

Preferences and Perceptions of Study Abroad Programs at a Private Japanese University

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Abstract: Well before the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of Japanese university students who joined study abroad programs had already been in general decline, while the popularity of online study abroad programs has grown. This paper looks at the pre-COVID state of study abroad at a small Japanese university to investigate student preferences and possible explanations for the low number of participants. One new online program recently offered by the CNE1 / Classmate International Language School is reviewed. Through this case study, and in consideration of related research, the author identifies several factors to how online study abroad programs can appeal to a wider range of student demographics in the current environment of Japanese higher education.

Keywords: study abroad, online study abroad, student preferences, CNE1, Classmate

1. Introduction

The terms ‘globalization’, ‘internationalization’, and ‘global human resources’ have been touted by the government and businesses in Japan for the past few decades, with the aim of

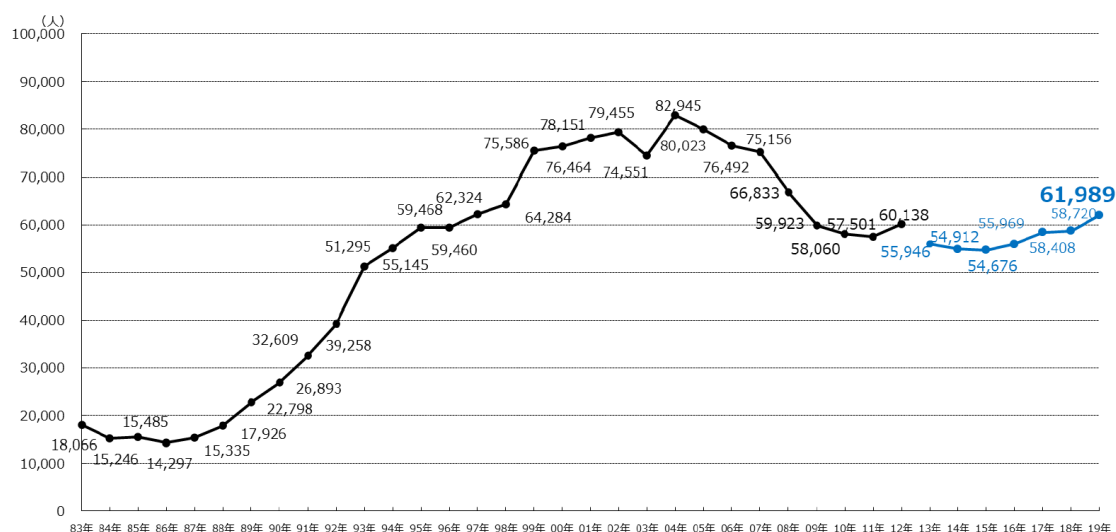
improving the economy and helping Japan to remain an important player in the world. The Japanese government wants Japanese companies to prioritize having a globally-minded workforce (Shimmi and Ota, 2018: 13). Policies in line with this agenda have affected changes that have not only allowed more immigrant workers into the country, but also increased efforts into improving the foreign language skills and global mindedness of young Japanese. With English long considered the lingua franca of international business and affairs, the English language curriculum at Japanese schools has also been expanded in recent years to now provide a minimum of 10 years of formal English education by high school graduation.

With a population that remains close to being 98% ethnically homogeneous Japanese, study abroad programs have long been promoted as the default channel for Japanese to hone communicative foreign language skills along with developing a deeper personal understanding of foreign culture: both highly regarded skills for ‘global human resources.’ As Kobayashi (2018) states, “study abroad is the most efficient and effective way for Japanese to become internationally minded, as the country needs”. The number of Japanese who traveled overseas to participate on such study abroad programs continually rose through the 1980’s until the early 2000’s (Japan Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare, 2022). However, between 2004 to 2015, there was a downward trend with a drop of 34% in the number of Japanese who joined such overseas study programs, as shown in Table 1 below. Although there was a slight rebound with a 12% increase between 2015 to 2019, overall, study abroad numbers have decreased dramatically over the past 2 decades.

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Table 1: Number of Japanese Studying Abroad 1983-2019

(Japan Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare, 2022)



The restrictions on international mobility and the health concerns that came along with the COVID pandemic in early 2020 almost instantaneously flattened study abroad numbers. The Japan Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare reported a 98% drop from 2019, down to only 1,487 individual Japanese studying abroad in 2020 (MEXT Japan Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare, 2022). More than 90% of universities faced difficulties in pursuing their internationalization efforts due to the massive cancellation of academic and student exchange programs caused by the pandemic (Shimmi et al., 2021: 39). However, although many other countries have since eased travel restrictions and COVID-related policies that have allowed for the revitalization of the study abroad sector by mid-2022, Japan has been slow to officially adopt such relaxed policies, which has contributed to keeping the public wary and holding back many institutions and individuals from recommencing with study abroad programs.

Unsurprisingly, given the barriers to travelling overseas for study since 2020, *online* study

abroad programs have seen much more attention in the past two years. Online study abroad programs have existed and had been growing in popularity well before the start of the pandemic, but have seen rapid development and normalization along with the general worldwide shift to using online platforms across all areas of communication and education due to COVID-19 related restrictions.

This paper will start by analyzing reported student preferences and perspectives regarding study abroad at a small private Japanese university in order to determine possible reasons for the low level of student participation on such programs. Secondly, it will examine one particular online study abroad program in depth: a program offered by the CNE1 / Classmate International Language School located in the Philippines. After outlining the courses of study officially offered by this program, I will review the experiences and feedback provided by two university students who participated on the course in 2021 and 2022. In closing, this paper will consider other related research in order to identify some unique circumstances in Japan that may prove to continue to bolster the comparative appeal of online study abroad even after the current stigma regarding international travel due to COVID subsides.

2. Case Study 1: Private University Pre-COVID Study Abroad Preferences and Participation

As mentioned in the opening of this paper, the number of Japanese students going overseas to study abroad had been in decline since 2004, well before the COVID pandemic. This section will examine 267 responses from a 2016 questionnaire regarding study abroad interests and preferences of students at a small private university in Japan. This survey was given to 333 students in total, with a response rate of 82.6%. This section will also look at the number of students from this university

that actually participated on any one of the study abroad programs offered.

Of the 267 university students who responded, 131 (49%) stated interest in travelling overseas on one of the university's study abroad programs, while 136 (51%) stated no interest, showing an almost even split amongst responses. The 49% of interested students here are fewer than percentages reported in other similar small-scale studies in Japan, such as the 57% reported by Lassegard (2013), the 67% reported by Asaoka and Yano (2009), and the 89% reported by Bradford and Fujimoto (2014) (as cited in Bradford, 2015: 112).

Students who stated they had no interest were asked to identify their reasons, as shown in Table 2 below. We can see that the major reasons for disinterest in study abroad are cost (53%), no future plans to work overseas (46%), as well as lack of foreign language ability (48%), and low confidence in interacting with foreigners (31%). In the past, having study abroad experience was a means toward developing language skills and better employment opportunities in Japan. As Ikemoto states, "there was a sense the Japanese economic recession gave meaning and motivation to study abroad; however, this is no longer the case" (2013: 280).

Table 2: Questionnaire Replies - Reasons for General Disinterest in Study Abroad Programs

Reason (multiple responses allowed)	Number of Responses	Percentage (of 136)
Expense / Financial Reasons	72	53%
Not good at foreign language	65	48%
No plans to work overseas in the future	62	46%
Not confidence in being able to casually speak with foreigners	42	31%
Not interested in the content of programs offered	18	13%
Schedule does not allow	10	7%
Not interested in understanding other cultures	5	< 1%

In the year that this questionnaire was administered, short-term (2-3 weeks) study abroad programs were being offered to students during the summer and spring breaks in-between school terms when university classes were not in session. Students who were unable to join during the summer or spring breaks were asked for their reasons, shown in Table 3 below. We can see that job schedules (54%), university sports club activities (38%), practical training sessions for university classes (32%), and expense (21%) are the major reasons why interested students claimed they could not join overseas study programs, even if only for a 2-3 week period.

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Table 3: Questionnaire Replies – Major Reasons Why Interested Students Unable to Study Abroad

Reason (multiple responses allowed)	Number of Responses
Have job during the breaks	71
Have university sports club activities during the breaks	50
Have practical training for university classes during breaks	42
Expense / Financial Reasons	28

Students who were interested in joining a study abroad program were also asked what length of time they would prefer to be overseas (Table 4). The responses show that the majority of students are interested in short-term programs of only 1-2 weeks, with very few students interested in programs of a month or longer. Although the traditional notion of study abroad in the past may have implied anywhere from 6 months to multiple years at a foreign institution, Shimmi et al. (2021: 40) report that in Japan, short-term programs of a month or less represent 60% of all study abroad programs both before and during the pandemic.

Table 4: Questionnaire Replies – Preferred Length of Overseas Study Abroad

Length of Study Abroad (multiple responses allowed)	Number of Responses	Percentage (of 131)
Around 1 week	103	79%
Around 2 weeks	90	69%
Around 3 weeks	45	34%
Around 4 weeks	15	12%
More than 1 month	15	12%

In contrast, we can also see the maximum reported amount that students would be able to spend on studying abroad (Table 5 below). As expense was cited as a major reason for students being unable to join a study abroad program in previous questions, it is unsurprising that we see lower thresholds for what students are able to budget for a study abroad experience. Unfortunately, in most cases, the total cost of overseas programs and international travel is much more than students anticipate, and a major reason why many students who *are* interested and who *are* able to make the time to go are ultimately unable to do so. In this survey, over half of responses state being able to only spend a maximum of 100,000 yen, which doesn't even cover airfare to most countries, not to mention domestic travel fees, accommodations while overseas, any overseas school and tuition costs, travel and sightseeing while abroad, food, insurance, and so on. In more recent years at this university, it has been common to see total expenses of 500,000 yen or more for a 2 -week study trip to the mainland US. Program cost is always of a major concern for more than just the student, as traditionally Japanese families pay for their children's university education, which has meant an even greater financial burden in the recent struggling Japanese economy (Ikemoto, 2013: 277).

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Table 5: Questionnaire Replies – Maximum Able to Spend for Study Abroad

Maximum Cost of Study Abroad Program	Number of Responses
~ 100,000 yen	150
~ 200,000 yen	54
~ 300,000 yen	19
~ 400,000 yen	2
No interest in joining no matter of cost	43

One last survey question we will look at is what countries students are most interested in being able to travel to for study abroad in (Table 6). America and European countries seem to be the most sought-after study abroad destinations, and conversely typically the most expensive, proving a mismatch of student preferences to means.

Table 6: Questionnaire Replies – Interest in Specific Study Abroad Destinations

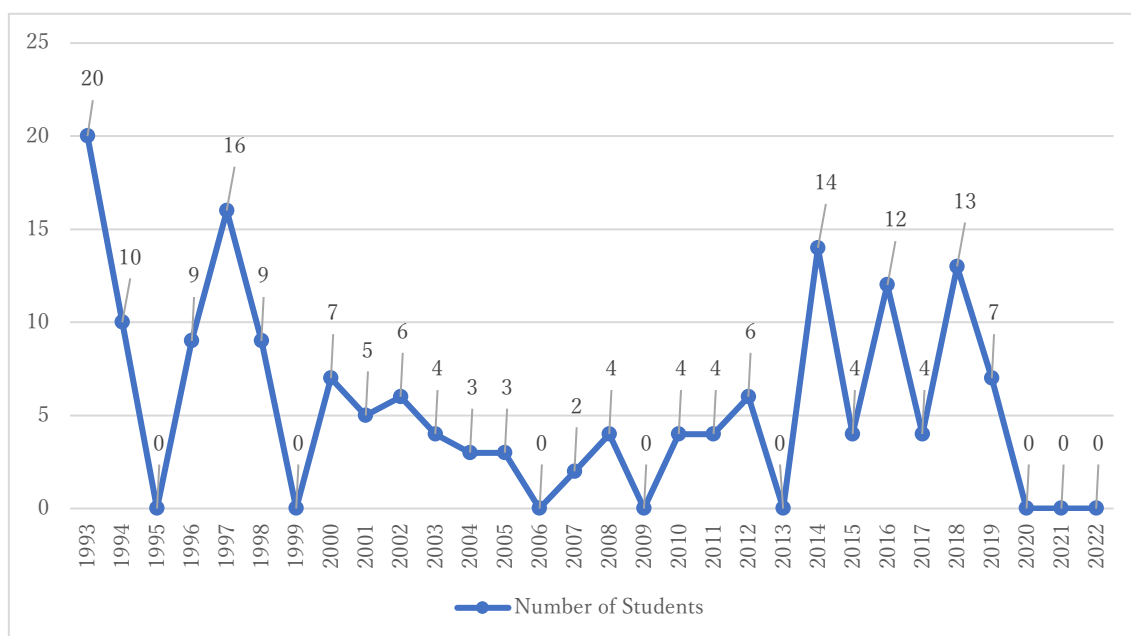
Destination (multiple responses allowed)	Number of Responses
Mainland USA	47
France	27
Hawaii (USA)	25
Italy	24
South Korea	22
England	21
Australia	18
Europe	14
Germany	12
Spain	9
Guam (USA)	7
Singapore	7

Having looked at some of the students' stated preferences regarding study abroad, Table 7 below shows the total number of students who actually participated on any one of the programs offered at this same university. It is important to note that this specific university offered only a single, teacher-escorted study abroad destination (to the USA) from 1993-2014, with no financial assistance offered. From 2014, new programs were introduced offering students a second teacher-escorted trip option to Thailand, as well as externally-managed programs that could be tailored to

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individual student preferences with destination options to 16 different countries. Additionally, at this same time, the university started offering subsidiary aid to interested students to help offset some of the total program costs. Although there were some significant jumps in participant numbers from year to year, it is interesting that the overall nation-wide trends shown in Table 1 from the introduction section of this paper are not mirrored here. National statistics showed large increases year-by year from in the 1990's until 2004, with a gradual but consistent decline every year after from 2004-2015. However, at this university, with the exception of 1997, we see a general decline in participants from 1993 until the early 2000's, and a general increase from 2014 up until the pandemic. It is likely that the increase in participants at this school from 2014 and onward was due to the addition of the new study abroad destinations and the financial assistance that was offered.

Table 7: Private University Study Abroad Program Participants (1993-2022)



Although the survey and study abroad participant data reviewed in this section was from a relatively small university, the large number of students who reported interest in joining study abroad

programs (131 in the 2016 survey) sharply contrasts with the low number of students who actually participated in any of the programs at this school. Some of the specific survey responses reviewed above are likely indicators of factors for the generally low participation numbers: cost, foreign language confidence / ability, no future plans to work overseas, and scheduling conflicts that prohibit joining even short-term programs during school term breaks.

3. Case Study 2: Students' Online Study Abroad Experiences and Evaluations

The international travel restrictions that accompanied the COVID pandemic brought overseas study abroad for Japanese to a griding halt in 2020, with numbers dropping from 61,989 participants in 2019 to 1,487 in 2020. Although online study abroad had already been seeing a steady increase in popularity before the pandemic, such programs immediately jumped in demand from 2020. This next section will focus on the experiences of an online study abroad program as reported by two non-English major university sophomores at the same school presented in section 2. These two students each joined a one-month long study aboard program offered by the CNE1 / Classmate Language School in 2021 and 2022.

The CNE1 International Language School is a boarding-style school located in San Manuel, Philippines which was established in 2010. The school advertises a focus on developing students English speaking and communication skills, with nine course options specific to preparing for standardized English certification exams such as IELTS and Eiken, as well as more specialized career and interest courses. The school's main selling points are its one-on-one lessons, individualized study, intensive curriculum, an active student community to help advance student's communicative skills, in addition to its competitive cost compared to other popular Western study

abroad destinations. As a side note, CNE1 was co-founded by a Japanese, and appears to market mainly to Japanese nationals, with their website and online presence being only in the Japanese language.

Table 8: CNE1 On-campus Course Options (Pre-COVID-19)

Regular one-on-one courses	Specialized courses
Basic training for speaking	Four skills test preparation for IEALTS boot camp
Everyday English conversation	Four skills test preparation for Eiken boot camp
Business English conversation	Specialized English - web design
IELTS speaking test preparation	Specialized English - children's English teacher training
Eiken speaking test preparation	
Barista English conversation	
Customer service English conversation	
Pronunciation and listening focus	
Presentations and discussions	

Due to the influences of the COVID pandemic, CNE1 closed its campus in 2020, and as of August 2022, still only offers online study abroad course options through its subsidiary business entity named *Classmate*. *Classmate* offers one-on-one lessons, albeit with a smaller set of five course options and class schedules allowing up to 4 class hours per day. The following section will review the experiences that two Japanese university students had in participating on a one-month *Classmate* online study abroad course.

Table 9: *Classmate* Online Study Abroad Course Options

Basic English for speaking
Everyday English conversation
Business English conversation
IELTS speaking test preparation
Eiken speaking test preparation

The two students in this study joined the “everyday English conversation” course, which focused on developing conversational competency through pattern practice, pronunciation, speaking, discussion, and presentation practice. These students both joined 3 class hours per day for 5 days a week, which equated to 60 classroom hours over the course of their one-month course. Online lessons consisted of live video lessons with the Filipino teacher along with the use of a texting app.

Both students were given a 30-minute-long online level test prior to starting the course that included questions that tested reading, speaking, and listening skills. Points were accessed in five different categories: grammar, vocabulary, fluency, listening / comprehension, and voice / non-verbal communication. A maximum of 20 points could be earned in each category. The students were then given an overall test grade between 0-100, which corresponded to 10 ranked levels starting at *basic* with the top level being *high-advanced*. In this study, one student was placed in the 2nd rank level (*upper basic*), while the other student was placed in the 5th rank level (*pre-intermediate*).

Students were both given a second similar assessment test at the end of their coursework. Although the actual questions were different than those on the first test, the format of the test was the

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same. Both students were shown as having an overall improvement of around 10 points after their month-long course, moving them each up one rank level. Of particular note, post-course assessment tests showed that both students had the most significant gains in the categories of fluency and listening / comprehension ability.

Both students reported the main components of the course were mainly live video lessons one-on-one with the teacher, a fewer number of sessions that included up to 3 other students in a group setting, as well as the use of a chat application in which students would exchange classwork-related texts with the teacher. Students were required to purchase a designated English conversation practice textbook to follow along with during the online sessions. Supplementary homework was assigned, but completion was optional. Both students reported that their course focused on speaking, listening, and reading skills, with texting via the chat application taking the place of traditional writing practice. One student commented that the teachers were friendly, engaging, and energetic, which greatly contributed to their own motivation on the program.

Table 10: *Classmate* “Everyday English Conversation” Course Typical Daily Lesson Schedule

10 minutes	Enter meeting room, chatting / small talk
50 minutes	One-on-one lesson
10 minutes	Break time, option to chat (camera off)
50 minutes	One-on-one lesson
10 minutes	Break time, option to chat (camera off)
50 minutes	One-on-one lesson

Students both brought up other positive experiences they had on the program that were not directly related to the coursework. As enrolled members of the online program, the Japanese students had the option to freely join large-scale online video chatrooms where they were able to interact with other *Classmate* students from many different countries. One of the students in this study remarked on the value of these opportunities and the benefit of being able to practice English with other speakers that had a variety of accents. The other student reported joining an online Halloween event also in a large-scale online video chatroom. They indicated that they were able to make friends with native Filipino students that they still keep in contact with. Online resources and experiences such as these add much to improving students' communicative confidence.

There were also a few negative experiences the Japanese students reported. The students both experienced a few technical issues, most notably some intermittent service disconnects that could take up to 10 minutes to re-establish the online connection. However, in these cases the lost time was made up by extending the lesson. Also, one student mentioned that it was sometimes difficult to read the text that the teacher would write on the shared screen, which could have been attributed to the size of the screen (device) the student was using as well as video resolution degradation caused by a poor internet connection.

When asked if they felt that their participation on the program had helped to improve their English ability, both students indicated that their listening ability had improved, while one of the two said they felt they had gained more confidence in their speaking as well. Both students indicated overall satisfaction with the program, one pointing out the main advantage of the online course in being able to learn with a native English speaker from the convenience of their own home here in Japan. The other Japanese student appreciated the course content and teacher's approach to lesson

content being level-appropriate to their own ability, as well as being able to make Filipino friends in their time on the course.

The Japanese students in this study were also asked if they would like to join the *Classmate* online program again in the future to continue their studies. Although both students were very interested in continuing the coursework that they started on this program, both students indicated that they would prefer to travel to the school in the Philippines if they had a choice. The students acknowledged that their reasons for joining the online program rather than traveling abroad were due to time and schedule restraints with their lives here in Japan, as well as current travel concerns and CNE1's campus closure due to COVID. Despite this, both students said they had a positive experience and would recommend the online program to any other interested students. Interestingly, despite the average cost of Classmate's Online Study Abroad program being roughly only one-third the cost of actually travelling to the CNE1 campus in the Philippines for a similar program, neither student in this study mentioned cost as a factor. However, this is likely due to the fact that as the CNE1 campus was closed, they had no option in travelling abroad versus online, and hence did not need to compare and weigh the cost differences.

In reviewing the online study abroad experiences of two university students in this section, it was indicated by both students after their programs had finished that they would prefer to travel to the Philippines to continue their studies if circumstances allowed. Although both students had mainly positive comments regarding their online experiences, it seems that they both feel that there is some additional advantage or appeal in actually going to the foreign country for face-to-face studies as opposed to what they experienced online.

4. Discussion

In this paper, I reported official figures showing declining Japanese study abroad trends nationwide, and compared them to the state of affairs at a small private university. In the students' questionnaire results, we were able to identify factors that have likely affected the low number of this school's study abroad participants. In consideration of online alternatives to travelling abroad, which have been propelled due to the COVID pandemic, we looked at one specific online program and analyzed students' appraisals of their experiences. In this section, I would like to highlight other related research regarding Japanese study abroad in order to postulate that the current circumstances in Japan for many university students could lend to even fewer Japanese studying overseas and that alternatively, online study abroad will likely continue to gain popularity in the coming years.

As identified in students' questionnaire responses, the cost of studying abroad was the top reason for reported disinterest in participating on such programs. Shimmi (2011: 2) and Kobayashi (2018) both point to the fact that Japanese higher education is less costly than overseas enrollment, which is a major deterrent for those considering enrolling in overseas universities in order to earn a degree. Specifically, the maximum amount that students in this case study reported being able to spend for participating on a study abroad program for even a couple of weeks falls far short of the actual costs required to join such a program. And unfortunately, with worldwide inflation and the depreciation of the Japanese yen against foreign currencies, program costs are likely only to rise in the immediate future. Economic stagnation in post bubble-era Japan has been one of the reasons for the decrease in Japanese studying abroad (Shimmi, 2011: 1; Ikemoto, 2013: 277), and without substantial financial assistance from the government, schools, or external organizations, joining

these programs will become more difficult for many young Japanese. Ikemoto (2013: 277) also comments that as Japanese parents traditionally foot the bill to send their children to university, more and more families with lowered incomes cannot afford to also pay for study abroad. Although the promise of both developing professional and language skills overseas were once enough to merit such an investment, with the current economic outlook in Japan, even of those families that may be able to afford it, “Japanese students tend to look more realistically at costs and opportunities for education and job opportunities” (Shimmi, 2011: 5). In contrast, with online study abroad programs available at a fraction of the cost of travelling overseas, it would seem that such virtual programs will only further increase in popularity for students.

In the case study presented in this paper, lack of confidence in foreign language ability also ranked high among reasons for students’ general disinterest in study abroad programs. Other studies have found similar results elsewhere in Japan, with researchers claiming that there has been more risk-aversion amongst young Japanese (Ogi, as cited in Ikemoto, 2013: 278), and more young Japanese displaying ‘linguistic anxiety’ with no confidence in their language ability and no practical experience in using English (Kobayashi, 2018). These trends are despite the widescale changes to English education by the Japanese Ministry of Education over the past few decades which has aimed specifically to improve Japanese students’ English communication skills. Even with 10 or more years of English classes before entering university, Japan still ranks quite low on global rankings on English tests that are required for overseas school admissions (Ikemoto, 2013: 278; Shimmi, 2011: 3). Bradford (2015: 111) also points out that the addition of the speaking component on the TOEFL test starting in 2006 proved to be a particularly challenging hurdle for students who were brought up learning English in non-communicative classroom settings. Even for students who are not looking to enroll in a foreign university and may only be interested in a short-term study abroad experience,

barriers such as ‘linguistic anxiety’ as well as a general defeatist attitude towards English education which has been perpetuated by the Japanese entertainment media (Jackson and Kennett, 2013), can be enough to prevent students from even giving shorter-term overseas programs a shot. While online study abroad may not necessarily lessen the effect of any anxieties or lack of confidence in language ability, as virtual programs can be completed in the comfort of one’s own familiar environment and where interactions are all done electronically without any physical face-to-face interactions, it could be argued that online programs could significantly reduce such student apprehensions.

In this case study, many of the university students that reported interest in joining an overseas program said that there were unable to do so due to scheduling conflicts. The academic schedule at this university is a two-term system, and provides a month-long break from classes in the summer, as well as more than a two-month long break from classes in the late winter. The top scheduling conflict reported was that of needing to work part-time during the break, but many students also reported expected attendance at university sports club activities and practical training sessions as reasons for being unable to travel abroad, even if only for a couple of weeks. While these students are technically free to take the time away from these activities to join overseas programs, the reality is that taking any time away from these scheduled university activities can result in the students missing out on experiences that their classmates would be getting, and being less favorably looked upon by staff and prospective employers upon return. For students in these situations, choosing to study overseas for even a short time can have detrimental effects on their academic career, professional sports prospects, and future aspirations. Such scheduling conflicts with university-related activities in Japan are also identified by Ikemoto (2013: 279). Even if students do have more flexible schedules during the breaks, the number of opportunities students have to travel overseas during their four years at university are limited by other scheduling conflicts, such as the ‘job

hunting' season that most students have in the fall of their junior year (Shimmi, 2011: 1; Kobayashi, 2018). In general, regardless of the academic calendar, many students' four years at Japanese universities are filled with many scheduled activities and responsibilities, which makes taking time for travelling abroad difficult. Additionally, along with any increase in economic stagnation and inflation affecting students' and their families' resources, more and more students may need to fill any open gaps in their academic schedule with work to supplement their income. With the flexibility and customization of timetables in scheduling online study abroad classes, many of the scheduling conflicts for Japanese students identified here could be reduced, if not avoided altogether, further strengthening the appeal of online programs over traditional ones.

One further deterrent to students' participation on study abroad programs in recent years is that of investment versus return. This issue was hinted at in this case study as 46% of students reported no plans to work overseas as a reason for their general disinterest in study abroad. Despite the government and businesses in Japan advocating for more youth to study abroad, the truth is that there may be very few or no practical benefits for many Japanese students to do so, depending on the duration and type of study abroad experience. Although short-term study abroad programs make up more than 60% of such programs in Japan, some Japanese companies have identified that prospective employees should have a minimum of six months overseas in order to develop language skills, intercultural understanding, and the flexibility to accept other's values, proving a mismatch between expectations and reality in regards to short-term programs (Ota, 2018: 100). Conversely, some research has shown that study abroad experiences "have not always given advantages to Japanese students in the domestic job market in Japan, and rather, their overseas experience could be considered negatively by potential employers if returning students cannot readjust to the norms of Japanese society" (Shimmi, 2011: 3). For students who looking at study abroad for the purpose of

academic advancement rather than for job prospects, short-term programs are not typically long enough for students to earn course credits. Even for students who can study overseas long enough for course credits, there may be decreased reasons for doing so as earning multiple degrees is not commonly accepted in Japan (Ikemoto, 2013: 278), and some schools do not even recognize the course credits earned from overseas universities. In many instances, Japanese students that study abroad for extended periods must still complete a full four years of classes in Japan in addition to whatever time they invested in studying overseas, adding to the overall cost of their education, and delaying their entry into the job market. With there still being little government and institutional-level support for the globalization of Japanese universities, issues with the recognition of overseas course credits and multiple degrees will continue to be a major deterrent to the benefits and appeal of extended study abroad (Ikemoto, 2013: 277; Ota, 2018: 102-103). Considering the multiple deterrents identified here, for Japanese students intent on study abroad, it would seem that doing so online would be an ideal option to help them mitigate some of the current drawbacks associated with physically going overseas.

5. Conclusion

As identified in this paper, there have long been and remain many obstacles to study abroad for Japanese students that will likely persist even as Japan slowly starts to emerge from the restraints of the COVID pandemic. Students' concerns of cost, lack of confidence in language ability, scheduling conflicts, and the practical benefits of such experiences as recognized by prospective Japanese employers can make participation on study abroad programs seem difficult and without merit. Paradoxically, there are few that are vested in the globalization and economic resurgence of Japan that would deny the benefits of a study abroad experience. Such experiences are essential to

allow the future workforce of Japan to “better navigate a globalized society and increase their future employability” (Bradford, 2015: 9).

Although online study abroad programs have boomed in popularity from 2020 due to COVID- related restrictions, I feel that the current environment and state of study abroad in Japan as partially revealed in this case study as well as the corroborating research cited in this paper will be very much conducive for the continued growth and popularity of online study abroad options. I believe such online programs will undoubtedly continue to improve in quality along with technology and diversify in content to appeal to a much broader range of Japanese students, while the lessened burden on finances and schedules will attract more students away from physically travelling overseas for studying abroad.

In a 2021 study, Shimmi et al. reveal that Japanese universities are well aware of the challenges ahead as 84% of universities in their study stated that they needed to revise their internationalization strategies to prepare for the post-COVID era (2021: 40). The universities in that study also acknowledged the viability of online resources, and 90% are planning for blended international exchange programs, incorporating both physical mobility and online components (2021: 40). Such programs would be ideal in helping to extend the learning experience beyond the few short weeks that many Japanese students can typically afford to spend being overseas, allowing them to use the online component to prepare for their upcoming travel, and / or to continue their learning experience once they have returned to Japan. Such blended study abroad programs also seem an ideal alternative for Japanese students who want the experience of travelling overseas, even if only for a short while, but also want the benefits of a longer-term learning program.

Considering the circumstances that Japanese students are currently in, and will likely continue to be in for the foreseeable future, there seems to be much promise in the continued adoption and improvement of online-only as well as blended programs as modern alternatives to traditional study abroad. However, some of the largest remaining barriers continue to be the reluctance and slow pace towards the globalization of Japanese businesses, universities, institutions, and society as a whole. While much effort has gone into maintaining the evolution of study abroad for Japanese in the face of the COVID pandemic, perhaps the greatest challenge remains an internal one, as Ikemoto (2013: 280) states, “the promotion of studying abroad has no meaning if Japanese society does not understand the importance of making use of students study abroad experience”.

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