

Internationalization of the curriculum in Japanese higher education: Strategies, pedagogies and practices in ‘international’ English-medium instruction classrooms

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Introduction

Internationalization of university curricula has received growing attention among scholars and policymakers who recognize the importance of providing international and intercultural opportunities to *all* students, not only those able to partake in education abroad. Much of the research in this area has been done in Anglosphere and European contexts (Leask 2017; Beelen and Jones 2015; Haigh 2002), with less scholarly attention given elsewhere. The present study focuses on Japan, analyzing the approaches taken to internationalize the curriculum in English-medium instruction (EMI) programs in Japanese universities. We seek to understand the experiences of educators and students involved in teaching and learning in these internationalized classroom contexts, with a view to contribute novel insights that can inform future policy and practice at internationalizing universities. The research questions guiding this mixed methods project are:

1. What does internationalization of curriculum mean for educators in the Japanese university context?

2. How do faculty members incorporate intercultural/global dimensions into curriculum design in their EMI programs?
3. What factors do educators and students perceive to enable or block the internationalization of the curriculum in these programs?

Literature Review

Japan's efforts to internationalize its higher education system since the early 1980s – mainly through recruiting international students, reforming administrative infrastructure, and promoting programs to nurture the global competencies of domestic students – have been widely documented in the literature (see Ota, 2018; Yonezawa & Yonezawa, 2016, for useful summaries). One of the approaches taken by many universities to accommodate the influx of international students and foster domestic 'global talent' has been to increase the number of EMI programs (Rose and McKinley 2017; Morizumi 2015). These EMI programs tend to attract students from diverse backgrounds, including domestic students who want to improve their English language skills, Japanese students who have returned from living abroad, and international students from around the world.

However, simply adding diversity into university campuses and changing the language of instruction to the *lingua franca* of English does not automatically entail comprehensive internationalization is occurring. In order to develop students' intercultural awareness and achieve the government's goal of producing 'global human resources' (Yonezawa 2014), concerted efforts must be made to incorporate and support this international diversity and adapt the curricula for the benefit of all learners. Indeed, while Japan's many internationalization initiatives have led to increased numbers of non-native students and faculty on Japanese campuses, an overemphasis on

recruitment and quantitative measures of ‘success’ has been criticized for neglecting the effective *integration* of international actors and facilitating meaningful qualitative reforms of Japanese higher education (Brotherhood, Hammond, and Kim 2019; Poole 2016; Ota 2018).

For a comprehensive, integrative internationalization of higher education, as Leask (2009, p. 209) puts it, the *curriculum* needs to be internationalized: that is, a strategy to ‘incorporate international, intercultural, and/or global dimensions into the content of the curriculum as well as the learning outcomes, assessment tasks, teaching methods, and support services of a program of study’, is needed. The internationalization of curriculum has never been central to higher education policy discussions in Japan (Ota 2011), but now that many scholars realize the potential of EMI programs to yield new teaching methods (for example Kojima, 2019; Murata, Iino, & Konakahara, 2017), the topic has gained fresh importance and value. In the Japanese university context, using EMI is acknowledged as a step towards the internationalization of curriculum, but it is not considered sufficient to achieve intended intercultural outcomes (Ikeda 2016).

Extant research on EMI in Japan has tended to be limited to small-scale institutional case studies (Iyobe, Brown, and Coulson 2011; Ikeda 2016), and focused on language usage and the linguistic capabilities of faculty members and students (Murata, Iino, and Konakahara 2017; Morizumi 2015). However, there is currently a gap in research that focuses on the different aspects of internationalization of curriculum beyond language, such as pedagogy, curricular content, and intercultural learning outcomes. There is also a need for research that investigates these programs on a larger scale that is more representative of Japanese higher education as a whole.

Methodology

To address these gaps, our study aims to understand the ways in which international and global elements are incorporated into the curriculum design in EMI programs at a range of internationalizing universities in Japan. We plan to conduct a mixed methods study that will seek to understand the experiences and challenges faced by educators and students involved in EMI programs at 20 Japanese universities.

Institutions will be selected based on considerations of access, but we will aim to include a representative sample of national, public and private institutions and a range of academic disciplines and programs in our study.

To address the research questions, we will employ parallel mixed data analysis (Teddlie and Tashakkori 2009). First, we will conduct document analysis, using program and policy documents related to the administration, curriculum, diploma and course syllabi of the case EMI programs to acquire basic information on program objectives and curriculum design. A survey will be conducted for the faculty members and students with a questionnaire adapted from Leask's '*Internationalization of the curriculum: blockers and enablers questionnaire*' (Leask 2015). The quantitative data collected from the case EMI programs from 20 universities will be statistically compared to identify the factors affecting the internationalization of curriculum. Follow up semi-structured interviews with participants will be conducted and analyzed thematically to gain a more nuanced qualitative understanding of the experiences of actors in internationalized classrooms.

The findings from these quantitative and qualitative approaches will be synthesized with the aim of gaining a robust understanding of the current situation and challenges of the internationalization of the curriculum in the Japanese university context. It is our hope that this research will contribute

new and valuable insights to the field of comparative higher education and also have relevance for policymakers and educators at Japanese universities.

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