Article

Counseling Services for International Students at Japanese Universities

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ABSTRACT: *This study aimed to examine the current conditions of counseling services for international students at Japanese universities and identify challenges in improving these services. A survey was conducted among counseling centers at universities with at least 250 international students, with 63 institutions participating. Of those, approximately 30% reported changes to their support framework for international students in the past decade, and approximately half indicated that multilingual counseling services were available. In addition, the study examined the perceived challenges and measures taken in providing culturally competent services for international students. Based on these findings, this study has implications for practitioners and university leaders regarding the internationalization of student support services.*

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INTRODUCTION

In this globalized world, student demographics are rapidly changing, especially as more students cross borders to study. Researchers and practitioners have noted the unique challenges faced by international students due to cultural and linguistic barriers, vulnerable visa status, and a lack of family-based support, making

university support services essential for their well-being and academic success (Auschner & Jiang, 2025; Ivanova et al., 2025; Marginson et al., 2010; Nyunt & Lee, 2023; Onabule & Boes, 2013; Onishi, 2016; Veerasam & Raby, 2023). However, despite considerable attention given to the internationalization of higher education institutions (HEIs), few studies have explored the internationalization of student support services. Recruiting international students comes with a responsibility to provide them with quality experience; therefore, universities must ensure that their recruitment policies match the campus community's preparation for engaging with this diverse population (Arthur, 2017; Nyunt & Lee, 2023; Onishi, 2016).

Internationalization of Japanese HEIs

The Japanese government's policy for the internationalization of HEIs has focused on various numerical indicators, including the number of international students. Notably, compared with HEIs in other countries, where revenue generation is a key driver of international student recruitment, Japanese HEIs do not commonly employ differential tuition fees for international students. Rather, the primary rationale behind Japanese universities' recruitment of international students has been to support the development of human resources in developing countries and strengthen international relationships. In 1983, the government announced the 100,000 International Students Plan to attract 100,000 international students to Japan. After this target was achieved in 2003, the 300,000 International Students Plan (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology [MEXT], 2008) was launched in 2008, which aimed to further increase this number to 300,000 by 2020. To support this objective, several funding projects have been launched, such as the Global 30 (MEXT, n.d.-a) and the Top Global Universities Initiative (MEXT, n.d.-b), with the figure reaching 312,214 in 2019 (Japan Student Services Organization [JASSO], n.d.). Since 2011, due to revisions to Japan's immigration law, the total number of international students has included those enrolled at Japanese-language institutions. The number of international students at HEIs alone increased by approximately 1.8 times, from 123,829 in 2008 to 228,403 in 2019. However, during this period, the rationale behind recruiting international students shifted rapidly from supporting international students to enhancing the global competitiveness of Japanese society. Accordingly, universities' internationalization policies have increasingly focused on strengthening domestic students' global competence by providing opportunities to interact with international students from different countries. Moreover, universities have sought to recruit diverse student bodies by improving admission procedures, establishing new programs, and accepting short-term exchange students from partner universities. The provision of full-degree English-taught programs (ETPs) has further enabled students to study at Japanese universities regardless of their Japanese language skills. While only 5 and 57 universities offered full-degree ETPs at the undergraduate and graduate levels, respectively, in 2006, by 2022, these numbers had increased to 45 and 144, respectively (MEXT, n.d.-c.). These

strategies have increased student diversity in terms of country of origin, Japanese language proficiency, motivations and expectations for studying in Japan.

International Student Support Framework at Japanese Universities

Under the 100,000 International Students Plan, international student centers were established at major national universities to provide Japanese-language education and support to help students adjust to the new academic environment and daily life in Japan (Onishi, 2016; Yokota & Shiratsuchi, 2004). Some private universities have also established similar offices to oversee international student support. In a survey by Inoue and Ito (1998), 7 of 111 private universities (6.3%) and 24 of 83 national universities (28.9%) reported having an international student center or a relevant office to support international students. As there are no clear standards or guidelines regarding the functions of these centers or the professional requirements of their personnel, there have been discussions regarding the roles and backgrounds of personnel tasked to support international students (Onishi, 2016; Yokota & Shiratsuchi, 2004).

Takahashi (2012) discussed possible directions for improving the support delivery framework for international students, concluding that integrating international student support into standard support systems would not be appropriate or practical in the Japanese context, where academic activities are conducted in Japanese and English, whereas daily life interactions are almost entirely in Japanese. Meanwhile, Onishi (2012) investigated the provision of professional, on-campus counseling services for international students by a survey of counseling centers of universities with at least 250 international students. In this survey, provisions of support services for international students were categorized into three types: 1) integrated (i.e., the counseling center provides support for international and domestic students), 2) collaborative (i.e., the counseling center provides psychological support in collaboration with international student offices), and 3) specialized (i.e., international student offices oversee international student support and provide comprehensive support, including professional counseling services). Among the 53 universities that responded to the survey, 8 (15.1%), 32 (60.4%), and 13 (24.5%) universities claimed to have integrated, collaborative, and specialized-type support delivery frameworks, respectively. Notably, 47.1% of national universities and 13.9% of private universities selected the specialized-type framework, which indicated that national universities tended to have separate support systems for international students from their general student support systems. Additionally, 26.5% of the universities provided multilingual support at the counseling centers; another 24.5% provided this support at offices other than counseling centers or by using translators, whereas 49.1% provided counseling services only in Japanese.

Discussions of services for international students in Japanese HEIs have primarily remained in the field of international student education, with little engagement from counseling centers. According to a national survey conducted in 2023 (JASSO, 2025), over 90% of universities in Japan provide support services to address their students' psychological and mental health concerns.

However, the structure of counseling services differed greatly across HEIs. Furthermore, the survey did not address how such services are provided for international students. While the Japan Association for Student Counseling (JASC) has published guidelines for establishing student counseling facilities, these standards are not mandatory. Moreover, the most recent version of the guidelines (JASC,2025) highlights the growing awareness that considering students as a homogeneous group is inappropriate, given the diversity of the student body. However, the guidelines do not detail how university counseling centers should address the needs of such diverse groups of students. Given that the international student population in Japan is growing in number and diverse, universities need to identify effective and feasible ways to adapt on-campus infrastructure and student support frameworks for this population.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Targeted Support for International Students

Studies on culturally underrepresented groups have revealed that ethnic-specific or culturally matched services increase service utilization among these populations (Griner & Smith, 2006; Lau & Zane, 2000; Quimby& Agonafer, 2022). Previous research on international student support has demonstrated the advantages of targeted and tailored services for international students (Auschner & Jiang, 2025; Beri et al., 2025; Koo & Nyunt, 2020; Mori, 2000; Nyunt & Lee, 2023; Onishi, 2016). For example, Auschner and Jiang (2025) examined the experiences of Chinese students at German universities, reporting that they faced difficulties in approaching student services and programs despite acquiring the required host language level, therefore concluding that differences in support structure make them less inclined to utilize university support. In addition, An et al. (2021) found that targeted services were preferred by international students in Japan.

International student affairs/support offices are known to play significant roles in providing support for international students; however, the specific functions of these offices and the responsibilities of their staff remain understudied (García et al., 2021). Furthermore, the structures and functions of these offices differ across countries and have evolved based on institutional structure, culture, international student demographics, and institution- and government-level internationalization policies (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education [CAS], 2023; Onishi, 2016). The CAS (2023) published standards and guidelines for universities in the United States on international student programs and services, describing in detail the functions of the office and the standards for staff who work with international students and scholars. The College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR) (n.d.) describes the roles of international student affairs professionals as follows: 1) to build support services that foster the education and development of international students and scholars; 2) to provide advice,

counseling, and advocacy regarding immigration, cross-cultural, and personal matters; and 3) to support an environment conducive to international education and intercultural awareness via educational, social, and cross-cultural programs. Therefore, the position covers various support activities requiring highly specialized skills.

Australia and New Zealand have established clear national-level frameworks and standards to support international students. In Australia, the Education Services for Overseas Students Framework (ESOS Framework) governs the registration and regulation of institutions offering education to international students (Department of Education, n.d.). Meanwhile, New Zealand established the Education (Pastoral Care of Tertiary and International Learners) Code of Practice 2021 (New Zealand Qualifications Authority [NZQA], 2021), which serves as a mandatory guideline to follow for educational providers to meet the distinct wellbeing and safety needs of international students. Within these frameworks, universities in Australia and New Zealand are obligated to provide services and information across several domains. For example, international students must attend well-designed orientation programs and receive relevant information and advice to support learning, well-being, and safety. Unfortunately, no similar frameworks or guidelines exist for Japanese HEIs.

Culturally Sensitive Counseling Services for International Students

Although developing tailored and targeted services represents an important direction for strengthening support for international students, it is also considered necessary that student affairs offices and traditional counseling centers serve the international student population appropriately (Koo & Nyunt, 2020; Onishi, 2016; Roberts & Ammigan, 2024; Veerasamy & Raby, 2024; Yao & George Mwangi, 2017). The multicultural competence of counseling professionals has been extensively discussed in the United States and other countries, where addressing the needs of culturally diverse populations is considered a fundamental competence. However, even in these countries, the specific skills required to address the needs of international students have not received sufficient attention (Arthur, 2004; Koo & Nyunt, 2020; Onabule & Boes, 2013). In Japan, there is no formal curriculum for training counselors to work with cultural and linguistic minorities, including international students. Furthermore, prior experiences and qualifications that enable culturally sensitive support remain understudied (Onishi, 2020). These differences in counseling professionals' training curricula may affect counselors' competency in addressing the needs of students with diverse backgrounds.

Research Questions

Understanding the characteristics of an international student support framework in Japanese HEIs and how institutions and practitioners evaluate it is crucial to facilitating the meaningful discussions needed to improve the support

they provide. Accordingly, this study sought to address the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1: What is the overall condition of the support delivery framework for international students and the provision of multilingual counseling services?

RQ2: What are the counseling centers' responses, perceived challenges and measures to improve their services to meet the needs of international students?

METHOD

Research Design

This study used a survey-based design. The survey was designed to clarify the overall condition of counseling services for international students at Japanese universities. The survey comprised four primary components: (1) the characteristics of the participating universities; (2) the current condition of the service delivery framework and multilingual counseling services for international students; (3) evaluations of current conditions, including universities' initiatives for developing services for international students and the challenges faced; and (4) counselor recruitment policies and measures for improving counseling services for international students. Some of the items regarding the support delivery framework were drawn from the survey conducted by Onishi (2012) to examine changes in the support framework over a decade. In addition to Onishi's (2012) categorization of support delivery frameworks as integrative, collaborative, or specialized, this survey included a unit-type category, referring to the establishment of a special unit for international students or the assignment of a special counselor responsible for supporting international students at the counseling center.

Participants

In 2019, Japan had a total of 786 universities (MEXT, 2019), including 86 national universities, 93 public universities run by local governments, and 607 private universities. This survey targeted universities with at least 250 international students as of May 1, 2019 (JASSO, n.d.); this criterion was satisfied by 138 universities, including 44 national universities, 4 public universities, and 90 private universities. As few public universities met these criteria, local public universities were analyzed along with national universities, collectively referred to as "national public universities" in the following sections.

Data Collection Procedures

After being approved by the institutional review board of the author's university (Ethics approval number: 23--347), the survey was sent via post to the offices responsible for student counseling (i.e., counseling centers) at the selected

universities from December 2023--January 2024. Because counseling center structures vary across HEIs, the survey did not specify who should complete the questionnaire; instead, it asked each counseling center to designate the most appropriate person. The survey could be completed either physically and returned by mail or online via a QR code. To ensure the respondents' anonymity, no personal identifiable information or university names were collected. A total of 63 university counseling centers responded to the survey, yielding an overall response rate of 45.7%. The response rate was higher for national public universities (58.3%) than for private universities (38.9%).

Data Analysis Techniques

The survey data were analyzed both descriptively and inferentially by using SPSS version 30. To identify the current conditions of counseling services for international students and explore differences based on HEI characteristics, such as the number of international students enrolled at the university (250–299, 300–499, 500–999, or at least 1,000) and the type of institution (i.e., national public vs. private), a chi-square test of independence or Fisher's exact test was performed. The chi-square test was used to determine whether any statistically meaningful associations existed between categorical variables. As the chi-square test is unsuitable for small datasets, Fisher's exact test was performed when cells had fewer than five observations. For example, when the results indicated no significant associations between the number of students enrolled and changes to the service delivery framework, the characteristics of the service framework were displayed as independent of the number of international students.

In addition, the university initiatives and the perceptions of challenges and measures toward developing counseling services for international students were also analyzed, and the group differences based on the effects of enrollment size, institution type, and the current conditions of the support delivery framework for international students were explored via one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) or t tests. Furthermore, post hoc tests were conducted via Tukey's HSD test.

RESULTS

Types of Service Delivery Framework for International Students

Table 1 illustrates the universities' characteristics, such as the type of institution, type of support delivery framework, and changes in framework according to the number of enrolled international students.

The respondents selected the type of support delivery framework for international students: integrative, unit, collaborative, specialized, and other types. Universities that selected "other types" ($n = 6$) were asked to provide a detailed description of their service delivery framework, and after examining these descriptions, these universities were reclassified as integrative ($n = 3$), unit, collaborative, or specialized ($n = 1$ each). In summary, the integrative-type

framework was the most common ($n = 37$, 58.7%), followed by collaborative ($n = 14$, 22.2%), unit ($n = 7$, 11.1%), and specialized-type ($n = 5$, 7.9%) frameworks. The respondents selected if any changes had occurred in the counseling service delivery framework for international students during the past 10 years and then described the type of changes. After the descriptions of the 3 universities that selected "other changes" were analyzed, one was reclassified as a change within the counseling center, and the other two were reclassified as no changes. As a result, 45 (71.4%) universities responded that there was no change, whereas others selected changes within the counseling center ($n = 11$, 17.5%) and changes by reorganizing the offices ($n = 7$, 11.1%).

Table 1: Characteristics of Universities According to the Number of Enrolled International Students

Number of Students	250–299	300–499	500–999	at least 1,000	do not know	Total
	n (%)	*n* (%)	*n* (%)	*n* (%)	*n* (%)	*n* (%)
Type of institution						
national public	7(38.9)	5(41.7)	5(38.5)	9(56.3)	2(50.0)	28(44.4)
Private	11(61.1)	7(58.3)	8(61.5)	7(43.8)	2(50.0)	35(55.6)
Type of support delivery framework for international students						
integrative	13(72.2)	7(58.3)	7(53.8)	6(37.5)	4(100.0)	37(58.7)
Unit	1(5.6)	3(25.0)	0(0.0)	3(18.8)	0(0.0)	7(11.1)
collaborative	4(22.2)	2(16.7)	4(30.8)	4(25.0)	0(0.0)	14(22.2)
specialized	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	2(15.4)	3(18.8)	0(0.0)	5(7.9)
Changes in the service delivery framework for international students over the previous 10 years						
No	16(88.9)	8(66.7)	12(92.3)	5(31.3)	4(100.0)	45(71.4)
Yes	2(11.1)	4(33.3)	1(7.7)	11(68.8)	0(0.0)	18(28.6)

Note. N= 63, number of enrolled international students: 250–299 (*n*=18), 300–499 (*n*=12), 500–999 (*n*=13), at least 1,000 (*n*=16), do not know (*n*=4)

Specifically, the changes within the counseling center included increasing the number of bilingual counselors, actively recruiting counselors who can provide counseling in foreign languages, and increasing the number of workdays for counselors who serve international students. Moreover, the reorganization of the offices included reassigning counselors for international students from the international student office to the counseling center and integrating the counseling function of the international student office into the counseling center. The respondents described that these changes were fostered by difficulties faced by counseling centers in providing services for students with limited Japanese or

English language skills and increasing demand for counseling services from international students.

A chi-square test was performed to investigate the relationship between enrollment size (excluding 4 universities with missing data regarding the number of enrolled international students) and institution type, and the results did not reveal a significant relationship ($\chi^2(3, 59) = 1.353$, $p = .717$). Fisher's exact test was also performed, and the results revealed no significant relationship between the number of enrolled international students and the type of service delivery framework ($p = .204$); however, a significant relationship was observed between the number of enrolled students and changes in the framework ($p < .001$). Among universities with at least 1,000 international students, 68.8% reported some form of change in the support delivery framework. In addition, 28.6% of national public universities and 28.6% of private universities reported some form of change, with the type of institution having no significant impact on changes in the framework.

Provision of Multilingual Counseling Services

A total of 36 (57.1%) university counseling centers provided multilingual counseling services, among which 28 (44.4%), 6 (9.5%), and 2 (3.2%) universities offered services in 1, 2, and 3 languages other than Japanese, most commonly English ($n = 32$, 50.8%), followed by Chinese ($n = 12$, 19.0%), and Korean ($n = 2$, 3.2%). Multilingual counseling services were offered by 67.9% of national public universities and 48.6% of private universities, and the results of the chi-square test revealed no significant relationship between the type of institution and the availability of multilingual services, $\chi^2(1, 63) = 2.36$, $p = .124$. Multilingual services were offered by 81.3% of the universities with at least 1,000 international students, whereas these services were offered by 75.0%, 44.4%, and 38.5% of the universities with 300–499, 250–299, and 500–999 international students, respectively. A significant association was found between enrollment size and the availability of multilingual counseling services (Fisher's exact test, $p = .040$).

University Policy and Improvement of the Services

The respondents' perceptions of universities' initiatives for improving support services for international students were explored via a five-point Likert scale. The respondents were asked to evaluate the clarity of university policies as well as the perceived improvement in support services for international students at their institution. Table 2 presents the relevant items and the corresponding results.

One-way ANOVA demonstrated that the effect of the enrollment size was significant for policy clarity and service improvement. Tukey's HSD test for multiple comparisons revealed that policy clarity was significantly different between universities with at least 1,000 international students and those with 250–299 international students ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.02$ vs. $M = 2.28$, $SD = 0.83$, $p = .005$, 95% CI $= [-1.93, -0.26]$) , and those with 500–999 international students ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.02$ vs. $M = 2.46$, $SD = 0.66$, $p = .048$, 95% CI $= [-1.82, -0.01]$). The

perceptions of service improvement were significantly different between universities with at least 1,000 international students and those with 250–299 international students ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 1.03$ vs. $M = 2.39$, $SD = 0.92$, $p = .008$, 95% CI = $[-1.99, -0.23]$) and those with 500–999 international students ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 1.03$ vs. $M = 2.46$, $SD = 0.88$, $p = .028$, 95% CI = $[-1.99, -0.08]$).

Table 2: Evaluation of University Policy, Improvement, Current Conditions, and Challenges According to the Number of Enrolled International Students

Number of Students		250–299	300–499	500–999	at least 1,000	F (3,54)	P	η^2
University policy and improvement of the services								
policy clarity[a]	*M*	2.28	2.83	2.46	3.38	4.52	.007	.04
	SD	0.83	1.11	0.66	1.02			
service improvement[b]	*M*	2.39	2.83	2.46	3.50	4.44	.007	.04
	SD	0.92	1.03	0.88	1.03			
Current conditions and challenges								
difficulty with recruitment[c]	*M*	3.94	3.40	3.67	3.69	0.65	.585	.00
	SD	0.97	0.84	0.89	1.14			
lack of budge[d]	*M*	4.18	3.20	3.33	3.44	2.98	.040	.02
	SD	0.88	1.23	0.78	1.03			
rapid change in needs[e]	*M*	3.00	2.20	2.92	2.75	1.58	.206	.01
	SD	1.12	1.03	0.79	0.86			
other challenges[f]	*M*	3.76	3.20	3.42	2.69	2.59	.063	.02
	SD	0.90	1.62	1.00	1.08			
responsiveness [g]	*M*	1.59	2.70	1.92	3.44	9.25	<.001	.13
	SD	0.71	1.34	1.00	1.26			
low language support needs[h]	*M*	3.41	2.80	3.08	2.31	2.78	.050	.02
	SD	1.00	1.62	1.08	0.87			

Note. M=Mean value*, SD*＝ Standard deviation
A 5-point Likert scale (strongly desagree1--5 strongly agree) was used to rate the following statements: a. the university's policy for the development of counseling services for international students is clear; b. the university's counseling service for international students has improved; c. it is difficult to recruit a counselor with the expected competence; d. there is no budget to hire multilingual counselors; e. the number and language needs of students change too quickly for us to keep up; f. it is difficult to respond to multilingual support needs because there are also other challenges; g. we provide services that meet the language needs of our students; and h. the need for language support is not high, as many of our students are fluent in Japanese.

Moreover, the type of service delivery framework did not have a significant effect on either policy clarity, $F(3,59) = 0.23$, $p = .872$, or service improvement, $F(3,59) = 1.80$, $p = .157$. A t test was performed to determine the effects of institution type and recent changes in the service delivery framework on the perceptions of policy clarity and service improvement. With respect to institution type, national public universities and private universities had no significant impact

on the evaluation of policy clarity ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 1.05$ vs. $M = 2.60$, $SD = 2.60$, t (61) = 0.44, $p = .66$) or service improvement ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 1.18$ vs. $M = 2.71$, $SD = 0.99$, t (61) = 0.00, $p = 1.00$). Universities with changes in the service delivery framework, compared with those with no changes, reported that they had clearer policies ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 1.07$ vs. $M = 2.40$, $SD = 0.89$, t (61) = 3.33, $p = .001$, $r = .39$) and that their service had improved ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 1.04$ vs. $M = 2.36$, $SD = 0.86$, t (61) = 4.94, $p < .001$, $r = .54$).

Current Conditions and Challenges

The respondents' perceptions of the current conditions of services for international students at counseling centers and challenges regarding the improvement of multilingual counseling services are presented in Table 2. One-way ANOVA and t tests were performed to compare the mean values and examine the effects of university characteristics.

Universities with 250–299 international students most strongly agreed that a lack of budget represented a challenge for developing services, although no significant difference was found on Tukey's HSD test. Universities with at least 1,000 international students cited a significantly greater need for language support than those with 250–299 international students did ($p = .034$, 95% CI = [−1.91, 0.37]). Universities with at least 1,000 international students also reported that they were more responsive to language needs than universities with 250–299 students ($p < .001$, 95% CI = [0.85,2.84]) and 500–999 students ($p = .003$, 95% CI = [0.43, 2.61]). In short, universities with a larger number of international students perceive more language support needs, although they also claim to have better responsiveness to these needs. Enrollment size did not significantly impact the evaluation of difficulties with recruitment, rapid changes in needs, or other challenges, suggesting that these perceptions are common challenges regardless of the number of enrolled international students.

Regarding the type of service delivery framework, integrative, unit, collaborative, and specialized-type had the following mean scores for each item: difficulty with recruitment: $M = 3.94$, $SD = 0.81$, $M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.51$, $M = 3.64$, $SD = 0.84$, $M = 2.60$, $SD = 0.89$; lack of budget: $M = 3.74$, $SD = 1.14$, $M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.03$, $M = 3.79$, $SD = 0.89$, $M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.11$; rapid change in needs: $M = 2.74$, $SD = 0.96$, $M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.21$, $M = 3.00$, $SD = 0.96$, $M = 3.00$, $SD = 0.71$; other challenges: $M = 3.53$, $SD = 1.35$, $M = 3.00$, $SD = 0.89$, $M = 3.29$, $SD = 0.99$, $M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.00$; responsiveness to language needs: $M = 2.35$, $SD = 1.25$, $M = 3.50$, $SD = 0.84$, $M = 1.64$, $SD = 0.75$, $M = 2.80$, $SD = 2.05$; and low language support needs: $M = 2.74$, $SD = 1.26$, $M = 3.50$, $SD = 1.05$, $M = 3.21$, $SD = 0.98$, $M = 2.40$, $SD = 0.55$. According to the results of one-way ANOVA, the type of service delivery framework significantly affected difficulties with recruitment, F (3,55) = 3.23, $p = .029$, $\eta^2 = .02$, and responsiveness to language needs, F (3,55) = 3.69, $p = .017$, $\eta^2 = .03$. Furthermore, Tukey's HSD test revealed that universities with a unit-type framework evaluated their services as being significantly more responsive to language needs than universities with a

collaborative-type framework ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 0.89$ vs. $M = 1.62$, $SD = 0.77$, $p = .013$, 95% CI = [0.31, 3.41]). Moreover, universities with an integrative-type framework reported greater difficulties with counselor recruitment than universities with a specialized-type framework ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 0.81$ vs. $M = 2.60$, $SD = 0.89$, $p = .017$, 95% CI = [0.19, 2.50]). However, the type of service delivery framework did not significantly affect evaluations of the lack of budget, other challenges, or low language support needs.

The results of the *t* tests indicated that institution type did not significantly impact the mean value for each item. Moreover, universities with changes in their service framework ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.42$) perceived their services to be significantly more responsive to language needs compared with those without changes ($M = 2.05$, $SD = 1.01$), $t(57) = 3.25$, $p =.002$, $r = .40$. Universities without changes agreed more strongly that the rapid change in needs ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 0.91$ vs $M = 2.27$, $SD = 0.96$, $t[57] = 2.46$, $p = .016$, $r = .31$) and other challenges ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.10$ vs $M = 2.53$, $SD = 1.13$, $t[57] = 3.41$, $p = .001$, $r = .41$) made it difficult for them to implement measures to improve support services for international students compared with universities with such changes. There were no significant differences in the evaluation of the difficulty in recruiting counselors, lack of budget, or low language support needs between universities with and without changes.

Recruitment Policy Focused on Internationalization

The respondents were asked whether the counseling centers had a clear policy to value the internationalization of their services and counselors' competence in addressing the needs of international students and included this policy in the recruitment materials. A total of 16 universities (25.4%) reported that they mentioned such a policy in recruiting counselors in charge of international students, and 2 universities (3.17%) applied such a policy during the recruitment of all counselors. Moreover, 36 (57.14%) universities had no such policy in the recruitment of counselors, 5 (7.94%) selected "others," and 4 (6.35%) did not respond to this question. Enrollment size was significantly associated with having a recruitment policy focused on internationalization (Fisher's exact test, $p = .002$); 94.1%, 50.0%, 66.7%, and 31.3% of universities with 250–299, 300–499, 500–999, and at least 1,000 international students did not have a recruitment policy focused on internationalization. The type of service delivery framework was also significantly associated with having a recruitment policy focused on internationalization (Fisher's exact test, $p = .004$); a recruitment policy was seen in 100.0%, 40%, 29.4%, and 21.4% of universities with a unit, specialized, integrative, and collaborative-type framework, respectively. The chi-square test was performed, and the results indicated no significant relationship between institution type and the presence of a recruitment policy, $\chi^2(1, 59) = .019$, $p = .889$.

Required Qualifications for Counselors

The respondents evaluated how strongly they expected counselors who were assigned to work with international students to have certain qualifications, indicating these as either required, preferred, or not required (Figure 1). The most frequently required qualification was Japanese language skills, followed by professional qualifications as counselors in Japan.

Approximately half of the respondents indicated English language skills and multicultural competence as either required or preferred. Moreover, the following qualifications were preferred by approximately 60–80% of universities but required by only a few: working experience in a related field at Japanese HEIs, knowledge regarding international student affairs, working experience in a related field at universities overseas, and fluency in a language (other than English) that meets the needs of the enrolled students. Approximately half of the universities responded that having experience studying or living abroad would not be required for counselors who work with international students. The type of service delivery framework was significantly associated with having Japanese language skills as a required qualification (Fisher's exact test, $p < .001$); this was required by 100% of the universities with an integrative-type framework but only by 66.7%, 64.3%, and 60.0% of the universities with unit, collaborative, and specialized-type frameworks, respectively.
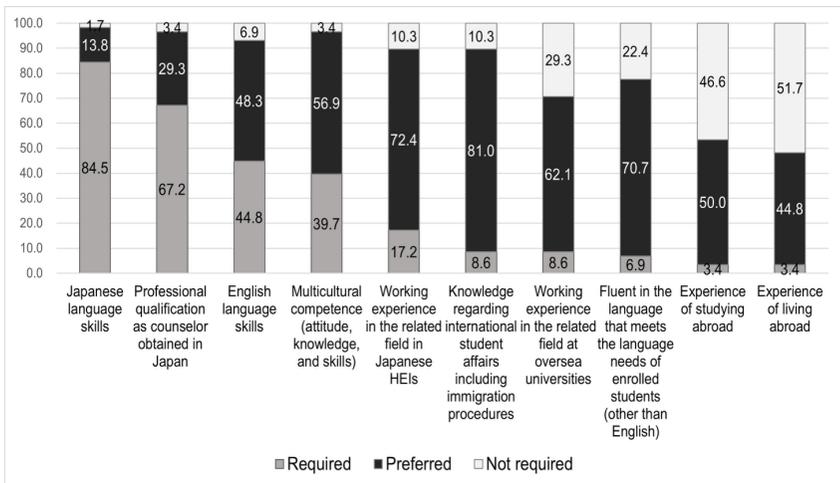

Figure 1: Required Qualifications for Counselors Working with International Students (%)

Measures to Enhance Support for International Students

The respondents were asked about the degree to which they agreed with each statement as a necessary measure to enhance support for international students, as well as whether they had already implemented each measure or had a plan to do so. As shown in Figure 2, collaboration with offices responsible for supporting international students was recognized as a necessary measure ($M = 4.58$, $SD = 0.74$) and had already been implemented or planned by more than 80% of the respondents, followed by assigning multilingual counselors in the counseling center ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 1.06$). Providing training opportunities for counselors was also recognized as necessary ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.08$), but a relatively lower percentage of universities had already implemented or planned to implement this measure. Moreover, establishing specialized support services and outsourcing multilingual counseling services was considered less necessary than other measures were, and only a few universities had implemented or planned to implement these measures.
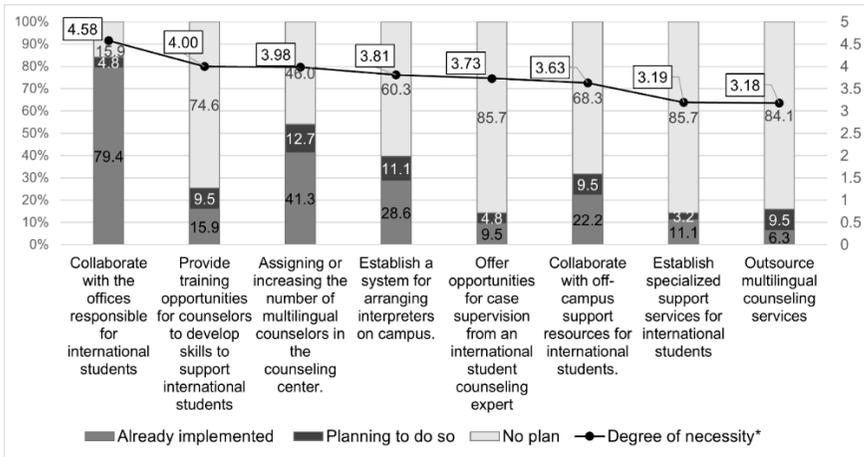

Figure 2: Measures for Enhancing Support for International Students: Implementation (%) and Degree of Necessity (mean)

Note: *Mean value for degree of necessity (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)

One-way ANOVA and *t* tests were performed to examine differences in the perception of the necessity of each measure across enrollment size, type of institution, and counseling service delivery framework. Enrollment size had a significant effect on the assignment of multilingual counselors, $F (3, 53) = 4.05$, $p = .012$, $\eta^2 = .04$. The results of Tukey's HSD test indicated that universities with at least 1,000 international students more strongly agreed with assigning or increasing the number of multilingual counselors versus those with 250–299 international students ($M = 4.73$, $SD = 0.46$ vs. $M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.02$, $p = .021$) and those with 500–999 international students ($M = 4.73$, $SD = 0.46$ vs. $M = 3.62$, $SD = 0.87$, $p = .018$). With respect to the type of institution, private universities

(M = 3.50, SD = 1.08) more strongly agreed with outsourcing multilingual counseling services than national public universities (M = 2.79, SD = 1.11), t (60) = −2.57, p = .013, r = .32, suggesting that some private universities considered outsourcing these services to be a possible option. However, the service delivery framework did not significantly impact the evaluation of the degree of necessity of these items.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the current conditions of counseling services for international students in Japanese universities by conducting a survey among the counseling centers of universities with at least 250 international students. Approximately 30% of the participating university counseling centers reported changes in their support framework for international students within the past decade. Specifically, the support delivery framework has shifted toward a more integrative framework, where counseling centers play a central role in providing counseling services for international students, which stands in contrast to previous studies (Inoue & Ito, 1998; Onishi, 2012). Additionally, unlike previous survey results, institution type did not significantly impact the overall response trend, indicating that national public and private universities had similar experiences in developing counseling services for international students. This finding can be attributed to the government policy-driven nature of the current internationalization of Japanese HEIs, where these policies exert similar pressure on universities, regardless of whether they are public or private. To enhance the support provided to international students, the following measures were considered the most crucial: collaborating with other resources on campus, providing training opportunities for counselors, and assigning multilingual counselors.

Multilingual counseling services were offered by approximately 50% of the university counseling centers and, in particular, by over 80% of the universities with more than 1,000 international students. Compared with the situation in 2012 (Onishi, 2012), multilingual counseling services have become widely available at counseling centers, at least in universities with large numbers of international students. However, at some universities, changes in the support framework have taken place without increasing the number of counselors working with international students. Around half of the surveyed counseling centers still provided counseling services solely in Japanese; furthermore, implementing multilingual support was considered to not be a priority at some universities or impossible due to limited budgets—even among universities that considered it important.

In addition, although some counseling centers focused on the internationalization of their services and included such statements in their counselor recruitment materials, many universities appear to lack a clear strategy for recruiting culturally competent counselors or making their services more responsive to international students' needs. The top two qualifications listed as requisites for counselors who work with international students were Japanese

language proficiency and obtaining a counselor certification in Japan. In contrast, having international experience (e.g., experience studying abroad) was viewed as relatively less necessary. Notably, 100% of the universities with an integrative service framework required counselors to have Japanese language skills, whereas 66% or less of the universities with other frameworks did. As such recruitment policies may hinder the enrichment of the counselor pool, they may also hinder the realization of un

iversities' internationalization goals.

Furthermore, only some universities had implemented or were planning to offer training or case supervising opportunities to improve the skills of counselors in working with international students, despite a high awareness of its necessity. These findings raise the concern that providing support services for international students may be perceived as adding a language service menu to traditional counseling services, as opposed to being perceived as a transformation toward culturally sensitive services.

Implications for Future Improvements in International Student Support Services

Previous studies have shown that international students and other cultural minority groups prefer targeted services within the traditional support framework. The findings of this study show that the support delivery framework for international students has shifted toward a more integrative framework, indicating that it is becoming increasingly important for counseling centers to monitor the effectiveness of their framework and ensure that students utilize their services, regardless of their language proficiency or familiarity with the support system.

To ensure multilingual, culturally competent staff with highly specialized skills, developing more effective strategies for recruiting counselors is essential. Moreover, as mentioned previously, no formal curriculum for training counselors to work with cultural and linguistic minorities exists in Japan. Thus, designing programs to train all counselors in the basic skills needed to work with international students is crucial for internationalizing counseling services. Collaborating with international student offices may assist in creating effective training programs.

Many counseling centers responded that they considered implementing multilingual support important but not possible due to limited budgets. This may indicate a possible knowledge gap between senior decision makers and frontline student support professionals. Therefore, it is important for professionals to advocate that university leaders have a clear policy on strengthening support for international students. Providing training to senior leaders that increases organization-level cultural competence would also be beneficial. Finally, the necessary changes should be facilitated by the development of national standards and guidelines for international student support.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, as its discussion was centered on language, it could not fully address culturally sensitive services more broadly. Although meeting linguistic needs is critical and the provision of multilingual support can indicate universities' awareness of international students' unique needs, the discussion must go beyond language assistance to ensure inclusive student services. Second, the study did not examine the viewpoints of international students. This should be a future research topic, along with a focus on increasing student engagement in the service development process.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate how Japanese universities provide counseling services for their international students and identify challenges and areas for improvement. A survey of counseling centers at universities with at least 250 international students was conducted, with 63 universities participating and respondents completing the survey. The study revealed unique challenges in the internationalization of student support services in Japan, where culturally competent services remain understudied. Student support structures should be designed and adjusted to meet the changing needs of enrolled students, and counseling centers should be actively involved in developing an inclusive support system for all students. The findings of this study should provide valuable insights for universities in countries facing similar challenges in internationalization.

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