Internationalization of Curriculum in Japanese Higher Education: Blockers and Enablers in English-medium Instruction Classrooms in the Era of COVID-19

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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) in English-medium instruction (EMI) programs at Japanese universities in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Utilizing a conceptual framework and ideas of 'enablers' and 'blockers' of IoC, we 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 collaborative online international learning (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.

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

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Introduction

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 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 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, curriculum, IoC's enablers and blockers

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;

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[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.).

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 in the Introduction 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 the 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.

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).

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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.

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

As the first stage of a broader longitudinal mixed-methods research project, our study was designed as a qualitative, grounded exploration of the ideas of EMI educators about IoC in a variety of institutional contexts. The findings from this exploration were intended to inform the development of a quantitative questionnaire that could be distributed widely to EMI program educators. We plan to repeat this cycle of interviews and survey research again in two to three years' time, to see whether and how approaches to IoC have evolved in this new era for higher education internationalization.

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. We plan to ensure a more accurate representation of these other types of EMI contexts when conducting survey research in the next stage of the project.

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 and discussion

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 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, 2018). 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[3]. 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 program 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 on the one hand a clear enabler (and an outlier in the government's broader strategy for internationalization). However, as of this writing the government's COIL initiative is centered around virtual exchanges between universities in Japan and the US. Thus, while one form of IoC is enabled, opportunities for the funded development of other COIL programs (for example, with partner universities in the East Asian region) are blocked, arguably due to political or diplomatic agendas of the Japanese government.

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

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[3] Only one of our interview participants was involved in COIL. Going forward we plan to conduct a thorough investigation of COIL programs in particular and their relation to IoC in Japanese higher education as the pandemic unfolds.

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.

Effects of policies in sectors outside of higher education

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 her research on "perceptions" and how that affected the values she carries 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 we intend to reach out to these academics going forward. It may be the case that COIL courses will 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.

Conclusion

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.

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.

While 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.

Acknowledgment: This work was supported by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science [21K02635].

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