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University Support Services, Intercultural Communication, and Languages Barriers: A Comparative Study of two Japanese Universities

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Abstract. The movement to push Japanese education into an age of internationalization came to realization in 1982 with the formation of the Nakasone Government. The ambitious 1983 target of bringing 100,000 foreign students to Japan was finally achieved in 2003 under Prime Minister Nakasone's original "International Student 100,000 Plan". Since that time, The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has focused its effort on internationalizing its universities by developing an educational system called the Global 30 Project (G30), a plan which is meant to attract 300,000 foreign students by 2020. The G30 Project and similar policies aim to transform Japan into an international education hub. Although these policies seem theoretically sound and viable, the intended outcome of internationalizing Japanese universities is sometimes not achieved. The policies that have shaped the internationalization of Japanese universities are based on increasing the number of foreign students on campus to internationalize the institution, culture and curriculum.

Data presented in this paper is based on surveys involving 46 respondents conducted at two large (one national, one private), prestigious universities in Japan.

This comparative study focuses on university support services, language, and intercultural communication and issues that affect international students on a daily basis. Analyses from the surveys indicate differences in how international students feel towards their respective universities in terms of support services and intercultural communication opportunities. Findings of this exploratory report will be used for a more comprehensive look into the internationalization of Japanese universities.

1. Introduction

As of 2012, there were 137,756 foreign students enrolled in Japanese private, public and national universities [1]. This number represents less than half of the targeted 300,000 goal outlined by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) initiatives on

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increasing the number of foreign students to Japan. Under the Global 30 (G30) project, established in 2008, MEXT expects to reach this ambitious goal by 2020.

According to Yonezawa [2], the origins of the G30 Project can be traced back to the 2001 government scheme to promote 30 prestigious universities as part of the G30 Project. The original policies of the G30 Project included a 15 billion yen budget to improve 30 institutions that would be recognized as the 'internationalized' core [3]. The concept of an internationalized core or internationalization meant the recruitment of international students to Japan.

2. Features of the G30 Project

The premise behind the G30 project and the strategies of similar programs for increasing the number of foreign students is to internationalize higher education in Japan. In 2009, 13 universities were selected to be part of the G30 project offering degree programs in a wide range of disciplines ranging from life science, agriculture, environmental studies information and communication technology, and social sciences, to name a few. All courses are taught entirely in English; however, G30 students also take Japanese language classes as part of the curriculum. The G30 project consists of national and private universities; each university has autonomy over the organization, management, acceptance, curriculum, and other aspects related to the education of international students.

3. Importance of Research

As part of the G30 goal of having 300,000 international students by 2020, it is essential that the G30 institutions educate the current population of international students as effectively as possible. It is critical to maintain and improve upon current reputational trends related to international education in Japan.

The data analyzed in this paper on international students' attitudes and perceptions highlights positive aspects and addresses negative issues that should be resolved.

It is essential to have a well-implemented and effective program directed towards the international student population to develop effective recruiting for future international students.

Due to increases in international student mobility, the G30 project aims to transform Japan into an international education hub. Although the policies of the G30 project, and programs offered by various other universities, seem theoretically sound and viable, the intended outcome of internationalizing Japanese universities sometimes falls short of the desired target. Policies shaped on internationalizing Japanese universities are based on increasing the amount of foreign students on campus to internationalize the institution, culture and curriculum. However, the physical presence of international students on the campuses of Japanese universities is simply not enough to internationalize the institution and curriculum.

4. What Recent Research Suggests

According to Jane Knight's definition of university internationalization [4], "internationalization of higher education is the process of integrating an international, intercultural, and global dimension into the purpose, functions (teaching, research, and service), and delivery of higher education at the institutional and national levels."

Japanese university internationalization policies have evolved in order to attract more international students; are these policies based on theories that will actually internationalize education? In Jane Knight's 'Five myths about internationalization' [5], she identifies the widely acknowledged myth that the mere presence of foreign students on campus will lead to a more diverse and internationalized university culture and curriculum. However, according to Knight [5], foreign "students feel socially marginalized and experience ethnic and racial tensions," and, for the most part, "resist or avoid social activities with native students". Furthermore, foreign students have a tendency to mingle and socialize together, thus limiting the amount of communication time with

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native students.

5. Previous Studies

There have been numerous studies conducted on intercultural interactions. Knight and de Wit [6] conclude that intercultural interactions between native students and international students result in a more fulfilling student experience, cross-cultural competence and increased communicative proficiency with the host nation. In contrast, Hanassab [7[, Brown [8], Dunne [9], highlight the fact that intercultural contact is, in actuality, a rarity in most places in the world. More specifically, Jou and Fukuda [10] found many international students in Japan find difficulties in making friends with Japanese students. Finally, Morita [11] states that in order for international students to have a worthwhile experience, strong Japanese language ability is a must.

6. Data

Data for this study was collected via a Google Docs survey. International students at both universities were asked to complete the survey. Participation was not mandatory and students could choose not to do the survey. Data were collected from November 1-15, 2013. Data were collected in a qualitative and quantitative manner.

Question 1: Students were asked to identify the university at which they are currently studying.
Both Universities (BU): n = 36
National University (NU): n = 30
Private University (PU): n = 16

Question 2:
The second question was important to determine what type of student we were surveying. Students were classified into full-time exchange students (Full course), or short-time exchange students (1 or 2 semesters).

What type of international student are you?
BU: Full = 35, Short = 11
NU: Full = 30, Short = 0
PU: Full = 5, Short = 11

Question 3: What is your nationality?
NU: Chinese (6), Indonesian (5), Thai (4), Indian (4), Vietnamese (3), South Korean (2), Malaysian (1), Singaporean (1), Egyptian (1), American (1)
PU: American (6), Chinese (2) Taiwanese (1), Lithuanian (1), Canadian (1), German (1), Singaporean (1), Korean (1), Australian (1), Norwegian (1)

Question 4: What is your gender?
NU: Male = 13, Female = 17
PU: Male = 4, Female = 12

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Table 1

The data in the following questions were collected using a Likert Scale
(1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

Question 5		**Difference from NU**
I'm satisfied with classes offered in my major		
NU = 4.03	PU = 3.88	+ 0.15
Question 6		
I'm satisfied with general education classes		
NU = 3.93	PU = 3.88	+ 0.05
Question 7		
I'm a satisfied with the quality of my professors		
NU = 4.03	PU = 3.88	+ 0.15
Question 8		
It is easy to make friends with other international students		
NU = 4.2	PU = 4.13	+ 0.07
Question 9		
It is easy to make friends with Japanese students		
NU = 3.1	PU = 3.25	- 0.15
Question 10		
I have experienced discrimination		
NU = 2.16	PU = 2.9	- 0.74
Question 11		
My university provides opportunities that allow me to communicate and meet Japanese students		
NU = 3.8	PU = 4.06	- 0.26
Question 12		
There are plenty of opportunities to have in-class discussions with my Japanese peers		
NU = 2.73	PU = 2.75	- 0.02

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Question 13		
In regards to club activities, Japanese students are welcoming and accepting of me		
NU = 3.2	PU = 3.44	- 0.24
Question 14		
English is widely used in my university		
NU = 3.06	PU = 3.56	- 0.5
Question 15		
I have no problem communicating with the university administration staff in English		
NU = 4.1	PU = 3.4	+ 0.7
Question 16		
I have no problem communicating with the university administration staff in Japanese		
NU = 3.26	PU = 3.19	+ 0.17
Question 17		
My university provides enough general information for me in English		
NU = 3.86	PU = 3.87	- 0.01
Question 18		
The International Student Center at my university provides adequate support in English		
NU = 4.1	PU = 4.3	- 0.2
Question 19		
The International Student Center at my university provides general assistance in finding housing		
NU = 3.53	PU = 3.56	- 0.03
Question 20		
The International Student Center at my university offers tutoring services		
NU = 3.9	PU = 3.06	+ 0.84
Question 21		
The International Student Center at my university has counseling staff that I can communicate with in English		

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NU = 4.0	PU = 3.5	+ 0.5
Question 22		
The International Student Center at my university arranges activities for me to meet other international students		
NU = 4.03	PU = 3.88	+ 0.15
Question 23		
The International Student Center at my university arranges activities for me to meet Japanese students		
NU = 3.77	PU = 3.62	+ 0.15
Question 24		
I am satisfied with the support services of the International Student Center at my university		
NU = 4.23	PU = 3.87	+ 0.36

7. Results

For the purpose of this exploratory study, a limited number of items from data collection will be reviewed.

#9: *It is easy to make friends with Japanese students*
Respondents from both universities responded with "neither". However, the private university showed a more favorable response to that statement. Data received represented all five choices on the Likert scale; however, no discernible pattern could be identified that isolated specific nationalities with similar responses.

As previously stated, with the exception of Japanese language classes, curriculum in the G30 program is taught entirely in English by native English instructors, and Japanese instructors, from general education courses to content courses specific to students' majors. According to Tsuneyoshi 2005 [12], Lassengard 2006 [13] and Kuwamura 2009 [14], Japanese instructors often find teaching classes entirely in English difficult due to often limited experience in an overseas academic setting. Although respondents reported being satisfied with the quality of their general education classes as well classes specific to their major, more in-depth research needs to be conducted to ascertain if students in the G30 program are improving their communicative abilities in English.

This is evident in the following comment form a third-year female Thai student at the national university:

> *'I was satisfied with my general education since most of the professors are English-speakers, so I really felt that the courses were international. However, when it comes to the specialized courses, which most of the classes are taught by Japanese professors, it is quite bad to say but I think their English skills are not enough for teaching courses in English. Somehow, I don't feel like my English is improving.'*

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Prior to April 2013, classes offered in the G30 program at the national university were only open to international students, which severally limited the opportunities for intercultural communication between foreign and Japanese students. Without opportunities for communication within the classroom, foreign students were not offered the appropriate chances to interact with Japanese students. Due to the nature of the G30 program, the end results were predictable in that foreign students did not interact with Japanese students in a classroom setting.

When foreign students are isolated, it is to be expected and natural that friendships will develop within that group. Brown's [15] (2009) study in the UK concluded that [students'] separation from the host community helps to foster attachments to the immediate, small closed group where all members share a similar identity. This shared isolation results in an ease of forming friendships, as can be seen from the results in question #8 where respondents from the private and national universities reported high percentages of establishing friendships with other international students.

The following comment from a second-year Vietnamese student at the national university highlights this issue:

> *'.....I was surprised that I have no classes with Japanese students. I would like to interact with Japanese people more at my university. I have had no problems making friends with the other G30 students; we all get along fairly well, we are always together'.*

The same second-year student also reported difficulty with acceptance into an extra-curricular martial arts club:

> *'....I feel I'm definitely not welcome, especially when it comes to the girls. I'm in the karate club, I've been practicing since I was a kid, and I thought this would help me to make friends with Japanese people. But, I was wrong, they don't want me in their group, but this just makes me want to stay, I won't quit.'*

When isolated from Japanese students within the classroom, foreign students often rely on extra-curricular activities to immerse themselves into Japanese university life. In Japanese universities, club activities are important aspects of student life. Although no statistics could be found, it can be said that a high-percentage of Japanese university students take part in some sort of organized extra-curricular club activity. The results from item #13, *"In regards to club activities, Japanese students are welcoming and accepting of me",* report a slightly better than average rate of acceptance. On the surface this may seem adequate, but when enrollment in club activities is one of a few ways in which foreign students can meet and interact with Japanese students, results from item #13 should be a concern to university officials and the international student centers at G30 institutions.

8. Conclusion

The purpose of the exploratory research paper has been to compare the government sponsored and funded G30 Project at a national university, to a study abroad, non-G30 program at a private university. Referring back to Knight's [16] (2011) myths about internationalization of university campuses, the amount of foreign students on campus does not necessarily translate to an international university. There are other more important intangible factors which should be recognized when determining if a university is truly internationalized and can successfully provide the kind of international experience that foreign students seek. With universities in the G30 program aiming to increase the amount of foreign students to 300,000 by 2020, these institutions

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need to provide meaningful opportunities for foreign students to interact with Japanese students. As Kuwamura [17] (2009) surmised, as Japanese universities move towards an era of internationalization, special consideration needs to be given to the development of intercultural communication aptitude at the institutional and individual levels. There needs to be more coordinated efforts in including Japanese students in the academic setting experienced by G30 students, and universities need to work towards a mutual acceptance between foreign and Japanese students within extra-curricular activities. Results from this study will be used as the basis of a more comprehensive analysis of the G30 program and the challenges of intercultural communication between foreign and Japanese students.

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