID-19 situation by creating opportunities for online dialogues with and between students. These also included the university president. In January 2021, only newly admitted home students were accepted into dormitories and on campus.

Chiba University—a national university offering instruction in a wide range of disciplines—initiated a study-abroad programme for all students but has taken steps to postpone study-abroad opportunities for eligible new students until the COVID-19 situation is resolved and offered free online (virtual) international education programmes.

Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (APU) attempted to meet the emergency needs of international students in various ways. For example, the university arranged to postpone admissions, and volunteer groups composed of university staff, alumni, and members of the local community provided free food to international students facing economic difficulty at and around the campus. Simultaneously, APU maintained the operations of overseas student recruitment centres based on their medium-term strategy to maintain their international student profiles.

POSSIBILITIES FOR ONLINE INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

The development of large-scale online university education in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to new developments that will force a fundamental shift in universities' online education, beyond its initial position as an emergency response. The term *digital transformation* (Stolterman & Fors, 2004), which refers to the creation of new value using digital technology and other means, has become widely used by the Council for Educational Renewal under the Cabinet Office and other organisations. Also, international university consortiums, such as University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (UMAP) and the Association of Pacific Rim Universities (APRU), provided joint platforms for the mutual provision of online courses as the pandemic spread. This led to shifts in the way degrees and educational programmes are offered by individual universities and the electronic authentication of academic records, such as using micro-credentials and badges for the acquisition of skills and expertise in smaller units of study that are not tied to a credit system or degree based on workload (study hours). The possibility of accumulating such credentials and using them for career development has also attracted attention, accelerating a discussion that was ongoing before the COVID-19 pandemic.

The development of international education through the digitisation of university education can be broadly divided into two categories. The first is virtual mobility, whereby students formally take classes offered by overseas universities online while in their home countries or at a distance, studying together with local students and aiming to achieve the same educational effects as activities involving physical movement. This includes the online cross-border delivery of asynchronous (on-demand) or synchronous (real-time) educational content using platforms such as learning management systems (LMSs) and Web conferencing systems. The second

is virtual exchange, or collaborative learning made possible by connecting learners in geographically distant locations via information, communication, and technology (ICT). In other words, the main purpose of virtual exchange is achieving an active exchange and collaboration itself. Virtual exchange is aimed at developing the competencies needed in a global environment and often incorporates not only cultural exchanges but also global citizenship and language learning (Duffy et al., 2020; Reiffenrath et al., 2020).

As an extension of virtual mobility, transnational education, whereby universities provide educational services across national borders, has been developed. The 1980s witnessed a fully fledged movement in which universities developed education programmes across national borders through overseas campuses and offshore programmes, and when the Asian economic crisis of 1997 caused a temporary cooling of the study-abroad market due to a lack of private tuition fees from Asia, universities in the United Kingdom and Australia accelerated the international development of overseas campuses and offshore programmes. Universities and higher education professionals in English-speaking countries, in particular, promoted market-oriented development in the form of the trading of services, which led to international efforts to achieve quality assurance for education across national borders when the interests of service exporters (providers) and overseas programme recipients collided (Healey, 2021).

The recent pandemic, which has severely restricted the movement of students around the world, has once again drawn attention to transnational education, but this time, unlike in the past, the possibility of developing transnational education online for a global market while remaining in the home country has been greatly expanded by technology. Before the pandemic, Arizona State University had planned to develop offshore programmes on the Hiroshima University campus, but in response to the pandemic, the university is now attempting to provide education that heavily relies on online resources replacing the real mobility of staff and students. Also, Cyber University Japan, which provides online education, is collaborating with universities in Korea and English-speaking countries to increase subject offerings by sharing educational content. The technology needed to overcome language barriers, for example, from Korean to Japanese, has also become a practical reality.

This movement to transmit and provide educational content to the world through digital media is being joined by many universities. These universities are implementing MOOCs, which are mainly open access

programmes that do not require fees from learners. In Japan, the University of Tokyo, Kyoto University, and other large universities have begun to participate in international platforms such as Coursera, edX, FutureLearn, and Japan Massive Open Online Education Promotion Council (JMOOC)—a consortium of Japanese universities that mainly offer educational content in Japanese—and some of the educational content of the Open University of Japan has also begun to be made available on the Internet. Additionally, the University of Tsukuba and other universities launched the Japan Virtual Campus in 2022 as an online joint effort to disseminate international educational content from Japan with support from MEXT. However, except for Japanese language education, Japanese university-developed educational programmes and content are not currently equipped to compete on a level playing field with overseas universities and educational providers, which mainly provide education in English in the global cyberspace market. Rather, a question arises regarding how Japanese universities and society will accept (or collaborate with) the provision of such global educational content, as well as how Japanese university education will be protected.

Even if the virtual space, in which physical distance has no meaning, were to gain a prominent place in the teaching and learning activities of universities, as long as the society underpinning university education continues to be diverse and value it, the role of university education, especially undergraduate education, in connecting the national and local contexts with the global and regional contexts will continue to be prominent. In this section, we will focus on ICL programmes, which provide opportunities for international and domestic students to study together, and discuss two examples of efforts to make such programmes available online. The first case (Kansai University's COIL initiative) is a practical method of international collaborative learning conducted online using ICT tools, which began to be developed by a global consortium before the COVID-19 pandemic. The second case study (Tohoku University's Be Global project) is a cross-cultural collaborative education initiative, called Intercultural Collaborative Learning (ICL), which has been promoted by the university to realise international university education by enabling international and domestic students to study together in seminar-style classes. This is an attempt to develop online education while international student mobility remains limited.

***Case 1: Introduction and Promotion of COIL
at Kansai University***

COIL is a method of active collaborative learning whereby students belonging to universities in different countries work together virtually on projects in various fields using ICT tools. In Japan, Kansai University became the first university in the country to officially join the global network hosted by the State University of New York (SUNY) in 2014, and it formed the KU (Kansai University)-COIL support team in 2015. The second half of 2014 was also the period during which the university drew up a new internationalisation strategy for 2014–2023. During this process, the promotion of COIL practices was positioned as the core of international education, and through the Institute for Innovative Global Education (IIGE), which was established in 2018, active exchanges with overseas universities have since been conducted at the whole-university level since February 2021. The IIGE has formed an international partner network of 67 universities in 20 countries.

COIL is a typical example of a curriculum designed to incorporate project-based learning (PBL) and other forms of collaborative learning into the existing syllabus in collaboration with overseas universities. In Japan, in 2018, due to support for the formation of inter-university exchanges with the US and other countries from the Project for Strengthening Global Competitiveness of Universities, 13 universities were selected to promote COIL-type education as described above, and the JPN (Japan)-COIL Council was established with other universities in Japan to provide a wider range of COIL activities. Kansai University is the organiser of the Council and plays a role in promoting exchanges and building platforms for collaborative education provision among these universities.

The initial motivation for introducing COIL at Kansai University was to promote blended learning, combining face-to-face and online learning, but the concept has since expanded to include the cultivation of transversal competencies and global employability, and it has been positioned as a programme for promoting the international mobility of students. Furthermore, in response to changes in the COVID-19 situation in 2020 and beyond, Kansai University's COIL initiative was identified as a core component of MEXT's Plan for Enhancing Education at Universities and Colleges of Technology Using Digital Technology (starting in 2021) and

incorporated into the Global Smart Campus Digital Transformation concept.

Because COIL is a form of project-based cooperative learning conducted in collaboration with overseas universities, the language used for teaching is generally English. Most of the COIL courses offered at Kansai University are modules of cross-departmental courses, and the courses offered in English (global courses) are specifically offered as COIL courses. In specialised subjects as well, COIL practices are being expanded to achieve learning goals more effectively, with the cooperation of the instructors in charge of seminar and internship subjects, while also taking into consideration students' levels of motivation and learning achievement.

Like many universities in Japan, Kansai University has suspended all study abroad programmes since the 2020 spring break. With all but three exchange students who had already entered the country prior to the start of the entry restrictions being able to enter the country, the semester began in April 2020 with fully online university-wide courses. Under these circumstances, Kansai University decided to provide alternative study-abroad opportunities online. Regarding outbound study-abroad programmes, in addition to language training programmes, Kansai University offered a short-term programme in which specialised subjects were taught jointly online with Dong Wu University in Taiwan. For incoming students, the Japanese language training programme was also offered online and gradually switched to a highly flexible class format, whereby both face-to-face and online participants could be taught simultaneously. Although the number of non-regular international students accepted into the programme has decreased, 82 students from six overseas countries were still studying in this programme in February 2021. For international students in regular programmes, Kansai University continues to provide support, such as online internship programmes, for employment and career education, which has been one of its strengths.

Regarding COIL practices, in addition to students taking COIL courses without planning to study abroad, students who originally wanted to study abroad and were preparing to do so are now taking COIL courses under pandemic conditions, and student needs have become more diverse. Also, the COIL Plus Programme, which started in 2019 and offers COIL before and after study-abroad programmes, had to be reconfigured as a COIL programme that incorporated the learning planned for the Plus programme into the COIL subject design because the local learning experience was cancelled.

As part of its efforts to cope with the emergency, Kansai University partnered with University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (UMAP) to organise a COIL-type learning programme to encourage multinational and multi-group participants to consider Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the era of crisis. The programme consisted of a combination of lectures and group work, followed by a final presentation. Because the programme was held at a time when university campuses were being closed worldwide, 140 people from 13 countries and regions participated. In another initiative, Kansai University opened these online courses to overseas partner universities and issued certificates of completion. This was done because international and domestic students could not learn together, because they were not on campus.

Case 2: Tohoku University's Be Global Project

According to Suematsu (2018), Intercultural Collaborative Learning (ICL) is a learning activity whereby domestic and international students gather in a classroom or other learning space to explore and discuss a specific issue. It is defined as a learning experience whereby learners from different languages and cultures create new values through metacognitive activities that allow them to reflect on themselves while deepening their understanding of others through meaningful interaction. Based on the concept of 'internationalisation at home', Tohoku University has been developing this ICL programme in not only regular classes but also extra-curricular activities.

ICL activities at Tohoku University began around 2005 with courses such as Japanese Studies, which was developed as the core of international education, and in 2009, special Japanese language education courses that had been offered to international students were incorporated into joint university-wide education courses. Consequently, 253 students were able to take ten courses. The students in ICL programmes received high marks in various student evaluations. The information about this success was included when Tohoku University applied for and was awarded the governmental projects for internationalisation such as Global 30 which began in 2009, and the Global Human Resource Development Support Project, which began in 2012. In the 2013 Tohoku University Global Initiative Plan, which was announced when the university applied for the Project to Support the Development of Top Global Universities, the goal of expanding ICL programmes was set as part of the promotion of campus

internationalisation as an educational initiative for the development of global leaders. Due to these efforts, the number of courses including programmes tripled in the first six years of the 2010s. Increased recognition of the value of international education within the university through faculty development programmes and educational awards led to a new group of international education courses being established in 2019. Also, in 2020, the School of Engineering and Graduate School of Engineering established new international education programmes. Since 2020, the number of international education courses has increased to 70, with a total of 1147 students (597 domestic and 550 international).

ICL activities are not possible in face-to-face classes unless students with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds study together in classrooms. In this respect, Tohoku University has traditionally enjoyed a richly diverse cultural and linguistic student body, and the number of international students has been steadily increasing since the 1990s, albeit in waves, reaching 2162 students (mainly graduate students), or about 12% of the total student body, in 2019. The number of study-abroad students also reached 837 in 2018, showing a well-balanced situation in terms of bi-directional student movement from a national perspective. However, there were some issues in terms of the actual exchanges of students. According to a survey on international student life conducted by Tohoku University in 2016, about 70% of international students at the university responded that they had four or fewer close Japanese friends, and 80.3% said they would like to interact more often with Japanese students. In the case of exchange students, this percentage reached 92.4%. It can be said that ICL programmes facilitate academic exchanges as a way of dealing with these issues.

In February and March 2020, when the global spread of COVID-19 became serious, Tohoku University was in the process of sending students abroad for short-term study and accepting new international students, and both these student movements had to be abruptly cancelled or suspended. Although the number of regular international students in the 2020 academic year increased gradually, the number of exchange students, who are the main group participating in ICL activities, decreased by half due to the almost complete suspension of new student admissions. Particularly, in the second semester of 2020, the approximately 200 expected exchange students, 150 expected research students, 25 expected international bachelor course students, and other expected graduate students were unable to come to Japan. Therefore, Tohoku University accepted international

students online and made it possible for these online students to earn credits by granting them academic registrations. Furthermore, Tohoku University has begun to participate in the Virtual Student Exchange (VSE) programme started by APRU and begun to offer courses. In April 2020, the Be Global project was launched as a university-wide project to internationalise the campus by incorporating the online environment. The Be Global project consists of support for studying ‘abroad’ in an online environment; digital global education programmes; a support system for international students, including virtual students; and an ICL format that allows domestic and international students to study together. Under this new structure, the university implement online ICL by building cooperative relationships with faculty members in overseas universities, mainly partner universities, who are interested in developing a virtual ICL environment; forming an ICL student support team to promote ICL, which has become more complex with the introduction of such online situations; and establishing an ICL website. Also, the university is working to raise awareness and promote understanding of a new form of ICL education by disseminating information about the concept and practice of ICL education inside and outside the university through the establishment of an ICL education website.

TOWARDS INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION IN THE NEW REALITY

Hudzik (2020), who proposed the concept of the comprehensive internationalisation of higher education, identified four directions for the internationalisation of higher education in the post-COVID-19 era: (1) pressure for greener and less costly internationalisation; (2) more flexible and integrated national and transnational programmes; (3) value assessment based on the results of international activities; and (4) the mixed use of technology for online and hybrid models of course and degree completion.

Considering the expected shift of undergraduate education from a national or local perspective to a global or regional perspective, it is important to note that most undergraduate education in Japan is provided through short-term overseas visits, study and training programmes, semester-based exchange programmes, or engagement with international students in physical classroom spaces. In terms of the functions expected of bachelor’s degree programmes, the near-disappearance of opportunities for international and cross-cultural experiences and learning was a great

loss. When the pandemic is over and international mobility again becomes possible, at least some of these opportunities will surely be restored.

However, the current expansion of online learning opportunities has been extremely rapid, and many of the initial problems have been overcome by accumulated experience and improved technology, allowing more advanced and complex activities to be conducted in cyberspace. In particular, the improved integration of ICT tools, such as those for recording and logging, has greatly expanded the possibilities of using learning management systems (LMSs), as mentioned earlier. This will greatly reduce the burden of language and cultural differences, which have been major aspects of international learning but also barriers to communication, and thus expand course access to a wider range of students. The fact that international communication and experience in virtual spaces have expanded in a way that eliminated the barriers of physical distance is likely to indicate an irreversible trend that will become common in university education in Japan and around the world.

An era in which people of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds can study together daily across national borders, regardless of country or region, and freely choose their modes of study is just around the corner. 'Going abroad' is no longer a prerequisite for international education, and online options for learning in this regard will become more important. From a student's perspective, this will provide a wide range of options for those who have been discouraged from studying abroad for various reasons, such as cost, or limited to participating in short-term programmes. However, to make this kind of freestyle, individualised learning possible, it is necessary for institutions in Japan and abroad to work closely together to guarantee the quality of learning, regardless of where or how it is accomplished; for example, there is an urgent need for a joint system of credit transfer that is suitable for the 'new normal' form of education. From the perspective of comprehensive internationalisation, which requires the input of all parties involved in teaching and learning at universities, including educators and university management, the outstanding question regarding the internationalisation of universities is whether they can quickly change their mindsets and behaviour to suit this new environment. Whether Japan can quickly adapt to this new environment will also determine whether it will be able to compete with the rest of the world. In other words, Japanese universities, based on their rather mature academic culture, are not necessarily the frontrunners in responding to such a drastic transformation.

The fact that university education is influenced by both the intrinsic values of universities and the extrinsic values of external parties, such as the government and industry, and that there can be both global convergence and differentiation in the international spread of university education relates to universal valuation and orientation, which will remain essentially unchanged during the current pandemic and after its resolution.

One possibility is that the expansion of the virtual space will break down the barriers of physical distance, leading to fundamental changes in universities' existence as part of higher education systems under the aegis of nation-states, which are fundamentally based on physical territory but may ultimately be transcended. On the one hand, there is a good chance that the current phenomenon of universities, government, and industry being grouped together based on the physical space they share may change. Especially regarding funding and resourcing, the roles of multinational and global industry will increase, while states may lose their power to control universities through resource allocation and regulation. On the other hand, it is common for countries and universities to block or restrict the use of various online media, including video distribution and platforms for interactive and real-time communication, and this has become a major issue in educational practice, especially in the field of ICL. Under these circumstances, Japanese universities, the government, and industries that tend to be isolated because of their heavy reliance of national language (Japanese) are the most territorially bounded communities in the world.

What is even more important is the fact that Kansai University's use of COIL and Tohoku University's use of online learning for ICL activities have converged into similar, overlapping activities, although their educational practices initially had different starting points. When international education is freed from the constraints of physical space, the essential differences between ICL activities and, for example, cross-cultural activities and co-curricular activities in the local community may disappear. In today's university education, communication skills and cross-cultural understanding are recognised as universal educational issues that cut across global, regional, national, and local boundaries. The question of how to incorporate these factors into curriculum design will ultimately emerge as an important issue.

As a result of the pandemic, the use of digital platforms in conducting many of the activities of daily life has rapidly become commonplace, especially in developed countries, including Japan. After 2025, when the

number of millennials (those who came of age in the 2000s) and the subsequent generations combined will begin to exceed half the working population, we must naturally accept a society in which online-offline and real-virtual hybrids will become the new normal. In this next phase, the acquisition of digital literacy will become the basis of all living conditions and an urgent issue regarding the second and third digital gaps deriving from social disparities.

It is unrealistic to expect that all the international experiences that require physical mobility will be replaced by virtual mobility and exchange. The International Education Leadership Summit, organised by the Institute of International Education (IIE) in October 2021, issued the common statement stressing the value of international academic exchange and mobility for the world's recovery from the economic and geopolitical disruption caused by the coronavirus pandemic (IIE, 2021). The value of 'real' in-person international exchange may even increase as a strategy for achieving distinction among students and families based on financial affordability, and this may lead to a critical divide among students. At the same time, the socio-economic and cultural divide already exists in every local community, and this defused and digitalised 'international' and intercultural learning will ultimately fair much as co-learning has on both sides of this divide. The development of international education as multicultural conviviality—in other words, sharing and committing to issues such as poverty and conflict in the real world with others from different backgrounds—is now required in university education in Japan and around the world.

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