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Internationalization of the curriculum in Japanese universities: an investigation of English medium instruction and collaborative online international learning programs

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Abstract

The objective of this research was to understand the current situation and challenges associated with the internationalization of the curriculum (IoC) through both English medium instruction (EMI) and Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) programs at Japanese universities in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. This working paper is thus comprised of two parts; the first reports on research focused on IoC in EMI contexts in Japanese higher education, and the second, based on notable emergent findings from the first study, looks more specifically at COIL programs. For part 1, we utilized a conceptual framework and ideas of 'enablers' and 'blockers' of IoC and analyzed the qualitative data from interviews with 11 faculty members involved in both in-class and online teaching in EMI programs at different Japanese universities.

Findings from our analysis revealed a general lack of awareness of IoC, with those that were aware either relating it to the international nature of their academic disciplines or expressing uncertainty in how to incorporate IoC into pedagogical practices. Perceived blockers included quantitative approaches to internationalization policy and funding at the government-level that largely neglected IoC, a lack of commitment and organizational support at the institutional level, and constraints on physical international mobility due to the pandemic. Enablers included the expansion of COIL programs for virtual student mobility and the general commitment to academic freedom in Japan that allows educators to teach without excessive external interference, enabling them to personally internationalize their curriculum if they wished to do so. The findings suggest that IoC is still a novel concept in Japan that may evolve in the dramatically altered higher education landscape going forward. In part 2 of the paper we report on how the initial findings regarding COIL from part 1 inspired a refocusing of our research; we subsequently conducted an additional 9 interviews with educators involved in a government-sponsored COIL project at 7 different Japanese universities in an attempt to better understand the perceived benefits and challenges of COIL as a novel approach to IoC. While this research is still ongoing, we present initial qualitative findings specific to these COIL projects in Japanese higher education in the latter part of the working paper.

Keywords: Collaborative online international learning (COIL), COVID-19, English medium instruction (EMI), Internationalization of the curriculum (IoC), Japanese higher education

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Part 1: Internationalization of the curriculum through EMI in Japanese higher education

Research and commentary on the internationalization of higher education has tended to focus on student mobility, but disparities in students' access to international opportunities and the challenges of studying abroad due to the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted the importance of reconceptualizing more innovative and equitable approaches to international education. One such approach is the internationalization of the curriculum (IoC), which has been gaining attention among scholars and policymakers of higher education in recent years. IoC has been defined as "the incorporation of international, intercultural, and/or global dimensions into the content of the curriculum as well as the learning outcomes, assessment tasks, teaching methods, and support services of a program of study" (Leask, 2015, p.9). A notable characteristic of IoC is that it is a form of internationalization that does not necessarily involve the physical cross-border mobility of people.

IoC has often been discussed and at times conflated with the related term of 'internationalization at home', which has been defined as "the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students, within domestic learning environments" (Beelen & Jones, 2015). The key difference here is that while some aspects or types of internationalized curricula could include an element of physical international mobility, internationalization at home inherently entails a type of IoC that takes place in the domestic university environment.

In the context of the ‘New Normal’ for higher education characterized by constraints on traditional mobility and increases in online provision due to the pandemic, forms of IoC aligning with the definition of ‘internationalization at home’ gain new relevance for policymakers and practitioners.

In Japan, debates about the internationalization of higher education have been ongoing since the 1980’s; however, IoC has never been at the center of the discussion (Ota, 2011). Some argue this is because since the Meiji era Japanese universities have imported most of the content of their curriculum from the West and followed Western models of education, and so there was an assumption that the curriculum is already ‘international’ (Ota, 2018). Therefore, in terms of internationalization, discussions had been mainly about the efforts to attract international students to study in Japan. This was part of Japan’s diplomatic strategy to build positive relationships with foreign countries, support human resource development of developing countries and as a measure to deal with Japan’s declining population of people under 18-years old (MEXT, n.d.).

To accomplish this goal, one approach that has been taken up by many universities is the establishment of English medium instruction (EMI) programs, which allowed non-Japanese-speaking international students to obtain credits and degrees by studying in English. EMI can be defined as “the use of the English language to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English” (Macaro, 2018, p.19). Many EMI

programs in Japanese universities were intended to accommodate both local and international students and provide a learning space for the development of intercultural awareness and competencies. An assumption made by policymakers is that EMI classes stimulate interaction of domestic and international students which leads to the development of those competencies (Sugimura, 2018). However, as we argue below, simply adding EMI programs to university curricula does not automatically lead to these desired educational outcomes; concerted efforts to internationalize the curriculum may be needed.

It is in the context of these EMI programs that we sought to explore the ideas and practices of IoC in Japanese higher education. With the COVID-19 pandemic drastically altering the international higher education landscape from 2020 onwards, our interest has expanded to include the ways IoC has evolved (and will continue to evolve) in EMI courses in the context of the 'New Normal', characterized by online and hybrid classes and the potential expansion of virtual student mobility[1]. As a first exploratory stage in a broader longitudinal project, our guiding research questions have been:

1) What factors do faculty members perceive to enable or block IoC in EMI programs?
2) How have IoC dynamics changed because of the pandemic? Are there new enablers and blockers?

Below are sections explaining the key concepts used to inform our research design and

[1] "Virtual student mobility (VSM) is a form of mobility that uses information and communication technologies to facilitate cross-border and/or inter-institutional academic, cultural, and experiential exchanges and collaboration. VSM can be embedded as part of the regular delivery of exchange and collaboration and/or be deployed as a response to emergencies that temporarily restrict physical mobility" (UNESCO IESALC, n.d.).

subsequent analysis, followed by a brief discussion of the contextual background of EMI in Japanese higher education. The description of the methods adopted for our study follows.

Key concepts

Intercultural competence

One of the rationales for promoting the internationalization of higher education is the development of students' intercultural awareness and competencies (Leask, 2015). Intercultural competence has been defined as "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge" (Deardorff, 2006, p.247). For some time, it was commonly believed that by increasing the diversity of students on a campus or in a classroom, international and local students will interact and gain an understanding about each other's perspectives, and will automatically develop intercultural awareness and competencies (Leask, 2015). However, many researchers have reported otherwise, suggesting that the development of intercultural competencies does not happen automatically when people from different nations or cultures inhabit the same institutional context (Hiller, 2010; Moeller & Osborn, 2014; Yonezawa, 2014). For example, the UK and Australia are educational hubs that attract many international students from around the world; however, international students have reported difficulties in connecting with local students and many of them leave having made no local friends (Leask, 2009). A study of international students in a U.S. university reported over half did not interact socially with host country nationals, with 27% self-segregating to interact only with students from their home countries (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013). These studies suggest that an increase in

international diversity on university campuses is insufficient in fostering the development of intercultural competencies; concerted support and pedagogical interventions are needed. For proponents of IoC, integrating international/intercultural elements (including the knowledge and experiences of a culturally diverse student body) into the pedagogical methods, content of curricula and broader support services are necessary to achieve this goal.

Curriculum

To explore ways in which curricula can be internationalized it is essential to consider the meaning and scope of the term itself. 'Curriculum' is a complex concept often used and defined in different ways. Multicultural education scholar Geneva Gay (2002) posits a typology of formal, symbolic and societal curricula, all of which routinely manifest in classrooms and have particular relevance to education for intercultural understanding. *Formal* curriculum refers to "the plans for instruction approved by the policy and governing bodies of educational systems" (p.108). *Symbolic* curriculum includes "images, symbols, icons, mottoes, awards, celebrations, and other artifacts that are used to teach students knowledge, skills, morals, and values" (p.108). In higher education, symbolic curriculum thus entails the representations and meanings experienced in the physical spaces in which students learn, both in classrooms and across university campuses. It also refers to the meanings embodied in university-sanctioned practices such as entrance exams, cultural festivals and graduation ceremonies. *Societal* curriculum expands the idea of the concept beyond campus

grounds, to include the “knowledge, ideas, and impressions about ethnic groups that are portrayed in the mass media”, representations which convey particular values, biases and stereotypes (p.109). These latter two types in particular relate to the widely theorized notion of a *hidden curriculum*, the “unstated norms, values and beliefs that are transmitted to students through the underlying structure of meaning in both the formal content as well as the social relations of school and classroom life” (Giroux & Penna, 1979, p.22).

In addition to these conceptions, Kelly (2009) rightly points out a distinction between the *planned* curriculum and the *received* curriculum, with ‘planned’ referring to the curriculum intended by policymakers, curriculum designers and educators, and ‘received’ meaning what is actually understood and experienced on the part of the students in reality. ‘Curriculum’ thus is an expansive and complex term, and one that has been defined to broadly encompass the *totality* of student experiences resulting from educational provision (Kelly, 2009). Taking these varied definitions into account, for the purposes of our study we understand curriculum to embody all of the aspects described in the definitions above, but filtered through the interpretations and implementation by educators in EMI classrooms. In this respect we are interested most in the dimension of curriculum that is the remit of the classroom educator, who in some instances may adopt, adapt and implement a course-level component of a broader degree- or institution-level curriculum, or design and implement their own. In this sense the internationalization of curricula could occur at any of these levels, but our concern is with its enactment in practice in the classroom.

IoC and its enablers and blockers

Leask's definition of IoC presented above is comprehensive in scope, but what does the incorporation of international, intercultural, and/or global dimensions actually entail? In practice, IoC has been described as making a curriculum more inclusive and flexible in terms of accepting the possibilities of different ideas. For Haigh (2002), IoC is about "fair play"; it values social inclusion, cultural pluralism and world citizenship and is to meet the needs of all students for their learning ambitions, regardless of their national, ethnic, cultural, religious, social or gender identities (Haigh, 2002). Educators should provide alternative perspectives through materials, readings, speakers, and other content from diverse sources to make a course more inclusive. By doing so, the dominant paradigm of a subject or a course could give way to non-dominant perspectives (Kitano, 1997). However, changing traditions and culture associated with academic disciplines is not always easy; emergent paradigms are often blocked by resistance from the old guard.

IoC thus requires educators who are open minded and skilled in managing a complex teaching and learning environment. It needs educators who can identify and prevent biased behaviors as they may generate a hidden curriculum, which prescribes the knowledge and behavior valued in the classroom (Sadker & Sadker, 1992). They need to have the ability to utilize the cultural diversity of the classroom as a learning resource and must be interculturally competent themselves. This entails understanding their own social, cultural and educational background and that of their students, and adapting

their teaching approaches based on the needs of students (Leask, 2007).

In addition to the discussion of IoC presented above, Leask developed a useful conceptual framework for investigating the possibilities for IoC's effective implementation in classrooms and university campuses (Leask, 2015). Leask situates “knowledge in and across” academic disciplines as central to IoC (ibid., p.28). She then posits how “dominant and emerging paradigms” in the disciplines are foundational to three pedagogical and organizational “curriculum design elements”: “requirements of professional practice and citizenship”, “assessment of student learning”, and “systematic development across the program in all students” (ibid., p.28). The other portion of the framework represents the contexts that may have varying levels of influence on decisions of academic members of staff considering IoC. These are the ‘institutional’, ‘local’, ‘national and regional’ and ‘global’ contexts (ibid.).

Leask also delineates the possibilities for IoC by identifying what she calls ‘enablers’ and ‘blockers’, positing three types of each: cultural, institutional and personal. These concepts in particular have been central to our study. Cultural blockers come from the values, beliefs and dominant ways of thinking in a discipline or a subject. They become blockers when presumptions and beliefs about the discipline could be an obstacle for change. This includes skepticism or denial about the relevance of IoC for a specific discipline or subject. Institutional blockers are those related to the characteristics, policies and practices of universities. Personal blockers are related to the mindset and skillset of the educators. These include a possible lack in the capacity, willingness,

commitment or confidence of the faculty members to engage in IoC (Leask, 2015).

On the other hand, enablers could be any factors in a university environment that support educators in developing and providing internationalized curricula. These factors could include official policy, management practices, leadership, organizational culture, human resource procedures, professional development or reward structures, provision of training and opportunities for self-development (Leask, 2015, p.49).

Based on the ideas of IoC presented by Leask and other scholars, we developed our research design, interview protocol, and *a priori* approach to data analysis. We move now to a discussion of the context to which we applied this analytical lens: EMI programs in Japanese universities.

EMI in Japanese universities

The development of EMI programs in Japan has been spurred on in recent years by a series of funded government initiatives (Rose & McKinley, 2018). The government's internationalization strategy of increasing the number of international students on Japan's university campuses started with "The International Students 100,000 Plan" in 1983 and continued with "The International Students 300,000 Plan" aiming to invite 300,000 students from abroad by 2020. In response, universities have set up new courses, programs, and departments that operate in English and service offices to make the institutions more accessible for international students. In one instance, the government provided funding through a project called "The Global 30 Project" to 13 selected universities to establish new EMI programs and departments. As a result of

this project, more than 100 new EMI degree programs were established within the selected universities (Shimauchi, 2017). This trend also made offering EMI a symbol of an 'international' university, which prompted other universities to also develop EMI. As of 2018, there were 305 universities that offer EMI (in terms of courses, programs or departments) at the undergraduate level and 227 universities at the graduate level (MEXT, 2020).

Developing 'Global jinzai'

Another ambition of many internationalization efforts, including curricula and EMI, is to create graduates who are capable of communicating, engaging and working in a culturally diverse globalized work environment (Killick, 2014; Leask, 2015). Graduates need skills and abilities to adapt to an unfamiliar culture and appreciate differences to work in a diverse environment and multicultural context. In a similar sense, '*Global jinzai*' (global human resources) is a term that is frequently used when internationalization of higher education is discussed in Japan.

According to Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), a 'global human resource' refers to a person "who can positively meet the challenges and succeed in the global field, as the basis for improving Japan's global competitiveness and enhancing the ties between the nations" (MEXT, 2012). Another government agency defined the concept somewhat differently, indicating the factors needed for the development of global human resources are "1) linguistic and communication skills, 2)

self-direction and positiveness, a spirit for challenge, cooperativeness and flexibility, a sense of responsibility and mission, and 3) understanding of other cultures and a sense of identity as a Japanese[2]" (The Council on Promotion of Human Resource for Globalization Development, 2011). While notions of global competition and national identity are unrelated to intercultural competence and IoC, a number of the other ideas expressed by the government align with accepted definitions.

The call for developing self-directed and positive global human resources relates to the widely publicized concern in Japan about the 'inward tendency' of Japanese students (Ota, 2011). This concern is based on the decrease of the number of Japan's outbound study abroad students and a trend for those that do participate choosing short-term rather than long-term programs. There are a few reasons behind this tendency, including students not wanting to miss job-hunting seasons, the high cost of travel and a lack of language proficiency (Burgess, 2015; Shimauchi, 2017). As of 2019, there were total of 107,346 Japanese students who studied abroad and more than half of them stayed abroad for less than a month (MEXT, 2021). Including those short-term mobile students, approximately only 3 to 4-percent of Japanese students partake in international mobility opportunities. In 2020 the global COVID-19 pandemic further limited student mobility and the number was reduced dramatically.

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[2] The ethnic nationalism inherent in factor 3 is indicative of a longstanding and often criticized trend in Japan's internationalization efforts, that the aim of Japan's strategy has been to "reinforce the idea of Japanese as being different from all other people and for that difference to be properly understood outside Japan" (Goodman, 2007, p 72). Others have argued that emphasis on a mono-cultural 'Japanese identity' overlooks the multi-cultural nature Japanese society (Horie, 2002). These underlying ideas shaping internationalization policy could lead to challenges finding shared intercultural spaces for learning in EMI classrooms.

EMI programs in Japanese universities are thus typically established with three aims: 1) to attract international students, 2) to foster intercultural/global competencies of Japanese students (i.e., creating *'Global jinzai'*), and 3) to gain 'international', 'global' or 'world-class' university status (Morizumi, 2015; Shimauchi, 2017). The degree of emphasis on these aims frequently varies, and Shimauchi (2017) categorizes EMI programs based on their main aims and characteristics into three models: the *Global Human Resources* (GHR) *model*, the *Crossroad model* and the '*Dejima' model*. The GHR model mainly targets domestic students, and the curriculum focuses on 'international' studies and foreign language skills. These programs are regarded as a space to develop the language and communication skills necessary for students' career development after graduation. Some of these programs also offer English teacher's licenses which allow them to teach English at secondary schools in Japan. The crossroad model intends to accommodate both domestic and international students. These programs typically have two curriculum tracks – one for domestic and one for international students – which start out separately but are designed to intersect like a crossroads at a later stage. The programs often offer courses on international or regional issues with an interdisciplinary approach, as well as Japanese and Asian studies courses to attract international students. The Dejima model mainly targets international students and refers to EMI programs or departments that are siloed from other departments, named after *Dejima* island in Japan. Dejima was an island used as the only place designated for foreign trade during the Edo period, serving to segregate foreigners from mainland Japan. Similar to the island, this model of EMI program is often isolated within the university and domestic students rarely join to study together

with international students. These programs often focus on STEM fields to attract international students since Japan is relatively advanced in these fields (Shimauchi, 2017).

Challenges of EMI in Japanese universities

One of the oft-mentioned challenges of conducting EMI in a Japanese university is the linguistic issue (Murata et al., 2017; Morizumi, 2015). This can refer to the challenge of teaching content to students whose first language is not English, challenges related to the English proficiency of the instructor, and teaching a class where students have diverse language proficiencies. This discussion leads to the question about how EMI fits into the Japanese university context. There is another form of education called 'content and language integrated learning' (CLIL) that became especially popular in Europe (Ikeda, 2018). The main difference between the two forms is the inclusion of language learning as part of the objectives. While CLIL has the dual objectives of both language and content learning, the focus of EMI is not on language learning but on the learning of a subject in English as a medium of instruction (Dearden, 2014). At the government policy level, there are more discussions on EMI than CLIL in Japan. However, in some universities, faculty members are facing the dilemma of whether they should also support language learning of the students aside from content learning when the language proficiencies of the students vary (Brown & Iyobe, 2014) or are insufficient.

Another challenge mentioned is the lack of faculty members who are capable and

willing to take on the greater workload and responsibility of teaching EMI classes (Morizumi, 2015), with non-native English-speaking EMI instructors reporting difficulties teaching in English regardless of their proficiency levels (Aizawa & Rose, 2019; Kuwamura, 2018). Although the number of EMI programs is increasing every year, the scale of these programs is relatively small, and one of the reasons for this could be the lack of human resources and qualified faculty (Brown & Iyobe, 2014; Kuwamura, 2018). A related issue is EMI programs in Japan often recruit fixed-term contract-based faculty members, and it is often the case that with the end of their contracts, the curricular innovations they developed during their contract also end (Morizumi, 2015).

Moreover, now with the COVID-19 pandemic, many universities and educators shifted their classes to online or hybrid forms and faculty members are facing new challenges. Although this shift limits face-to-face interactions in the classroom and traditional internationalization activities, it also presents new opportunities for Japanese universities, including possibilities to adopt new approaches such as IoC. We argue that now is a good time to reconsider the opportunities and challenges of IoC in the Japanese university context. The paper now turns to a discussion of our project which attempts to do just that.

Methods

Our study was designed as a qualitative, grounded exploration of the ideas of EMI educators about IoC in a variety of institutional contexts. More specifically, this study involved semi-structured interviews with 11 participants at different universities involved in teaching EMI courses, supported by policy and program document analysis.

Participants were offered the opportunity to do the interviews in English or Japanese, and all signed informed consent forms at the outset. An attempt was made to select a sample of case universities that represented the general makeup of higher education institutions in Japan, with 1 national, 1 public, and 8 private universities selected as cases. In the end we were able to secure interviews at 3 national universities and 5 private, most of which are located in Tokyo, but still achieved the goal of conducting 11 interviews with educators representing various academic specialisms. Most of these programs aligned with the "crossroad model" that accommodates both international and domestic students and offers interdisciplinary studies in the social sciences. We recognize the lack of adequate representation of a local public university, interviews with educators in STEM fields, and 'Dejima' models of EMI programs. The findings from this study are thus qualitatively skewed towards crossroads and GHR EMI programs primarily in the social sciences, which limits their applicability in other contexts.

Table 1. Information about interview participants

	Career stage	EMI program/course	Type	EMI model
1	Professor	Social Science	Private	GHR
2	Professor	Social Science	Private	Crossroad
3	Professor	Social Science	Private	Crossroad
4	Professor	Social Science	Private	Crossroad
5	Professor	Social Science	National	Crossroad
6	Professor	STEM	National	Crossroad
7	Associate Professor	Social Science	National	GHR
8	Associate Professor	Social Science/Humanities	Private	GHR
9	Assistant Professor	Social Science	Private	GHR
10	Assistant Professor	Social Science	Private	Crossroad
11	Assistant Professor	Social Science	Private	Crossroad

Interviews lasted about 1 hour, and the interview protocol evolved based on our reflective post-interview discussions. Questions broadly covered participants' academic and international education experiences, ideas about what IoC meant to them, and approaches to teaching and learning before moving into discussions about the perceived blockers and enablers of IoC in their particular educational contexts. Participants were assured that all information that might identify them or their universities would be kept confidential in the hopes that they would feel comfortable speaking freely about their experiences. Details of the interviewees including academic specialism, EMI program and affiliated university are omitted from this paper for this reason.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed. We each conducted thematic content analysis of the audio recordings and transcripts, then met online to compare our ideas.

The resultant discussion led to agreement on a number of emergent themes that would best inform our study going forward. These themes are presented and discussed below.

Findings

Analysis of the interview data revealed a broad range of enablers and blockers of IoC in EMI programs at Japanese universities. A number of these did not fit neatly into the extant categories proposed by Leask, and a few of them suggest that the conceptual framework for IoC can be problematized and expanded.

The 'cultural' level

The first of these had to do with the 'cultural' level of IoC enablers and blockers. Leask describes how approaches to IoC must be grounded in the academic discipline which constitutes the content and learning objectives of an internationalized curriculum. However, in the Japanese context many non-STEM EMI degree programs lacked this disciplinary foundation. Both GHR and crossroad model EMI programs often incorporate a range of subjects from the Humanities and Social Sciences and are supplemented by CLIL-type English language classes to respond to the needs and academic interests of both international and domestic students. Titles of these majors often included terms like 'global', 'international' and 'interdisciplinary'. There were exceptions, with some programs housed firmly in particular disciplines, but the substantial presence of EMI programs lacking obvious disciplinarity poses a challenge to the applicability of Leask's framework in the Japanese context. As IoC cannot be grounded in a particular academic culture in these cases, there must be some other foundation or pedagogical

approach upon which to develop an internationalized curriculum.

On the other hand, although we only had one interview with an educator from a STEM field, it was pointed out that faculty members in STEM fields often regard STEM curricula to be international by nature; as such there is less impetus to further internationalize the curriculum or incorporate learning objectives related to intercultural competencies. The perception appeared to be that IoC was irrelevant in these fields, despite the fact that STEM subjects are the most conducive to international research collaboration and cross-border co-authorship of scientific publications is on the rise. In this sense it appears that entrenched epistemic beliefs about certain academic disciplines served as blockers to new possibilities for IoC.

The government level: Opportunities and limitations from government policy

Another notable finding was the importance of the central government in setting policy and steering the internationalization of higher education in Japan. This steering and control are reflected in fixed-term funding opportunities for universities, which create an environment of intense competition both between universities and amongst faculties and departments within them. In this context, universities often develop their internationalization policies in line with government agendas in hopes of securing much needed funding. While a successful funding application could be seen as an enabler of IoC, to date the internationalization of the curriculum has not been a significant

component of the government's internationalization objectives. Instead, policies for increases in international students, faculty, and the creation of 'global human resources' through study abroad and EMI provision point to a quantitative approach to internationalization. As such, universities often direct their efforts toward demonstrable quantitative gains and neglect opportunities for qualitative reform (Brotherhood et al., 2019; Ota, 2018). This has implications for pedagogy and IoC. As was mentioned above, simply combining students and faculty from different cultures in an EMI context does not inherently mean intercultural competencies (or 'global *jinzai'*) will be developed.

Collaborative online international learning

There is one noteworthy exception to the predominantly quantitative approach to internationalization taken by the government that has salience in the context of the pandemic. In 2018, the government started providing funds under its Inter-University Exchange Project to a few selected universities for establishing Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) programs with partner universities in the US. As a result, 10 programs from 13 universities (national, public and private) were funded under this project (MEXT, 2018a). COIL is form of virtual student mobility that allows educators and students to communicate and collaborate with partner institutions around the world using internet-based tools (Naicker et al., 2021). This new pedagogy is now receiving attention as a more cost-effective approach to internationalization and development of interculturally competent students capable of working in cross-cultural environments (Appiah-Kubi & Annan, 2020). The international nature of COIL means that many

programs entail EMI provision. COIL is thus a potentially attractive internationalization option for many Japanese universities with extant EMI programs, since it is easier for Japanese students to participate as it doesn't inherently involve costly and time-consuming physical international mobility.

While universities involved in the government's Inter-University Exchange Project COIL initiative have been implementing their COIL courses since 2018, this initiative has special relevance as Japanese universities navigate internationalization in the era of the pandemic. The virtual mobility of students through COIL is inherently pedagogical and entails internationalization of curricula as it incorporates international elements, and as such this funding opportunity is a clear enabler (and an outlier in the government's broader strategy for internationalization).

For a more detailed discussion of COIL in Japan, including emergent findings from an analysis of interviews with educators involved with COIL, see Part 2 of this working paper, below.

Formal procedures of approval and revision of degree programs

Another reported constraint put upon universities by the government has to do with laws and regulations for the establishment and revision of degree programs and faculties at Japanese universities. All courses and syllabi must be submitted to the government for the establishment approval, and significant changes can only be made after the program has been in place for four years (National Institution for Academic Degrees and

Quality Enhancement of Higher Education, n.d.). As such this presents a limitation on opportunities for the *formal* inclusion of IoC content into such programs. The word 'formal' is emphasized here because it does not bar the incorporation of IoC in more informal capacities, at the discretion of the course instructor. This connects to the important theme of academic freedom in Japanese higher education, which is discussed in more detail below.

<u>Effects of policies in sectors outside of higher education</u>

A final example of the government level influence highlights how policy initiatives in sectors outside higher education can still shape dynamics in EMI classrooms at universities. One educator who teaches future English language teachers explained how the recent MEXT policy to include compulsory English language classes in Japanese elementary schools led to an influx of students taking her course as a requirement, many of whom had low levels of interest and ability in English. This created a class environment of substantially mixed abilities and motivation levels, leading to challenges for teaching and learning. Challenges posed by wide-ranging English proficiency levels were mentioned by other educators as well, findings which align with extant research. Many Japanese students educated domestically reportedly struggled to keep up with counterparts who have lived abroad (i.e., returnee Japanese), and with highly proficient international students and native speakers of English on exchanges in Japan. Differing levels of ability and confidence coupled with varying culturally-influenced communication styles create environments where basic academic discussion is a challenge, let alone the development of intercultural understanding.

The abovementioned examples of the power of the government to shape the activities of universities point to an important dimension of potential enablers and blockers of IoC. While Leask states that “[r]egional and national matters and related government policies around internationalization are the background against which institutions formulate policy and academic staff do or do not engage in internationalization of the curriculum” (Leask, 2015, p.32), we suggest that the role of the government in the case of Japanese higher education is much more than just a ‘background’; as a regulator and gatekeeper of quality assurance as well as a funder, the government plays a major role in shaping curricula in Japanese higher education. With ‘cultural’ enablers/blockers focused on academic disciplinarity, and the ‘institutional’ level focused on the policies, practices and structures of universities, an equally-weighted space for the analysis of this other influential enabler/blocker is needed.

While government-level agendas for internationalization have a strong effect on IoC (or the lack thereof) at Japanese universities, our study suggests that the most powerful force for curricular reform were the educators themselves. This is in part due to the current lack of explicit IoC policy at the institutional and governmental levels, but also due to the relatively high level of autonomy given to academics in charge of delivering their EMI courses. This connects to the long-standing commitment in Japanese higher education towards faculty autonomy and academic freedom, which we suggest acts as both an enabler *and* a blocker of IoC.

The tradition of allowing for a high level of freedom for academics to choose what and how to teach their courses means that university-level policies for internationalization and IoC can be met with resistance from faculties and individual educators. On the other hand, it largely allows for individuals to incorporate content and pedagogy as they see fit. In this respect, IoC becomes challenging to implement in a top-down, university-wide (even faculty/department-level) manner, but easier to do so based on the volition of individual educators for their courses. The tradition of faculty autonomy is arguably under threat however, due to the increased power given to university management as a result of the corporatization of Japan's national universities (*hojinka*) and the growing adoption of New Public Management (NPM) practices across the sector (Vickers, 2020).

The personal level

The personal level proved to be the most salient of the levels in Leask's enablers/blockers in the Japanese context. Educators that were familiar with the IoC concept did make efforts to incorporate various international dimensions into their teaching practices, although they also admitted to struggling with the concept in terms of practical application and assessment.

Educators' personal experiences and presumptions about disciplines

Faculty members who reported caring about IoC often had international experiences themselves, which had subsequent influence in designing their curriculum. Some mentioned that because of their experience abroad and opportunities they had they

wanted their students to have similar opportunities. Others found connections to IoC through their research interests. One educator mentioned their research on "perceptions" and how that affected the values they carry for teaching, which aligned with some of the key concepts for intercultural communicative competency.

These educators where in the minority, however. The majority of those interviewed were not familiar with IoC, arguably because their academic expertise lay in disciplines outside of international education. Some projected an idea of what IoC was by drawing on the aspects of their disciplines that were international in nature. To these educators, simply teaching about international or global issues through course content entailed that their curriculum was internationalized, and little more needed to be done to achieve IoC. This aligns with findings from a similar study of university educators in Hong Kong conducted by Zou et al. (2020), which described this attitude as the least sophisticated of five conceptions of IoC identified. They write that at this level, "IoC is viewed primarily as the responsibility of teachers, who incorporate internationally relevant frameworks and materials into their content, whilst students are largely seen as knowledge recipients" (ibid, p.10).

A teacher-dominated approach

This conception echoes the banking concept of education described and criticized by Paolo Freire (1970) as a teacher-dominated approach that ignores the agency, creativity and capacity of students, in this case to develop their own understandings of international and intercultural awareness. By contrast, dominant theories of intercultural

communicative competence highlight the importance of self-awareness and attitudes of the learner, such as respect, openness, and curiosity (Moeller & Osborn, 2014). This centrality of the learner in the active construction of knowledge and intercultural skills was largely absent from the narratives of most of the interviewees, perhaps because the development of these skills was not considered to be connected to the learning objectives of their courses.

The institutional level

Through the analysis it became clear that parsing the personal and institutional levels into distinct categories was a challenge, as many institutional level characteristics shaped personal behaviors and attitudes towards what was possible for IoC.

Marginalization of fixed-term contract-based faculty

A common institutional-level blocker was the fact that many educators in Japanese higher education are in fixed, limited-term contract positions, which often have associated rules that prevent them from participating in faculty meetings and influencing university policy. Some of the participants who were knowledgeable of IoC and eager to foster its development at their institutions were in these relatively powerless positions at various points in their careers. One faculty member in such a position wanted to develop a COIL course utilizing their international network, but was told it would be difficult to accomplish in an official capacity because there was no one to take over the course when they were required to leave the university when their contract expired. This

is one example of how the marginalization of faculty on fixed-term contracts can be detrimental to the qualitative internationalization of higher education, as opportunities to affect meaningful reform are hampered by unequal hiring practices.

Lack of administrative support

A few educators described how the organizational structure of their university entailed that while a centralized international office existed, it was up to the individual faculties to organize their own international committees, and competition emerged amongst the faculties with regard to international exchange opportunities. A foreign faculty member on one such committee described how the work of establishing new exchange partnerships was considered to be their responsibility, despite lacking administrative support to do so. The burden of this additional work must then be assumed on top of teaching and research responsibilities, the added stress of which acts as a demotivator to pursue internationalization. The discussions of these more traditional modes of internationalizing campuses and classrooms through increased international exchange of course become complicated in the context of the pandemic. In the era of the 'new normal' for higher education, new blockers and enablers arise.

IoC in the 'New Normal': new challenges and opportunities

The COVID-19 pandemic forced many universities in Japan to shift to online and hybrid modes of learning in 2020, and early attempts to return to face-to-face teaching were thwarted in major cities like Tokyo by a rise in cases and renewed state of emergency

declarations by the government. This exogenous shock to the higher education system laid bare the many areas in which universities were technologically lacking, both in infrastructure and teaching capacity. While some educators have reportedly struggled with teaching and assessment in these novel online environments (The Japan Times, 2020), several participants in our study expressed how the move to online classes provided opportunities to re-evaluate and improve upon ingrained teaching practices. One educator described that pre-recording lectures and allowing students to view them in their own time freed up class time for discussions and going deeper into weekly topics based on student input. They mentioned how even when classes return to face-to-face, they would most likely continue this 'flipped classroom' format for their classes. In EMI contexts with English language learners, this approach has reported benefits because students could watch and re-watch lectures at their own pace and add subtitles for videos uploaded to YouTube. This reportedly aided comprehension and provided helpful preparation time for discussions with classmates. In this respect, the pandemic has presented opportunities to incorporate new pedagogical practices and improve learning outcomes for students.

Downsides to online learning were reported as well. The dilemma of requiring students to turn on their video cameras raised important questions about privacy, socio-economic inequality, and student well-being. Keeping cameras off or optional seemed to be the dominant approach for these reasons, but this led to challenges of gauging student engagement and fostering interactive group discussions. The challenges of experiencing meaningful interactions with classmates in online settings are arguably

exacerbated in intercultural classes, as opportunities for reading non-verbal communication ques are dramatically reduced.

While online platforms may not be the ideal for communication and meaningful interaction, the possibilities for online classes to enable for virtual exchange with students in other countries is significant. Most of the EMI educators we interviewed were not involved in virtual exchanges in their courses. One participant, however, was involved in the administration of COIL courses, and offered some novel insights:

> COIL is a pedagogy, and our policy is not to create a new course, but rather make a preexisting class COIL. So, we've got 15 weeks and 5 weeks of that would be class from a partner institution. Before it was just a domestic traditional course, now with COIL the international component is added to it. So that's definitely a true way of internationalization; revising curriculum, changing the existing course.

This approach to changing pre-existing domestic courses by adding the COIL component is a clear example of IoC. We recognized that it would be valuable to conduct more interviews with educators involved in the government's COIL initiative, and as such devised the second phase of our research study introduced in Part 2 below. We suggest that COIL courses may become a bigger component of Japan's internationalization strategies in the New Normal era, and extant EMI programs would provide an entry point to this new approach.

Discussion

Based on our pilot study we suggest that internationalization of curricula is generally 'not on the radar' of most of the EMI educators we interviewed. This may connect to the lack of emphasis on IoC at the government and institutional levels, and also to a lack of awareness or perceived relevance of IoC at the individual level. While IoC was largely an unfamiliar concept, educators were generally aware of the range of challenges and enablers they faced in achieving their learning objectives in both traditional face-to-face and online EMI classrooms, many of which concerned the possibilities for IoC.

A number of these challenges applied to any type of curricular change in Japanese higher education. Government-level internationalization strategies, funding streams and legal frameworks constrain possibilities for formalized curricular innovation, but the general acknowledgement of faculty autonomy allows for academic freedom and IoC at the individual level. At the 'cultural' level, dominant paradigms may hinder possibilities for the open-minded incorporation of IoC in some established academic disciplines, while the lack of disciplinarity in many EMI programs in the social sciences pose challenges to the practical applicability of established theories of IoC. While policies aimed at expanding virtual student mobility may open up new spaces for pedagogical innovation, it appears that the main driver for IoC in Japanese higher education will come down to the volition of individual educators. As such, for those who wish to implement IoC in Japanese universities an advocacy approach that incorporates professional development and workshops for educators may be the best way forward.

The ongoing pandemic continues to challenge the extant higher education system including modes of teaching and learning and the provision of international education. Novel pedagogical responses such as virtual student mobility and flipped classrooms facilitating more student-centered 'active' learning may open up new possibilities for IoC. The probable expansion of virtual student mobility in the 'New Normal' era may bring IoC into the spotlight, and it became clear that further exploration of the existing COIL programs involved with the Inter-University Exchange Project is warranted. While Part 1 of our paper has focused on the ideas of educators and the side of curriculum development that could be described as *planned* or *formal*, ultimately, it is the curriculum that is *received* by students that truly matters. The diversity of students enrolled in EMI courses and their active involvement in the construction of their own intercultural competencies should be acknowledged as a key component in the quest to develop 'global jinzai'. It is our hope that this perspective will be incorporated into future internationalization policies and the teaching philosophies of educators in EMI classrooms. At this early stage in our project, our broad conclusion is Japanese higher education and its internationalization efforts are in a new period of exciting and dramatic change, and we look forward to a continued investigation of these changes as they emerge in the coming years.

Part 2: Internationalization of the curriculum through COIL in Japanese higher education

In this section of the paper we will report on initial findings from the qualitative analysis of 9 interviews with academics involved in the government-funded COIL project at Japanese universities described in the earlier section of this paper. The methods for interviews and analysis were similar to that of part 1. We attempted to interview educators from each of the participating universities involved in the project, and have accessed participants from 7 of the 13 universities at the time of this writing. To provide some context, a brief literature review of the COIL project and its specific programs in Japan is provided below.

As mentioned in Part 1, 13 universities (10 programs) were selected for the MEXT's COIL project, distinguished by fund type A and type B programs. 12 universities were funded for the type A program, with the main aim of fostering global human resources not only through COIL but by using COIL as a gateway for a physical exchange program. The type B program aims to build a platform for COIL partnerships in addition to promoting exchange. Only one university, Kansai University, which had been promoting COIL for some time prior to the project, was selected for type B. They are expected to promote COIL across the universities in Japan by sharing knowledge and information regarding COIL, matching Japanese and US universities for COIL partnerships, and planning and organizing workshops for faculty and staff development (MEXT, 2018b).

As a result, COIL is now offered in several universities in Japan in various forms. The methods of COIL vary depending on how it is perceived by the universities and the faculty members and its implementation capacity. Some universities have created their own typology of COIL based on the purpose, the language of instruction, and the type of the partner university. For example, the purpose of COIL could be language, cultural, or content learning (Kodama, 2018; Ikeda, 2020), and the language of instruction could be English, Japanese, or both. The type of partner university could be the US, as encouraged by the MEXT, or a university in other countries or Japan, or a combination of any of these. Although the MEXT project recognizes the US universities as primary partners, it does not limit partnerships with universities in other countries.

For instance, the COIL joint project implemented by Sophia University, Ochanomizu University, and Shizuoka Prefectural University divides COIL types into Japanese COIL, domestic COIL, and regular COIL. Japanese COIL refers to COIL classes using the Japanese language (fully or partially). Its primary purpose is language learning, as the students could practice English and Japanese by communicating with each other. Domestic COIL refers to a COIL class partnered by two Japanese universities. It provides opportunities for international and domestic students at different Japanese universities to interact with each other. Domestic COIL could be a significant opportunity, especially for universities with few international students (Sawasaki, 2020). Regular COIL classes are EMI classes that provide collaborative learning opportunities with foreign universities, synchronous or asynchronous.

Nanzan University has a different typology of its COIL classes: basic COIL, academic COIL, and problem-based learning (PBL) COIL. Each of these COIL types has different expected learning outcomes. Basic COIL is considered a beginner-level class for simple cultural and language exchange, while academic COIL includes academic discussions. PBL COIL is designed as an advanced practical class where students research and discuss together on social issues and propose solutions.

The initial goal of COIL introduction set by the MEXT and most of the universities was to increase the number of inbound and outbound students and strengthen the university partnerships between Japan and the US using COIL as a starting point (MEXT, 2018b). However, the COVID-19 pandemic changed the purpose and importance of COIL. As physical international mobility was restricted, COIL started to develop and launch as an alternative international learning activity (Fujiyama, 2021).

As of this writing, most of the literature on COIL in Japan are case studies of records of COIL implementation at individual universities, and there are no studies that comprehensively look at the effects of COIL. Looking at the different case studies of COIL in Japanese universities, it became evident that COIL has been implemented in different forms and there are various challenges faced by the faculty members at the class and university levels. Some of the challenges mentioned are a lack of awareness of the importance of COIL within the university (Ikeda, 2020), a lack of faculty members willing to conduct COIL (Sawasaki, 2020), and miscommunications via online tools for the students (Kodama, 2018). It is reported that managing the COIL class has more

challenges than regular classes for faculty members (Kodama, 2018).

The lack of studies examining COIL beyond policy description and institutional case studies supports our choice to engage in an exploratory qualitative analysis across cases. Initial findings from this exploratory study are presented below.

Initial findings and discussion

Through the interviews a number of important insights came to light, and it is our intention to continue interviewing more participants and undertake a comprehensive document analysis before synthesizing our findings into another paper.

In the previous version of our paper on IoC and EMI (published in *Higher Education Forum*) we suggested that 'political or diplomatic agendas of the Japanese government' may be enabling IoC through COIL with the United States, which could conversely block other opportunities for funded virtual exchange with partners in East Asia and the wider region. However, interviews with academics involved in the COIL program highlighted that the situation was more complex and nuanced. A number of the academics interviewed described how the funded COIL projects at their institutions were often extended to include existing partner universities in East and Southeast Asia, with virtual exchanges taking place with countries such as China, Mongolia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Marshall Islands and the Philippines.

Interestingly, key MEXT documents related to the program have notably different titles in Japanese and English. While the English title refers specifically *and only* to US

partner universities, the Japanese title 'COIL *gata kyouiku wo katsuyoushita beikokutō no daigakukan koryū keisei shien*, uses the term '*beikokutō',* which means the 'U.S., etc.' As such, it appears that actors at different levels at participating universities interpret this term in different ways. While some might focus on US-Japan exchanges, others build on existing links and utilize the COIL platform to engage in exchange with a range of countries.

One interviewee described how the US-Japan COIL project was deemed mutually beneficial to the two countries for the following reasons: first, the rapidly rising tuition fees in the United States in the past decade meant that reciprocal exchange agreements were unfeasible because of the dramatic difference in tuition costs in the two countries. For example, some US partner universities wanted to send 3 US students to Japan while only being willing to accept one student from Japan, while others were unwilling to engage in exchanges at all. Second, this coupled with a general decline in Japanese students studying abroad in the US, an issue the Japanese government wanted to address. Similarly the American Council on Education (ACE) acknowledged that since few American students choose Asia as a study destination, and only 1.9% of American students study abroad in Japan, the project was introduced to increase student mobility and strengthen university partnerships between the two countries utilizing COIL (MEXT, 2018c).

The reported intention of the COIL project at its inception was to give students an opportunity to make connections and build intercultural communicative competences

before taking part in actual study abroad. However, with the COVID pandemic COIL became the main medium through which to foster student exchange, and it became clear to many that these experiences could be expanded to include more students. This development also had an effect on the attitudes and available technological infrastructure at Japanese universities with regard to virtual exchange. Before the pandemic, there was little support from some university administration offices for financing virtual exchange, but once the pandemic was underway, many universities purchased Zoom licenses and enhanced wifi capacity on their campuses. These developments created a new foundation upon which COIL projects could be supported and, theoretically, expanded.

Challenges

A number of challenges have remained, however, many of them are the same blockers that have impeded the realization of IoC on Japanese university campuses more broadly. As with IoC, lack of a) awareness, b) intercultural skills, c) international experiences and connections, and d) English language ability all were reported as barriers that impede the expansion of COIL projects in Japan.

A number of blockers specific to COIL were also reported. One of these was the challenge of conducting real-time virtual exchanges across vastly different timezones, with students in one or the other country (e.g. Japan or the US) frequently joining classes in the middle of the night. While these problems could be remedied with

asynchronous teaching and learning approaches, a more difficult problem that was reported was that some students came away from the COIL experience not with enhanced intercultural awareness but instead expressing nationally-framed cultural stereotypes. The educator who reported this observation highlighted the importance of teachers capable of effectively intervening when stereotyping occurs, echoing the recommendations from previous studies highlighting that “communication does not equal intercultural learning if it is not supported by specific tasks, tools and teacher moderation” (Rubin & Guth, 2015, p. 21).

Finding suitable partners was described as a key aspect of a successful COIL project. While COIL often develops from existing collegial networks, when starting from scratch, communication and collaboration with faculty members from different linguistic, cultural and pedagogical contexts may present a number of challenges. Aligning content is important, but the personalities of collaborating faculty members are also important. Flexibility and willingness to compromise were described as important characteristics for successful collaboration.

Another blocker reported was the lack of institutional support at some institutions for maintaining and expanding COIL. The MEXT-funded project enters its final year in 2023, and after that universities may be expected to maintain their COIL programs on their own. Participating universities now benefit from COIL coordinators funded by MEXT to help manage their programs. Without institutional level leadership and administrative support, a number of interviewees lamented that it will be difficult to

expand their programs, and it will take the efforts of motivated faculty members to keep their COIL courses going. One interviewee described how while international collaborations are measured at some 'Top Global Universities', COIL is not measured. Ideally some universities will recognize the potential for COIL to contribute to internationalization of their campuses, acknowledge the educators who are putting in the effort, and find means to keep their programs going.

Opportunities

A reported opportunity for COIL in Japan is the possibility for fostering more pluralistic forms of internationalization that do not hinge on the English language. While English was reported as a barrier by some, unlike EMI courses, faculty members involved in COIL do not necessarily need to have high-level English language skills beyond that required for organizing the course with international partners, and students themselves may be able to take courses taught in Japanese with English-language or language exchange COIL components as opposed to EMI courses taught entirely in English. As mentioned, Japanese COIL has also been developed at some institutions. Thus, COIL may provide more flexibility for students and educators at Japanese universities to engage in IoC who might otherwise struggle in English-only or EMI contexts.

A further opportunity mentioned was the way in which COIL can foster a culture of collaboration at an institution, beyond the international collaboration of the COIL program itself. For example, at one university, faculty members who were involved in a

COIL program became increasingly involved in collaborations with one another, irrespective of the COIL program. Previous ideas that courses and curricula are the remit of individual educators may be becoming replaced at some institutions with a new culture that normalizes collaboration.

Another element of the benefit of collaboration through COIL was the way it provided an impetus for educators to revisit their own course content and teaching methods, adapting and improving their teaching beyond their COIL courses. One faculty member described how they had been teaching multiculturalism in Japan for many years, but after collaborating with a US partner, they encountered and adopted new approaches to teaching the subject. Another educator adopted more student-centered discussion-based pedagogies as a result of participating in COIL. In this sense COIL has the potential to internationalize the curriculum beyond specific COIL courses through changing the awareness and pedagogical approaches of the educators who participate in the project.

Based on these initial findings, we suggest that COIL encourages faculty members from different parts of the world to collaborate in designing curriculum, and those collaborations may provide faculty members with an incentive to reevaluate or explore new content or pedagogy. Even after the end of the funded project, the awareness about COIL and different ways of designing curriculum inspired by the collaboration may motivate new explorations of IoC. COIL does not necessarily require substantial financial resources, as long as the online systems and facilities are maintained and

faculty members are willing to engage. Many universities and faculty members are now accustomed to using online systems for teaching and learning, which could be an advantage for COIL development.

These initial findings highlight some of the emergent barriers and opportunities for COIL in Japan. Our research continues with further interviews and document analysis. Another area worthy of investigation is the implications of the various technologies used through COIL in the Japanese context. Issues such as copyright, data security, privacy and surveillance of students and faculty, the politically contested nature of some course content and the politics of technology itself all become increasingly complicated in globally networked classrooms (Wilson, 2015). These and other as yet unexplored areas of COIL in Japan will be the topic of our continued research.

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