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“I just wanted to learn Japanese and visit Japan”: the incentives and attitudes of international students in English-Medium Instruction programmes in Japan.

### **Abstract**

With growth in English-Medium of Instruction (EMI) in higher education, there have been increasing calls for research on this expansion, particularly the challenges facing students. Despite the growth in international students and ambitious target recruitment numbers in places like Japan, much of the EMI research to date focuses on home students. This article reports on a study with international students enrolled on EMI programmes in six Japanese universities. Data was collected using open-ended questionnaires ( $n=102$ ), interviews ( $n=10$ ) at four of the six universities, and 3 focus groups (Japanese and international students) at three of the six universities. Results show that unlike home students, international student enrollment in EMI programmes is not linked to goals to improve English proficiency; many are simply interested in Japan or learning Japanese. While students recognized the benefits of EMI, they discussed numerous challenges, particularly language-related issues in classrooms where they study with students of varying levels of English proficiency. This study provides key insights into EMI policy implementation and the needs of an important group of stakeholders who have long been high on the government’s internationalization agenda in Japan.

Keywords: English-Medium of Instruction (EMI), International students, English taught programmes (ETPs), Japan, Higher Education (HE), Internationalization

## **Introduction**

In 2014, Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) launched the 'Top Global University Project' (TGUP) to support the internationalization of higher education (MEXT, 2014, p. 1). One route the government took was to attract international students. Generous scholarships attracted international students (Baas, 2019), leading to a rapid expansion in the number of EMI courses and programmes. While driving forces behind the push towards EMI vary around the globe, the past 10 years have seen phenomenal growth in provision, not only in Japan, but worldwide (Galloway et al., 2020; Curle et al., 2020; Wächter & Maiworm, 2014). EMI is commonly defined as being the use of English to teach academic subjects in countries where the language is not the first language of the majority of people (Macaro, 2018). Increasing the number of international students is central to Japanese Higher Education (HE) policy, yet little research has been conducted with international students within EMI settings in Japan. Such research may enhance the quality of the international student experience, which in turn could improve the institution's competitiveness in the global higher education market (Coles & Swami, 2012). This paper responds to the need for such research, reporting on a study investigating international students' incentives to (and attitudes towards) studying in English taught programmes (ETPs) in Japan.

## **Background of the study**

### *The growth of EMI in Japan*

EMI is not new in Japan (for an overview see Brown, 2017a). In the Meiji Era, other languages (Chinese, Dutch and English) were used alongside Japanese. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, foreign academics were invited as part of an attempt to modernise and westernise Japan. In 1877 at the University of Tokyo, two out of three academic posts were held by foreigners. However, foreigners were soon replaced, and the medium of instruction switched to Japanese. By the turn of century, almost all higher education scholars were Japanese (Marshall, 1992) and foreign texts were translated into Japanese. After World War 2, a small American expat community remained and in 1945, a limited number of EMI programmes were established. EMI continued to expand in the 1960s in some small private universities with short programmes for international students. In the 1970s, Japan experienced a steep fall in birth rates. Following this (1980s-1990s), the Japanese government focused on *kokusaika* (internationalisation); internationalising universities by attracting international students. By the end of the 1990s and beginning of the 21st century, EMI started to become the focus of the internationalization agenda. Highly funded government policies like the Global 30 and TGUP were then implemented. The number of universities offering EMI grew by 50% between 2003 and 2013 (MEXT, 2015a). EMI also started taking on an important role for domestic students. The New Growth Strategy in 2010 saw a shift of emphasis on increasing international students to developing international programmes for domestic

students to foster 'globally capable human resources' (so called *global jinzai*, Yonezawa, 2010). This expansion of EMI in Japan is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The expansion of EMI in Japan



### *International Students in Japan*

The main driving forces behind the internationalization of Japanese universities and the transition to EMI in higher education include: improving university rankings, improving English proficiency, access to specialized knowledge, internationalizing education, and attracting international scholars and students, amongst other factors (see Macaro et al., 2018; Cameron & Galloway, 2019). In Japan, MEXT explicitly states two goals of HE policy; to 'Increase the number of classes taught in foreign languages', and to 'Increase the ratio of international students in the total student population' (MEXT, 2018, p. 2). A string of highly funded government policies (Galloway et al., 2020) have set ambitious targets for international student recruitment. The number of international students studying in HEIs in Japan as of 1 May 2018 is **267,042** (an increase of 11.6%; JASSO, 2018). Table 1 illustrates updated figures on from where (the top five countries) these students originate. Chinese students dominate this market, followed by Vietnamese, Nepalese and Korean.

The motivation to attract international students to study in Japan gained momentum in 2009 with the *Global 30 (G30) Project*, aiming to attract 300,000 international students to Japan by 2020 (MEXT, 2014). Japan has seen a rapid expansion of ETPs in Japanese

universities and although they serve more domestic students, attracting international students has certainly been a major driving force. Given the target numbers for international student numbers, and the important role international student enrolment can play in university rankings, research on their needs and experiences is essential to ensure successful EMI policy implementation and a quality educational experience. This study aims to start to fill this research gap.

Table 1. International Students in Japanese HEIs

International Students in Higher Education Institutions		
Country/region	Number of students	
	2017	2016
China	79,502	75,262
Vietnam	35,489	28,579
Nepal	14,850	13,456
Republic of Korea	13,538	13,571
Taiwan	6,994	6,401
Indonesia	4,235	3,670
Thailand	3,266	3,185
Sri Lanka	3,020	1,905
Malaysia	2,750	2,581
Myanmar	2,686	2,079
Others	22,054	20,433
Total	188,384	171,122

Source: JASSO, 2017 from:

[https://www.jasso.go.jp/en/about/statistics/intl\\_student/data2017.html](https://www.jasso.go.jp/en/about/statistics/intl_student/data2017.html)

#### *Research on International Students in Higher Education*

Research on international students in HE is vast and diverse. Topics range from choices, expectations, and experiences of learning (Hu et al., 2016) to career decision-making difficulties (Zhou & Santos, 2007; Huang & Curle, 2021), engagement (Kettle, 2017), and the adjustment challenges that international students face when entering college (Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015). Shapiro, Farrelly and Tomas's (2014, p. 2) definition of an 'international student' is adopted in this study: 'a student who moves to another country (the host country) for the purpose of pursuing tertiary or higher education e.g. college or university'.

#### *Research on International Students in English-speaking Countries*

Much of the research on the internationalization of higher education has focused on Anglophone countries, with many studies focusing on the experiences and motivation of

international students to enroll in EMI programmes (Bertram et al., 2014; Chalmers & Volet, 1997; Chirkov et al., 2007; Karaman & Watson, 2017; Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

Chirkov et al's (2007) study in Canada, found that autonomous motivation to study abroad was a significant predictor of students' adjustment outcomes, confirming findings from a study of Chinese students studying in Belgium and Canada (Chirkov et al., 2007). International students often face problems adjusting to life in a foreign country, experience challenges academically, as well as financial and language-related difficulties (Barratt & Huba, 1994). Sato and Hodge's (2015) study of eight Japanese international students studying at an American university revealed that their expectation of mixing with American students, and hence improving their English proficiency, did not manifest. Social distance contributed to students' academic struggles, and they reported feeling ill-prepared to learn all their content subjects through English (p. 212). These findings were in line with a previous study done in 2009 by Sato and Hodge. This study turns the focus to international students studying in Japan; exploring their incentives and attitudes to investigate whether similar attitudes, motivations, challenges, and experiences arise.

#### *Research on International Students in Asia*

There is a small body of research that has looked at international students' motivations and experiences of studying through English in East Asia (Galloway & Ruegg, 2022; Galloway et al. 2020; Guo, Li, & Ito, 2014; Jiani, 2017; Jon, Lee, and Byun, 2014). Jon, Lee, and Byun (2014) examined Chinese students experiences in Korea, finding that the majority enrolled as they wanted to learn Korean, and experience Korean culture. Students also cited practical, financial, and career-orientated reasons: scholarship opportunities, ease of obtaining a student visa, and study abroad experience enhancing job opportunities. Ahmad and Buchanan (2017) explored the motivation of students studying at international branch campuses in Malaysia (transnational education), finding that students chose this form of education due to: the perceived 'good' reputation of these international universities, the perception that a higher quality of education was offered compared to local universities, and that the programmes offered are similar to those offered in Western countries (and are more prestigious).

Galloway and Ruegg (2020) conducted a questionnaire study with international students studying in Japan. Exploring views on language norms, the study highlighted that non-native English-speaking international students were the most rigid about English-only use in EMI. Galloway, N., Numajiri, T. and Rees, N. (2020) expanded this line of research, collecting questionnaire data from international students in Japan. Significant differences were found in attitudes towards the role of EMI programmes in improving students' English language proficiency, with Japanese home students being more negative than non-native English-speaking international students. *Language-related challenges* (referring to both staff and students' perceived limited English proficiency and the use of other languages) were mentioned by almost all international students,

compared to nearly half of home students. However, no international students referred to personal language-related challenges compared to nearly all home students who referred to their own English-related challenges. This study makes an original contribution to this line of research by exposing students' incentives and attitudes towards studying through English in Japanese universities.

### *International Students' needs in Japan*

Some studies do provide some initial insights into international students' motivations and experiences in the Japanese EMI context (Galloway & Ruegg, 2022; Huang & Horiuchi, 2020; Miyoshi & Pan, 2019) but more research is needed, particularly given the targets for international student recruitment in Japan. Such research will provide insights into the cost-effectiveness of EMI programmes, as well as the quality of provision. While EMI research is growing, the focus on provision over quality has been met criticism and there is a need for clear EMI policy implementation guidelines, and research with a range of stakeholders. This study addresses this research gap in the Japanese context with an investigation into the motivating factors behind international student enrolment, as well as their overall attitudes towards EMI in this context. This study aims to improve the coherence between top-down macro-level EMI policy and bottom-up implementation, generating two overarching research questions:

1. *Why do international students choose ETPs in Japan?*
2. *What are international students' attitudes towards ETPs in Japan?*

## **Methodology**

### *Research Design*

This study builds on previous studies by Cameron and Galloway (2019) and Galloway and Ruegg (2020) that collected data from both home (i.e. Japanese) and international students and faculty in Japan. Here, we examine the international student dataset; this consists of questionnaires ( $n=102$ , see Appendix A for relevant questions related to this study) and interviews at 4 universities ( $n=10$ , see Appendix B) and focus groups at 3 universities ( $n=3$ , Appendix C; Table 2). All universities in Japan were private apart from University A. Universities were selected due to their varying approaches to EMI. Each had different entrance requirements, such as international English language proficiency tests, national tests or the university's own entrance examination. Research instruments were piloted with a small set of students in 2016 by Galloway and collected by Galloway person. All participants provided consent to participate, and rigorous ethical procedures were followed. Data analysis was conducted with *NVivo 11* and each qualitative data set was analysed separately. Pseudonyms have been used throughout.



**Table 2** Overview of participants

	Questionnaires		Interview		Focus group	
	(n = 102)		(n = 10)		(n=3)	
<b>Japan</b>						
University A	13		3		1	
University B	21		4			
University C	16				1	
University D	18					
University E	17		2		1	
University F	17		1			

### Participant Overview

Questionnaire respondents came from the following countries: 52% came from ‘native’ English-speaking countries and regions: North America ( $n=37$ ), United Kingdom ( $n=7$ ), New Zealand ( $n=5$ ), Australia ( $n=3$ ), and Canada ( $n=2$ ). The remaining 48% came from countries with a range of other official languages: Europe ( $n=12$ ), Asia ( $n=34$ ), and South America ( $n=2$ ).

Interviewees came from the UK ( $n=1$ ), the US ( $n=3$ ), Taiwan ( $n=1$ ), China ( $n=2$ ), Singapore ( $n=1$ ), the Philippines ( $n=1$ ) and Lithuania ( $n=1$ ). Focus group participants came from Japan ( $n=7$ ), Switzerland ( $n=1$ ), Latvia ( $n=1$ ), Taiwan ( $n=1$ ), Spain ( $n=1$ ), China ( $n=4$ ), Canada ( $n=1$ ) and the United States of America ( $n=1$ ). In some focus groups, home students were included to gain further insight into international students’ attitudes when in conversation with home students. The limitations of this are recognised in that international students might have reserved their true feelings due to the presence of home students.

### Results

#### **EMI programme enrollment**

##### *Open-ended Questionnaire responses*

When asked about their main reasons for enrolling in their EMI programme (Appendix A), most students reported a *desire to improve their Japanese proficiency* (“I just wanted to come to this location”; “it allows me to study in Japan”) and a *desire to study in Japan* (“I wanted to come to Japan but I don’t speak Japanese”). For some, the programme was “easier to enter than taking Japanese enrolment exam and competing with smart Japanese students”. Only 13 referred to the opportunity to improve English proficiency,

8 were interested in the content of the course, and a few referred to the status of the university and enhanced employability.

### *Interview responses*

As in the open-ended questionnaire responses, 8 of the 10 interviewees listed a *desire to improve their Japanese proficiency* (“I wanted to do something that I could use to help me to immerse myself in an environment to help me get better at it” [*i.e. Japanese*, Riley (University B, USA)] and *study in Japan* (“I came here basically to learn about Japan’s culture and like to see what experiences I might be getting in a study abroad programme” (Amelia, University B, Philippines)) as their main reasons for enrolling. Other reasons included practical or financial reasons (“I needed to choose a school that had a direct international link with my university, and I didn’t have to pay extra fees” (Julia, University A, USA)) or to become independent (“This is my first time living alone, budgeting my money, buying food, washing my own clothes” (Amelia, University B, Philippines)). Only 1 mentioned job opportunities and improving English proficiency.

In discussions about why they enrolled on their EMI programmes, half of the interviewees referred to an awareness of the role of English as the world’s lingua franca, discussing its role in international relations, trade and business:

“Because English speakers overall have a lot of power within the world, so it’s a matter of being able to speak to people who are buying your products, who you are selling your products to, who you are ordering from” (Kirsty, University B, USA).

Such comments also related to comments regarding the “demands of globalization” and other reasons referred to “access to specialised knowledge”.

### *Focus Group responses*

Focus groups, which also included Japanese students revealed differences between the two cohorts. Unlike the international students in the questionnaire and interview findings reported above, Japanese students referred to the employability prospects offered by EMI programmes, whereas international students responded with comments on the quality of the programme. In University A focus group, composed of 3 Japanese home students and 3 international students, status differences were evident in the use of personal pronouns. Japanese students established a collective identity as home students, using ‘We’ and making frequent references to Japan. For example, Keiko (University A, Japan) noted: “We have to be globalised to gain jobs...Some exposure to English is a must in the near future in Japan.” Daichi (University A, Japan) added that: “When we trade with China, the communication is normally in English. Matteo, a Swiss student responded by noting that “it depends from person to person”, but that since

English is the world's global language and "the internet is filled with English" that you need English "if you want to get legitimate information. However, Zhang, a Taiwanese student, returned the focus to the motivation of Japanese students noting that they "choose EMI for study at universities because these universities are better for getting jobs afterwards", prompting agreement from Himari, a Japanese student, who noted that EMI programmes effectively kill two birds with one stone teaching content and English. This prompted a further example from Zhang to strengthen her point, referring to companies that may prefer such students and specifically noting that "companies come to these schools and then we can apply to them, instead of job hunting ourselves".

In University C, international students made similar comments about the importance of English and participants, both Japanese and international, elaborated on each other's points in agreement:

Josè (University C, Spain): As I said before, even though it is not the most spoken language in the world, it is the most important second language in the world, so in order to have some intercultural communication, or political or economic transaction, it is necessary to speak with people from other places. Also, as far as I know, compared to Chinese and Spanish, it's much easier.

Zhou (University C, China): Even to acquire a minimum, not necessarily proficient, level of English, it's easier to acquire a minimum level of English I think; I think it's a key thing to have English as a Lingua Franca.

Yoshi (University C, Japan): Like you said, one of the advantages is if we can speak in English, we can communicate in English to some extent.

Hyoustake (University C, Japanese): If we can speak English, we can extend our thoughts, which is like, we can know other countries' cultures and attitudes.

Kazue (University C, Japan): We can get new interests and have more influence in making it a better thing for you.

### **Attitudes towards EMI**

#### *Open-ended questionnaire responses*

With regards to their attitudes to the EMI programme, the majority were satisfied. Positive comments mostly related to studying in an international environment: "EMI provides international atmosphere, thus encouraging globalization" and helps them "have a more global identity". Some referred to the opportunity to study abroad, even if they "do not speak another language [*besides English*] adequately". Overall, most felt EMI is "awesome but needs improvement" and many referred to the need for linguistic support: "It is good but requires English ability support for non-English speakers".

Only three were critical, citing *language-related challenges*, particularly the perceived low proficiency of students and faculty: “It is difficult to understand the contents of the subject because we focus too much on language ability”; “Many of Japanese lectures are not trained enough to give a lecture in English” and “The fluency of instructors affects the results of students”. Some commented on the dangers of EMI: “EMI is great in making discussions and standards more universal although it may also isolate other languages and cultures inherent in said languages” or “EMI all through a student's life (such as mine, where I have been taught in English all my life) has very deep implications on language and identity”.

### *Interview responses*

With regards to their attitudes towards EMI, overall, the interviewees see it as a positive development and, as Jack (University E, Singapore) stated, “the positives outweigh the negatives”. Nevertheless, positive comments were always followed up with concern and they were critical of EMI policy. For example, when discussing the irrelevance of compulsory English language classes for international students, Steve (University A, UK) noted, “international students are not seen here as people coming to study, they are often viewed as tools for the Japanese students to improve their English and their sort of globalization, essentially”. *Language-related Challenges* were mentioned by all, with most referring to issues understanding their Japanese classmates’ English and half also referred to difficulties understanding their Japanese lecturer’s English. Julia (University A, USA) was concerned that “some students do not have a really good level of English” because “The threshold for passing to get into the school is low”. Amelia (University B, Philippines) found it “kind of difficult for us to understand the lectures” and while they are recognised to be experts in their field, “the Japanese professors aren’t that fluent in English. There are a couple of professors here who are academically excellent but it’s difficult for them to convey what they want to because of the language barriers” (Jack, University E, Singapore).

*Institutional/Organizational Challenges* were also mentioned by half of the interviewees, referring to a dislike of the style of education, the size of the institution, and the range of EMI classes on offer. Some had to change courses due to staff shortages and Julia (University A, USA) felt that her institution was “trying to imitate the American system” but “it’s miles below that”, referring to a lack of courses on offer and the fact that they often “switch curriculums because they don’t have many teachers”.

*Nationality/Cultural related Challenges* were mentioned by half of the interviewees, mostly relating to a lack of integration with home students. Steve (University A, UK) noted that “the Japanese students and the international students are very segregated” and found that the later arrival of international students (often in September, unlike Japanese students who begin in April) hinders integration because “[t]he Japanese students have friendship groups and it is difficult to integrate”. Kirsty (University B, USA)

felt that the university *does* make an effort to create opportunities for students to interact by placing Japanese and international students together in dormitories, but that it was difficult to integrate as they didn't "necessarily share the same interests". Steve (University A, UK) put this down to a lack of initiation from home students to interact: "The Japanese are lovely people but are very rarely assertive on their own". Kirsty (University B, USA) also felt that it was "subconscious", noting that "Japanese students like international students but they will never be inclusive, and it's difficult. Japanese have the saying 'The nail that sticks out will be hammered down'. This kind of mentality doesn't disappear". She found it "hard to cope with the concept" and felt hurt and had a "really hard time here because I wanted to be included, but I think it's just the Japanese culture with foreigners, we will never be Japanese, even some Japanese people aren't considered as Japanese."

#### *Focus Group responses*

As in the interviews, challenges to implementing EMI were discussed extensively, particularly regarding *language-related challenges*. Discussions did not centre on the intelligibility of their Japanese classmates or lecturers, as in the interviews, although concerns over the Japanese lecturers' use of Japanese were related to the perceived low English proficiency of their Japanese peers. In University C, José (Spain), initiated a discussion on this, where he referred to the Japanese students as "non-native speakers", despite also being a so-called 'non-native' English speaker himself. Kiyo (University C, Japan) responded quickly, noting the challenge this poses for international students and the others nodded in agreement:

Josè (University C, Spain): "...when you move to the upper classes [i.e. university years], and you have non-native speakers, sometimes they don't know all of the academic terms, and the teacher and students start using Japanese."

Kiyo (University C, Japan): "That's hard for international students."

Similar concerns were 'discussed in University C. This group discussed *language-related challenges* more than others and made specific references to concerns understanding their Japanese lecturers' English. Kiyo (University C, Japan) noted that his lecturer "is trying to explain in English" but "sometimes we don't get what he or she is saying" and José (University C, Spain) added that this "can make it [the content] even more difficult to understand" referring to the "double challenge" of studying in English.

*Nationality/Culture-related challenges* were also discussed. In University A, a Bohai, a Taiwanese student acknowledged the perceived differences in English proficiency between the international and home students. Ryo, however, did not respond to this, but added a further difference, referring to differences in classroom behaviour prompting a discussion on *nationality/culture related challenges*:

Bohai (University A, Taiwan): International speakers in class speaking, sometimes the Japanese students do not understand, and the teacher should regulate the speed.”

Ryo (University A, Japan): The classroom atmosphere is also different. We show respect by being quiet for the teacher, we take notes and listen, but the international students respond to the professor.

In University A, Matteo (University A, Switzerland) also expressed concern over the possible Americanisation of HE in Japan, and both he and Andrejs (University A, Latvia) posed questions to the Japanese participants regarding this:

Matteo (University A, Switzerland): I think it’s bad in Japan that EMI is highly influenced by the US. I think the communication is very unique in Japan and I love it. It’s good to be able to discuss with people in a discussing way, in a controversial way sometimes, but never get aggressive or offensive. I feel the EMI here is breaking it, especially the professors here they teach you that Japanese culture is bad, business culture, but it’s not perfect abroad. What do you think? Do you think you lose your values because of the international methods and international teachers?

Andrejs (University A, Latvia): Has your attitude changed, perhaps in your family?

Zhang (University A, Taiwan): I don’t think I have changed too much. My family is quite traditional, and we maintain this at home.

Sakura (University A, Japan): My parents say I am more open minded, due to me using English as a communication tool with international students. I think I have changed a little.

Andrejs (University A, Latvia): Is it like a mask you put on when it is necessary, or have you changed as a person?

Yua (University A, Japan): I sometimes think I have become westernised or Americanised, because I spent so much time in the States. I can see Japan from other perspectives, from the outside.

Zhang (University A, Taiwan): I think the culture will change in Japan, as there are going to be more EMI schools in Japan.

*Institutional/organisational challenges* also emerged in discussions over the Japanese job-hunting culture and the university start date. There was concern that if university start dates were standardised then it would be “like saying the whole world should change to one type” (Matteo, University A, Switzerland). In University C, there was also a discussion on the disadvantages of EMI and a particular concern over their knowledge of their field in Japanese. Zhou (China) initiated the discussion noting that by “learning subjects in English, you can tend to forget your own language, your mother language, like how to write properly in Japanese”, which is a “disadvantage” of EMI. José (Spain) agreed, noting that Japanese students have studied in their mother tongue until they entered university and that they may lack an “academic level” in Japanese and noted that he also finds “technical terms pretty difficult to acquire” in his mother tongue,

which is “difficult”. Kazue (Japan) responded immediately, noting that if they “learn economics in English”, when communicating “with a business Japanese person”, they won’t “know the words in Japanese, so it’s really hard to communicate in the domestic environment, so maybe that’s a disadvantage”. Hyousuke (Japan) then elaborated on this, noting that this would also cause problems when “working in another country”, as people would assume they “can explain everything in the Japanese language, but we don’t, actually, because we learn things in English”. Yoshi then jumped in, noting that “another disadvantage is when you study subjects in English” because “studying in English is not perfect for me” and he can “understand more” if he studies “a subject in Japanese”, referring to the difficulty of studying in English. Hyousuke (Japan) agreed that “it’s harder than learning in Japanese or in other mother tongues...”, and José (Spain) ended the conversation by agreeing, but noting that “At the same time, a good part of that is you learn the terms in English and you can use these terms in a globalised environment” to which nobody disagreed. José (University C, Spain) returned to this point when asked to give final comments, leading to a discussion over the students’ support needs, where a distinction was yet again made between the home and international students and it was suggested that Japanese students may need to be better prepared for EMI programmes.

## **Discussion**

With internationalization high on the higher education agenda in Japan, there has been a boom in international student recruitment. Target numbers are set as part of the internationalization agenda and this cohort of students are central to the internationalisation strategy, a ‘life-line’ even in some cases. Research into the needs of international students is essential to ensure student satisfaction and continued recruitment; this study provides this insight. Recently there have been calls for an examination of the challenges faced by students in EMI contexts (see Cameron & Galloway, 2019), yet much of the research to date focuses on home students. This study responded to the need for research with international students, not only to ensure government spending is cost-effective, ensure continued recruitment and avoid reputational damage, but also to explore the needs of this growing cohort and ensure quality of provision.

### ***Motivation to enroll in Japanese EMI programmes***

Our findings have implications for curriculum planning, providing insights into the reasons why international students choose to study EMI programmes and their expectations. An interest in learning Japanese and visiting Japan are the main reasons, as with Chinese students studying in Korea in Jon, Lee and Byun (2014). Unlike Japanese home students (Galloway et al., 2020), they do not choose EMI programmes in Japan to improve their English proficiency, nor is it due to a perceived ‘good’ reputation of these

universities as found in Malaysia (see Ahmad and Buchanan, 2017). Concerns that international students are merely recruited to provide a means for Japanese students to improve their English are concerning and could have a detrimental effect on student satisfaction and future recruitment. Such concerns, however, could be related to the demographics of international students in our study, particularly Japan. Table 1 shows a majority of Asian international students, yet only 34 of our questionnaires, 5 of our interviews and 3 of our focus group respondents were Asian. Participation in the study was voluntary and it is possible that more proficient English speakers signed up. Nevertheless, such concerns pose questions regarding the stated aims of the EMI programmes, which should be used to inform the curriculum. The Japanese Ministry of Education defines EMI as “Courses conducted entirely in English, excluding those whose primary aim is language instruction” (MEXT, 2015), yet this study reveals concerns over the language-learning focus of these programmes and the use of Japanese to accommodate the perceived low English proficiency of their Japanese peers. In addition to concerns over the English proficiency of their Japanese lecturers’, these factors influence the quality of the programme, from the perspective of our participants at least.

Our study included 4 universities ranked within the top 20 universities in Japan, yet unlike in Ahmad and Buchanan (2017), international students in this study did not cite the ‘good’ reputation of the institution, or that the quality of education was superior to their home countries. Recent years have seen the establishment of full ETP programmes at places like The University of Tokyo (ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> in Japan), and other high ranking Japanese universities such as Kyoto (1<sup>st</sup>), Osaka (8<sup>th</sup>), Waseda (13<sup>th</sup>), Keio, (14<sup>th</sup>). It is hoped that with the establishment of EMI as a research field in its own right, we will see more studies investigating the implementation of EMI policy, a focus on quality over provision, and more research with the international student cohort. In Galloway et al.’s (2020), Japanese home students noted the need for Japanese universities to recruit international students to generate revenue amidst an ageing domestic population. International student recruitment has slumped as in the West there have been criticisms that a business- and Western-centric ‘no-frills’ model of internationalization which ignores international students’ welfare has developed (Pang, 2012). There have also been warnings that compromising international student support may lead to “long-term reputational damage” (ibid). Our study provides insights into the needs of international students, and if the revenue generated from their fees, are, indeed, a ‘life-line’ of Japanese universities, then many of the concerns raised in this study warrant further investigation to ensure that Japanese EMI programmes avoid the criticism faced by universities in Anglophone settings.

### ***Overall attitude towards EMI in Japan***



The international students were positive towards EMI in Japanese HE, which provides an opportunity to study in an international environment and develop a “more global identity”. However, many challenges and drawbacks were discussed and overall, EMI is perhaps “awesome but needs improvement”. Concerns were raised over the growing presence of English in Japanese HE, and elsewhere, which may “isolate other languages and cultures” and influence their identity.

Challenges identified were similar to those identified by home students in Galloway et al. (2020), mainly relating to language-related issues. However, students did not report experiencing academic challenges as reported in Barratt and Huba’s (1994) study. In Europe, English proficiency was one of the reasons HEIs chose not to offer EMI courses (Wächter & Maiworm, 2014) and in Japan, Aizawa and Rose (2018) found it to be a major deterrent for home students. The perceived low English proficiency of their Japanese classmates and lecturers was clearly an issue for the students in our study and reports that EMI classes often focus on helping Japanese students with their English, raise questions regarding subject coverage, particularly if the students expect to transfer credits. It also highlights the need for more research regarding the aims of EMI programmes and appropriate English entrance requirements. Grouping students with varying levels of English proficiency is clearly a concern and our study highlights the differing support needs of Japanese home and international students, something that was raised by our participants. Many studies in anglophone settings on international students have focused on the English language, for example, the relationship between English proficiency exams and university students’ academic performance (Avdi, 2011; Feast, 2002; Li, Chen & Duanmu, 2010). This is gaining a considerable amount of attention in EMI contexts since EMI is often closely linked with the government’s desire to improve English proficiency, as well as the main reason home students enrol in EMI programmes (Galloway et al., 2020).

Concerns over Japanese lecturers’ ability to “give a lecture in English” and comments regarding their “fluency” may, however, relate to how proficiency and fluency in English are defined, as well as a lack of familiarity with the English spoken in Japan. Concerns may also be related more to teaching methodology, which may also be unfamiliar for students outside of Japan. Orientations on arrival were not discussed in this study, yet it would seem that more of an orientation to the Japanese higher education system, increased familiarity with the English spoken in Japan and also more efforts to integrate Japanese and home students would be a welcome part of an orientation on arrival for the students in this study. The lack of international and home student integration also arose in Sato and Hodge’s (2015) investigation of Japanese students studying in America: ‘organic integration’ or mixing may not happen and may need formal facilitation. Internationalization is high on the higher education agenda in Japan, and it is also a key graduate attribute. Actively encouraging integration between these two diverse groups of students will help Japanese institutions to be more successful in their

goal of developing students with a more outwardly orientated international perspective. This would also be in line with MEXT's (2014) goal to develop *global jinzai*, "globally competent human resources" (Chapple, 2015), students that possess 'international competencies and cultural understanding' (Brown, 2017b). Developing 'internationalisation at home' is also something that has received attention in Anglophone universities (see Harrison, 2015). At the institution level, semester start dates were noted to be an issue. However, as one participant noted, we also have to be wary of promoting a one-size-fits-all approach to higher education.

The quality of the EMI programmes in this study is clearly an issue and comments that they are "miles below" the American higher education system is concerning, particularly if policy implementation is to be successful and sustainable. To date, the implementation of EMI policy has gone relatively unmonitored and has been developed in a relatively haphazard way. Top-down policy is often left to individual institutions to develop. However, EMI research is certainly growing, particularly with the establishment of the Centre for EMI at The University of Oxford and an increasing amount of research being commissioned by The British Council. It is hoped that this increasing body of research (see Curle et al., 2020) will provide insights into the needs of students and quality assurance mechanisms. In 2017, Oxford EMI and the UK's national qualifications agency (NARIC: National Recognition Information Centre) developed an 'EMI quality mark' (NARIC, 2018); rating universities on a Gold, Silver and Bronze scale depending on how well they scored on the quality of their English-taught degrees. Our study further highlights the need for more research on the quality of EMI programmes, particularly as increasing provision is a high priority for many governments around the globe.

## **Conclusion**

Internationalization cannot merely be a token gesture. The recruitment of international students has certainly been a major priority in this process, and we call for more studies to fully understand the sojourn experience of this group of students. We call for more research into the needs of the international student population (not only in Japan but across the globe in all EMI contexts) through regular needs analyses, which should be central to any curriculum innovation. As students in this study referred to their experience beyond the academic setting (e.g. integration into clubs), further research is also needed into their experience in social settings. Successful top-down policy implementation is not guaranteed. Although the current study is limited in terms of sample size and reach (only 6 universities in the single context of Japan), results highlight a need for Japanese institutions to make adjustments to their infrastructure to accommodate a vastly growing, and diversifying student population. It also highlights the need for more research into the English language entrance requirements, English language support, delivery of content, the number of courses on offer in a syllabus, and

research into what it means to be a competent EMI lecturer.

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**QUESTIONNAIRE about your views on English Medium Instruction (EMI) in university settings**

1. What were your main reasons for enrolling in this EMI programme? **Please tick**  
Strongly Disagree      Disagree      Agree      Strongly Agree  
                                                                 

1. To increase my knowledge of the subject
2. To improve my English language proficiency
3. To improve my career option
4. To meet international students
5. Other

If other, please specify:

What is your overall opinion on EMI in your context?

## Appendix B - Interview Questions

### Interview guide

#### **Stage One: Narrative**

1. *Firstly, could you please begin by telling me about yourself and your EMI programme? For example, you can tell me what you are studying, year of study, name of university, your previous experience learning content through English, English language proficiency, etc.*

#### **Stage Two: Prompts**

1. **EMI**

With the globalisation of English, universities around the globe are beginning to move towards English Medium Instruction (EMI) programmes and attract international students, even in countries where English has no official status.

- ***Why did you enroll in these programmes?***
- ***Based on what you have said, how do you feel about moves towards EMI in your context?***

#### **Stage Three: Closing**

- *Thank you for your time today. Is there anything you would like to add that hasn't been covered in this interview?*

## Appendix C – Focus Group Questions

### Focus Group

*Once again thank you all very much for participating in this focus group. I am interested in your personal opinion and there are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers. Please give your answers sincerely as only this will guarantee the success of the investigation. The contents of this discussion are absolutely confidential. Information identifying the respondent will not be disclosed under any circumstances. Please follow the instructions.*

***First of all, please read the following summary:***

The globalisation of English has seen an increase in English education and education through English. This is not contained to Western nations alone and recent years have witnessed the internationalization of universities worldwide, including an increase in English Medium Instruction (EMI) programmes in English and recruitment of international students, even in countries where English has no official status. The global spread of English has seen an increase in importance placed, not only on English language education throughout the world, but also on education *through* English. As Professors working on EMI programmes, I am interested in your views on EMI in your context and beyond. There are no right or wrong answers and your views are very interesting to me. **Please speak as much as you like on each topic and don't be afraid to be honest and disagree with each other.**



**TOPIC OF DISCUSSION: INTRODUCTIONS**

Go round the group and introduce yourself briefly, telling the group about:  
***your name, nationality, programme study on, experience with EMI, etc.***

**TOPIC OF DISCUSSION 1: EMI**

The spread of English around the world has seen an increase in importance placed on English language education and education *through* around the world. The internationalisation of higher education institutes (HEI) has become a priority for universities worldwide who are in competition to attract international students and develop a global presence.

***Discuss:***

- *why students are choosing to enrol in these programmes*
- *your own opinion on such moves*

**TOPIC OF DISCUSSION 6: CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

**Discuss your overall opinion on EMI in your context.**

**Does anybody have any final points they would like to add?  
THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR PARTICPATING IN THE DISCUSSION**