

International Student Mobility in Japan

Higher Education in the Era
of the New Normal

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Chapter 9

Survey of Inbound Students Waiting to Enter Japan

Exploring Students' Voices

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Introduction

Due to the spread of COVID-19, the Japanese administration restricted the entry of foreigners, including international students, from March 2020 to the end of February 2022.

On November 8, 2021, the Japanese government introduced the 'New measures for border enforcement (19)' (hereinafter referred to as 'Measure (19)'), allowing new entry of foreigners, and many international students waiting overseas believed that they would soon enter Japan. However, on November 30 of the same year, the 'New measures for border enforcement (20)' (hereinafter referred to as 'Measure (20)') were enacted in consideration of the Omicron variant, and the admission of international students was once more restricted. As a result, approximately 150,000 international students, whose arrivals in Japan had been scheduled, were once again barred from the country (Yamamoto, 2021). In the online class that the author of this paper was instructing at the time, students' laughter could often be discerned during class around October when the semester first began, but after Measure (20) was enacted, numerous students turned off their cameras during classes, spoke less frequently and struggled to participate in classes. Students from regions with less time difference were also notably concerned about students from regions with greater time differences. During this period, countless international students complained to the Japanese administration about their inability to enter the country, using the term 'Cruel Japan,' a play on 'Cool Japan.'

This chapter organizes and analyzes the results from a survey of international students on the waiting list conducted at the end of 2021, during the aforementioned period. Specifically, by analyzing the responses regarding the situation of waiting students at that time, the issues and challenges they faced, their expectations of the Japanese government and universities and their desire to study in Japan, we elucidate the measures to be taken if student exchange is suspended once more, as well as points to consider when studying in Japan in the future. In particular, the students' descriptive responses provided us with detailed information about their situations at the time, information which could not be obtained from the multiple choice responses alone. In this chapter, we

will focus on their voices, and from them, we will reflect upon the support for inter-institutional student exchange that is required in the new normal era.

The COVID-19 Situation in Japan and Its Impact on Study-abroad Exchanges

Beginning around March 2020, Japanese universities began directing exchange students home on an emergency basis (Nakano, Ishikura, & Kondo 2020a); the Japanese government denied entry to Japan from all over the world, and for some time thereafter, the international exchange of students was greatly restricted.

Figure 9.1 shows the status of COVID-19 infections in Japan and the timing of the eight surveys conducted by the author's research team on inter-institutional student exchange during the corona crisis; this survey is survey 8.

Regarding the reception of international students during the pandemic, the Japanese government allowed international students entrance to Japan from November 1 to December 28, 2020; however, the borders were soon closed again (Figure 9.1). The entry of international students was then suspended for approximately a year. Then, with about 150,000 students waiting to come to Japan from around the world, the administration began to accept international students in turn on November 8, 2021. Just when they believed they could finally enter Japan, the Japanese government again restricted their acceptance on November 29 due to the emergence of the Omicron strain, and many students who sought to study in Japan expressed their disappointment. This survey was conducted from November 26 to December 17, when the infection situation had relatively calmed down and the acceptance of international students had just resumed, but Measure (20) was immediately announced. Then, it was not until March 2022 that the borders finally opened.

As for the Japanese outbound students, the outbound program had been suspended for a long period of time starting in March 2020, but on June 15, 2021, MEXT issued a notice permitting long-term study abroad students for about one year on the condition that safety was thoroughly ensured, and 11 national and private universities including Osaka University were quick to decide to resume sending Japanese outbound students from the fall of the same year.¹ From there, study-abroad programs for Japanese outbound students gradually resumed, and by March 2022, some universities had resumed short-term study-abroad programs of less than three months, gradually returning to a pre-pandemic state.

Methodology

Survey Overview

The survey was conducted online anonymously from Friday, November 26, 2021, to Friday, December 17, 2021. Specifically, the intention was to have the survey conducted among students waiting to enter Japan during the period when Measure (19) was enacted on November 8, allowing new entry of foreign

Trends in the Number of Infected People in Japan and our Surveys' Time Period

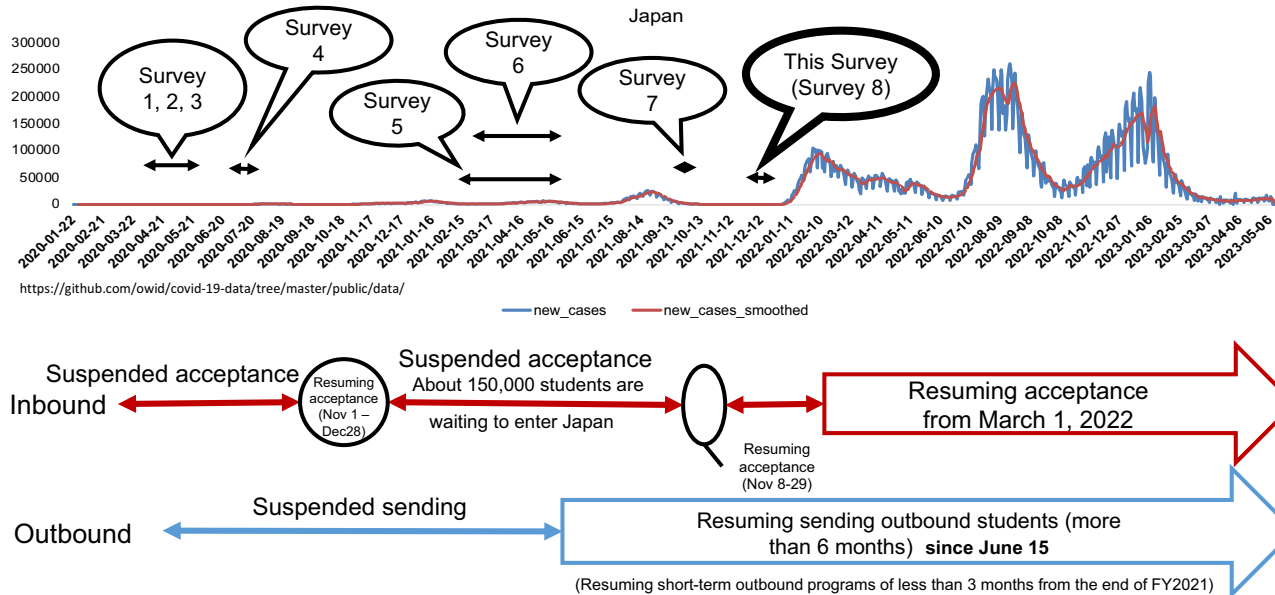


Figure 9.1 Trends in the number of infected persons in Japan and the timing of the survey.

Source: Created by the Author based on Data on COVID-19 (coronavirus) by Our World in Data, and Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet 'Policy Council' (<https://github.com/owid/covid-19-data/tree/master/public/data/>; https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/novel_coronavirus/taisaku_honbu.html)

nationals. However, on November 30, during the period of the survey, a new measure to strengthen border control measures in consideration of the Omicron strain, Measure (20) was issued, and entry to Japan was again suspended.

Although this survey was originally designed for exchange students at University A, it ultimately went beyond the walls of University A, and we received 646 responses from around the world. A total of 586 valid responses were received from 63 countries over a four-day period from Friday, November 26, 2021, to 5:00 p.m. on Monday, November 29, 2021. Sixty responses were received after 17:00 on Monday, November 29 through Friday, December 17, 2021.

Basic Information about Respondents

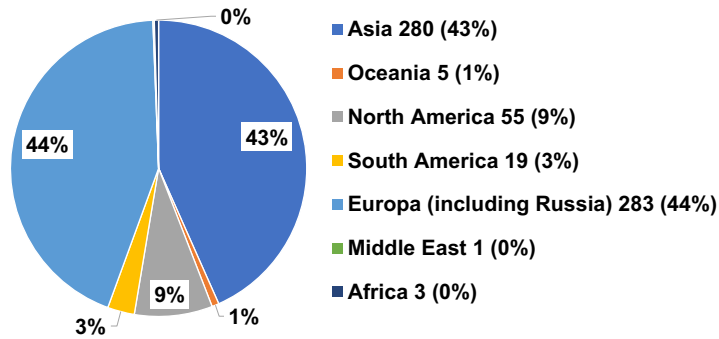
Home Countries of Respondents

Of the 646 responses, the majority were from Europe (283 respondents, 44%) and Asia (280 respondents, 43%). The remainder were from North America (55 respondents, 9%), South America (19 respondents, 3%), Oceania (5 respondents, 1%), Africa (3 respondents) and the Middle East (1 respondent) (Figure 9.2). Since the quantities of respondents from Europe and Asia are almost equal, a comparison could be made between the two regions.

Purpose of Study Abroad by Respondents

‘Obtaining a degree (privately financed)’ (32%), ‘credit acquisition (exchange program)’ (27%) and ‘preparation for higher education (Japanese language school)’ (23%) were the most common purposes for studying in Japan (Figure 9.3). The relatively minor number of respondents who selected ‘graduate/government funded’ (2%) may be due to the fact that they were assured the ability to study in Japan in the future and had little need to respond to the questionnaire.

Looking at trends by region, Asian respondents accounted for half (52%) of the respondents who selected ‘obtaining a degree (privately financed)’ as their purpose for studying in Japan. They were followed by those ‘preparation for higher education (Japanese language school)’ (26%), and ‘credit acquisition (exchange program)’ (14%). Conversely, respondents from Europe overwhelmingly chose to study abroad for ‘credit acquisition (exchange program)’ (46%). This was followed by ‘preparation for higher education (Japanese language school)’ (16%) and ‘credit acquisition (recognized study abroad program)’ (13%), for a total of 59% for ‘credit acquisition (exchange program/recognized study abroad program).’ This indicates that the purposes of study abroad in Japan tend to differ by region, with many students from Asia indicating long-term study-abroad programs for the purpose of obtaining a degree or preparing for higher education, and those from Europe selecting short-term study-abroad programs for the purpose of earning credits.



Country/Region	Country/Region	Country/Region			
Argentina	3	Hungary	2	Pakistan	3
Austria	1	Iceland	1	Panama	1
Australia	4	India	15	Peru	3
Azerbaijan	3	Indonesia	31	Philippines	14
Bangladesh	32	Iran	1	Romania	1
Belarus	1	Ireland	2	Russia	9
Belgium	8	Italy	36	Singapore	7
Brazil	9	Kazakhstan	2	Spain	12
Bulgaria	1	Korea, Republic of	2	Sri Lanka	7
Cambodia	1	Kyrgyzstan	2	Sweden	4
Cameroon	1	Laos	3	Switzerland	7
Canada	8	Lithuania	3	Taiwan	28
Chile	1	Luxembourg	1	Thailand	18
China	59	Malaysia	11	Turkey	2
Colombia	1	Mexico	6	Uganda	1
Costa Rica	1	Mongolia	7	Ukraine	1
Czech	1	Morocco	1	United Kingdom	22
Denmark	5	Myanmar	1	United States	40
Finland	4	Nepal	5	Uzbekistan	1
France	58	Netherlands	16	Vietnam	9
Germany	82	New Zealand	1	unknown	3
Hong Kong	18	Norway	2	Total	646
				Nationalities	64

Figure 9.2 Home countries of respondents.

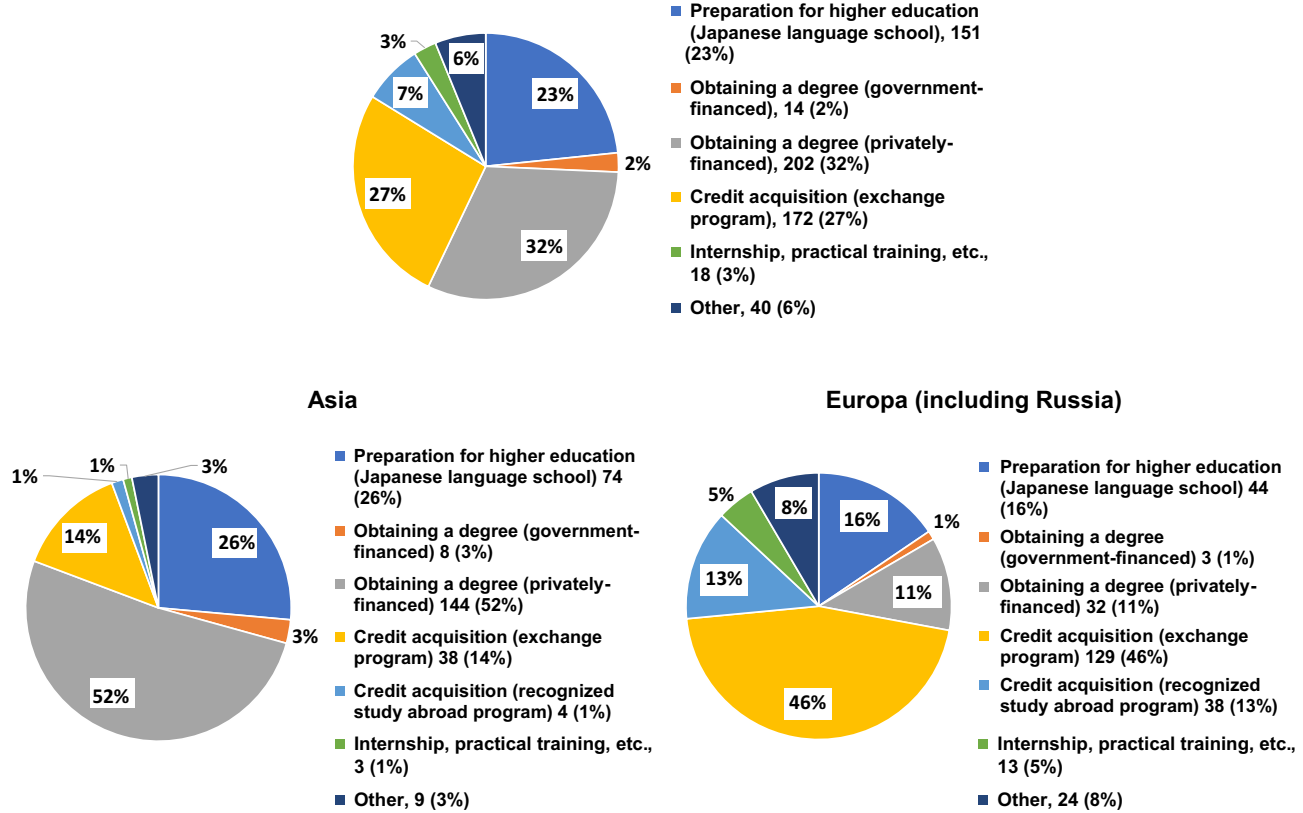


Figure 9.3 Purpose of studying in Japan (overall, Asia, Europe).

Table 9.1 Host institution

	# of schools	# of respondents
University	109	455
Japanese Language School	67	149
Vocational School	13	21
High School	1	1
Other	N/A	20
Total	190	646

Host Institution and Academic Year of Respondents

The largest number of respondents planned to study at universities (455 respondents, 70% or 109 universities) (Table 9.1). This was followed by Japanese language schools (149 respondents, 23%, 67 schools). In terms of respondents' academic years, the majority of respondents were first-year master's students (M1, 114, 18%), third-year undergraduates (U3, 93, 14%) and first-year undergraduates (U1, 80, 12%) (Figure 9.4). Furthermore, there were more responses from undergraduate students (278, 43%), master's students (203, 31%), N/A (130, 20%) and doctoral students (35, 5%), in that order. Those who replied 'N/A' were typically students in preparatory programs such as Japanese language schools and internships.

Comparing respondents from Asia and Europe, those from Asia were most likely to be first-year master's students (M1, 72, 26%), followed by first-year undergraduate students (U1, 52, 19%) (Figure 9.5). In contrast, respondents from Europe were more likely to be in their third year of undergraduate studies (U3, 93, 14%) or in their second year of master's studies (M2, 72, 17%).

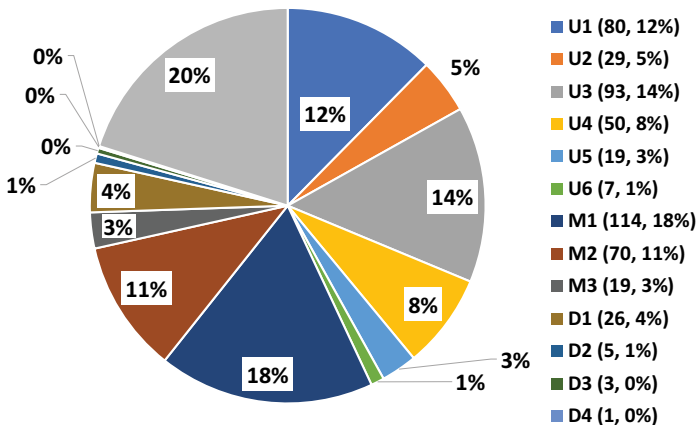


Figure 9.4 Academic year (overall).

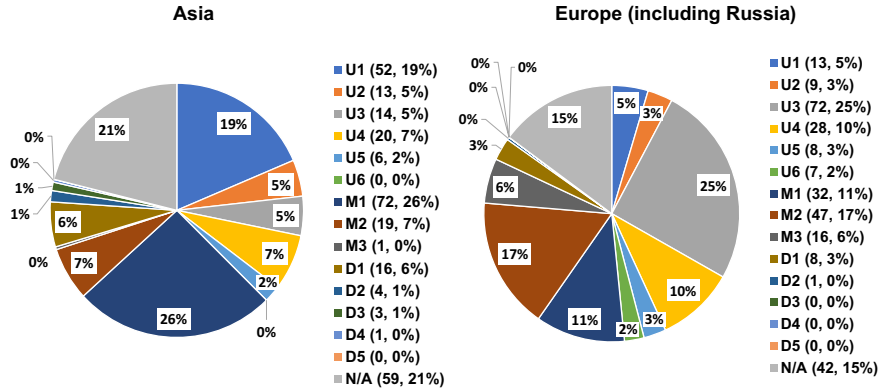


Figure 9.5 Academic year of respondents (Asia, Europa).

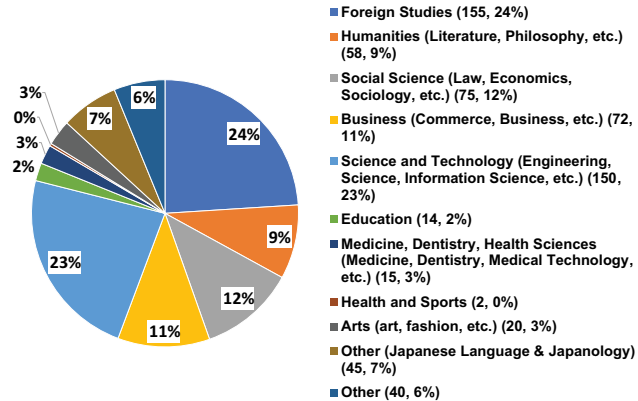
This can be explained by the fact that, as mentioned above, most respondents from Asia were in their first year of undergraduate studies or first year of master’s studies, as they tended to pursue degree acquisition as their purpose for studying in Japan, while most respondents from Europe were in their third year of undergraduate studies or second year of master’s studies and tended to pursue credit acquisition or exchange programs.

Majors of Respondents

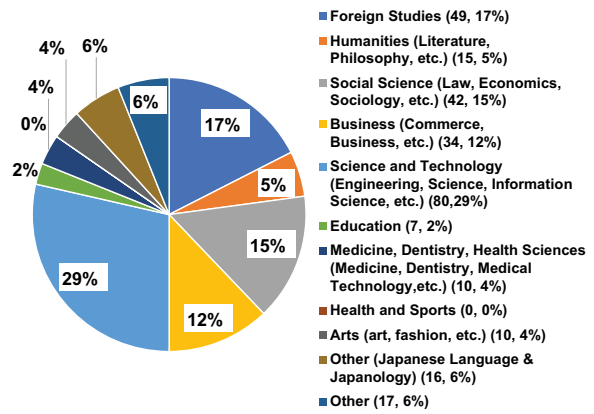
The most common major of respondents was Foreign Studies (155 respondents, 24%), followed by Science and Technology (150 respondents, 23%), Social Science (75 respondents, 12%), and Business (72 respondents, 11%) (Figure 9.6).

By region, those from Asia were overwhelmingly in Science and Technology (80 students, 29%), followed by Foreign Studies (49 students, 17%), Social Science (42 students, 15%) and Business (34 students, 12%). European students were the most numerous in Foreign Studies (97, 34%). This was followed by Science and Technology (52 respondents, 18%), Humanities (35 respondents, 12%), Social Science (28 respondents, 10%) and Business (21 respondents, 8%).

A cross-tabulation of respondents’ majors and purposes for studying abroad shows that the most common reason for studying abroad was to obtain a degree (privately financed) in Science and Technology (83 respondents, 13%) (Table 9.2). This was followed by credit acquisition (exchange program) in Foreign Studies (67, 10%), preparation for higher education in foreign languages (45, 7%) and degrees in social sciences (37, 6%). From this result, it can be concluded that students in science and technology, social sciences and business were more likely to choose ‘obtaining a degree (privately financed),’ while students in Foreign Studies, Humanities, and Social Sciences were more likely to choose ‘credit/exchange study abroad.’



Asia



Europa (including Russia)

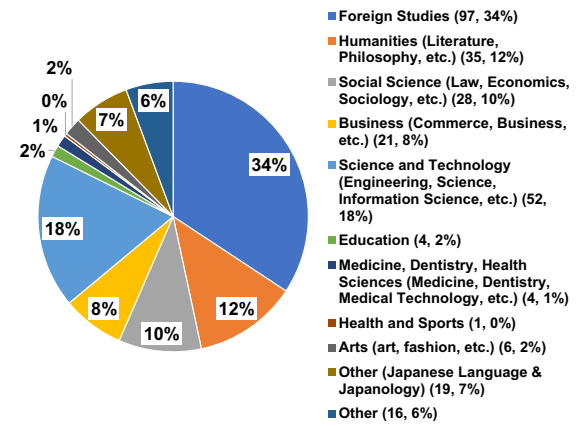


Figure 9.6 Majors of respondents (overall, Asia, Europe).

Table 9.2 Respondents' majors and purpose of study abroad

	<i>Preparation for higher education (Japanese language school)</i>	<i>Obtaining a degree (government-financed)</i>	<i>Obtaining a degree (privately-financed)</i>	<i>Credit acquisition (exchange program)</i>	<i>Credit acquisition (recognized study abroad program)</i>	<i>Internship, practical training, etc.</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
Foreign Studies	45	2	10	67	19	5	7	155
Humanities (Literature, Philosophy, etc.)	9	2	8	29	8	0	2	58
Social Science (Law, Economics, Sociology, etc.)	4	1	37	19	5	3	6	75
Business (Commerce, Business, etc.)	15	3	33	11	5	0	5	72
Science and Technology (Engineering, Science, Information Science, etc.)	24	6	83	21	2	4	10	150
Education	7	0	3	1	2	1	0	14
Medicine, Dentistry, Health Sciences (Medicine, Dentistry, Medical Technology, etc.)	4	1	5	1	1	3	0	15
Health and Sports	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Arts (art, fashion, etc.)	9	0	7	3	1	0	0	20
Other	32	0	17	20	4	2	10	85
Total	151	15	203	172	47	18	40	646

Results

Study-abroad Status of Respondents

This section provides an overview of the respondents' study-abroad statuses. First, 65% of the respondents were taking online courses while awaiting entry to Japan (Figure 9.7).

By region, more European students reported that their study-abroad program was canceled (36 respondents or 13%) or that they declined to study abroad (14 respondents or 5%) than Asian students. The reason for this may be that many European students tend to study in Japan as exchange students, and it is challenging to extend the study period due to curricular and institutional restrictions for exchange programs.

Impact of COVID-19 on Respondents' Plans to Study in Japan

The results of the impact of COVID-19 on respondents' plans to study in Japan were shown on a scale of 4 for 'most important' to 1 for 'fourth in importance' (Figure 9.8). The result was that numerous responses were related to challenges and issues for their futures such as 'Future Path (further study plan/employment)' (2,183 points) and 'Academic (earning credits, etc.)' (1,943 points).

By region, the top two responses were 'Future Path (further study plan/employment)' and 'Academic,' which were the same for both Asian and European students; however, European students indicated that health difficulties were more severe than financial difficulties. The exaggerated time difference between Japan and Europe suggests that online classes took a toll on their physical and mental health.

Requests to the Japanese Government at the Time

In terms of requests to the Japanese government administration at the time, 'VISA issuance as soon as possible' (1,893 points) was by far the most desired item, followed by 'Rapid information provision' (1,331 points), and 'Financial support' (945 points), scored from 3 for 'most important' to 1 for 'least important' (Figure 9.9). Viewed by region, 'VISA issuance' was also the most important, with the same results in Asia and Europe.

Requests to the Host University in Japan at the Time

Respondents' requests to their host universities in Japan at the time were also scored on a scale of 3 for 'most important' to 1 for 'third most important' and 0 for 'not applicable' (Figure 9.10). As a result, 'Requesting the government to issue visas for students' (1,809 points), 'Guarantee the right to study abroad' (1,460 points) and 'Rapid information provision' (1,009 points) were particularly requested.

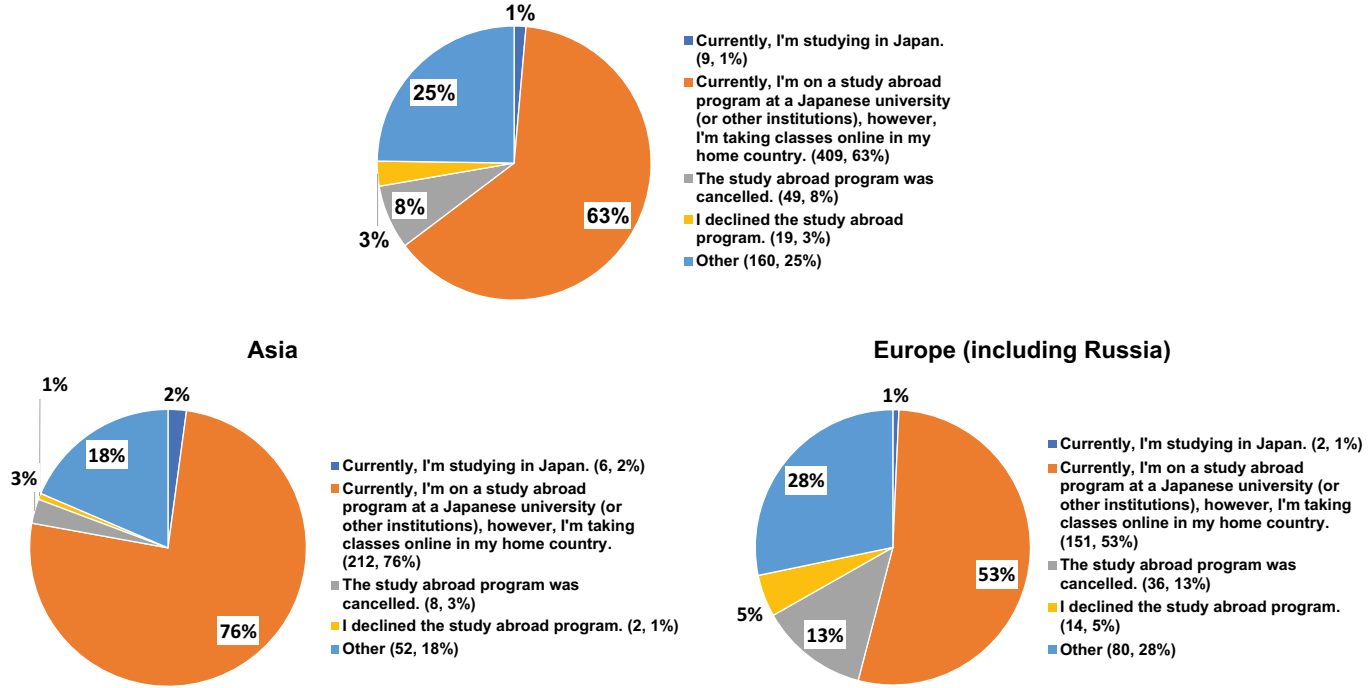


Figure 9.7 Study-abroad status of respondents.

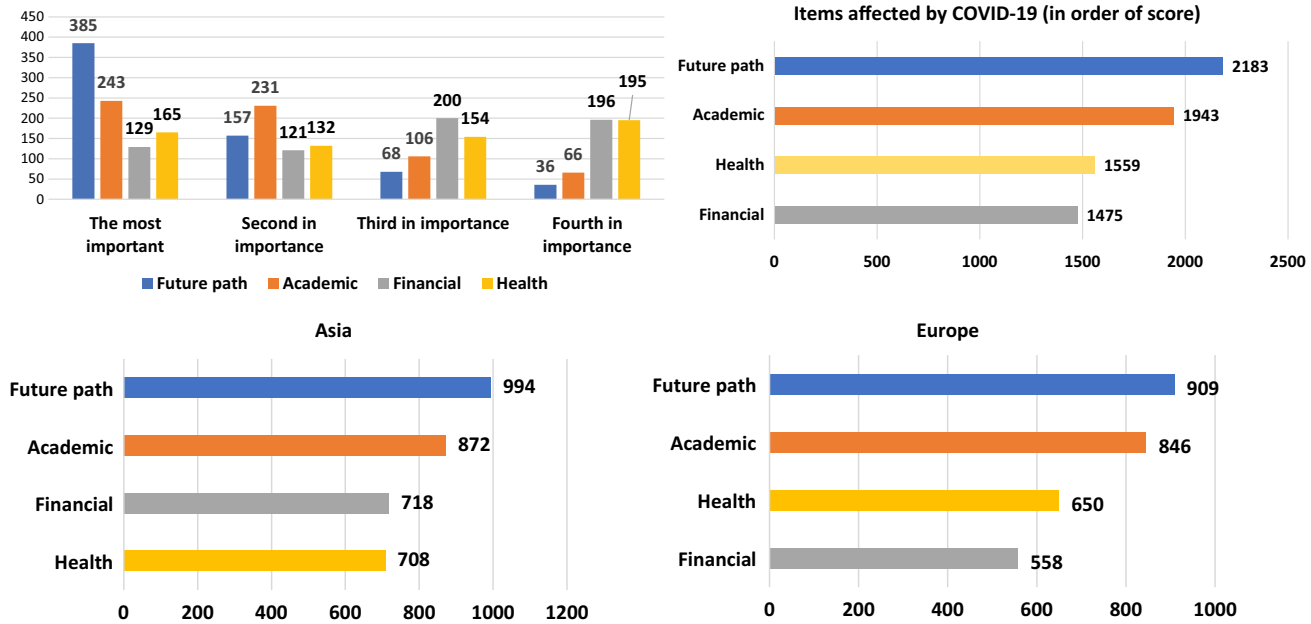


Figure 9.8 Impact of COVID-19 on respondents' plans to study in Japan.

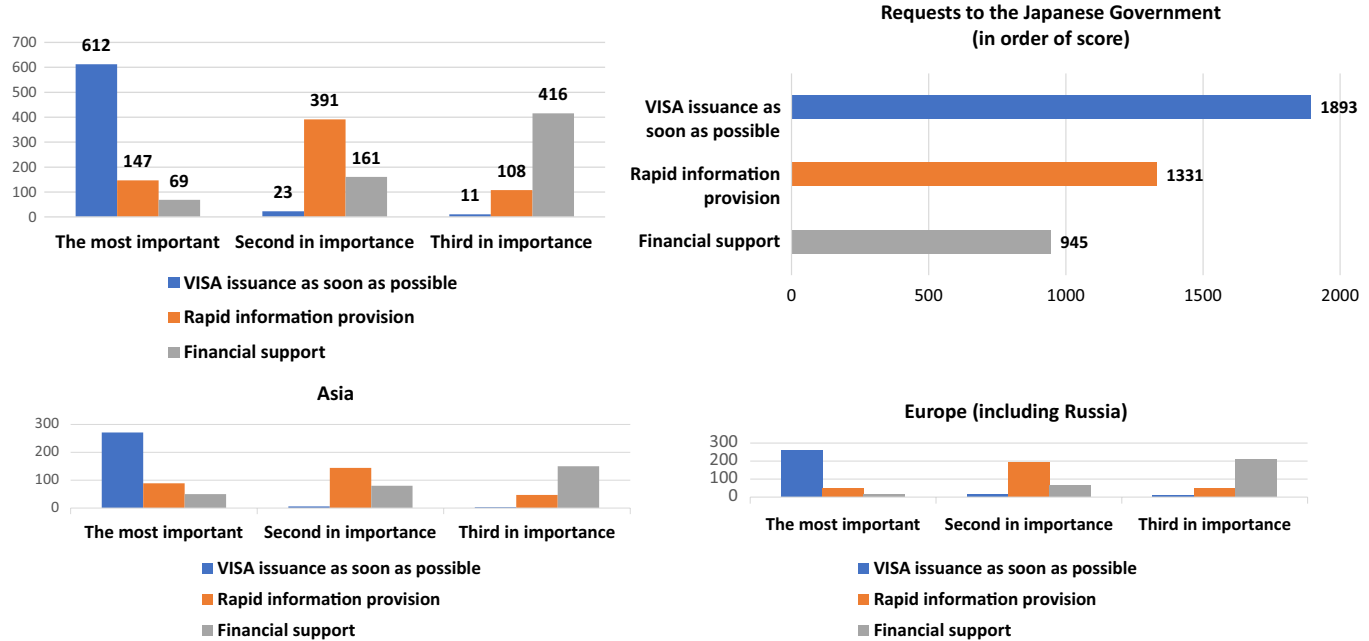


Figure 9.9 Requests to the Japanese government at the time.

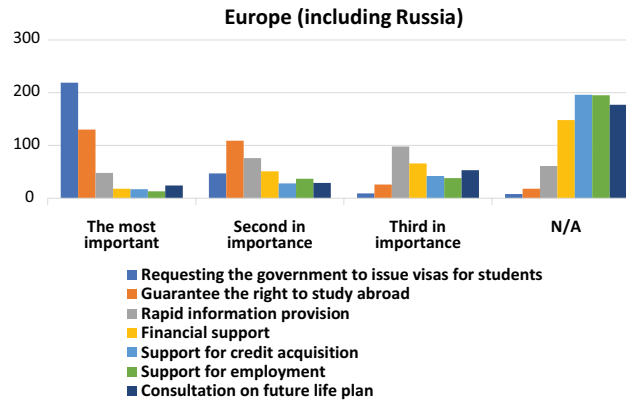
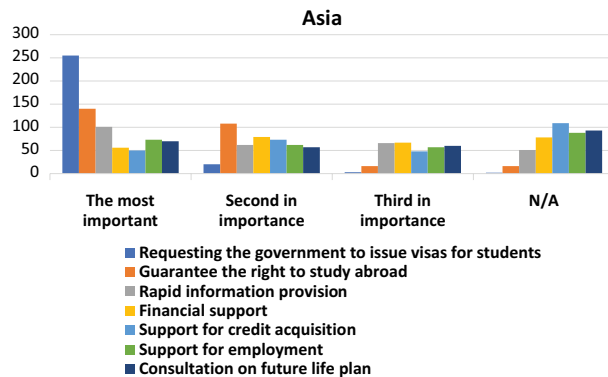
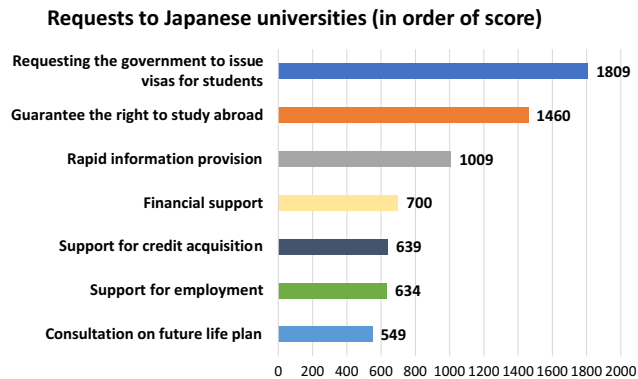
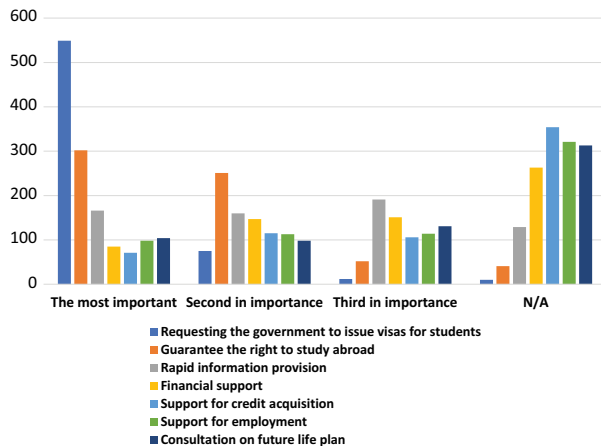


Figure 9.10 Requests to the host university in Japan at the time.

(Continued)

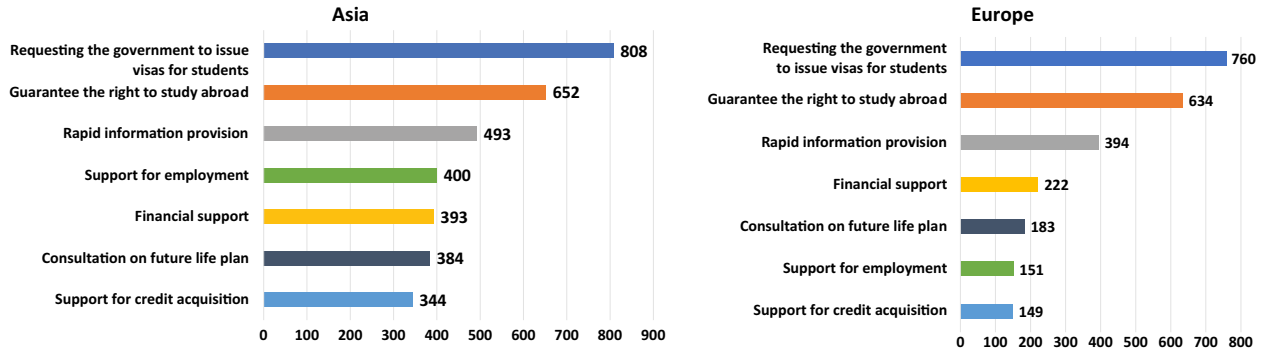


Figure 9.10 (Continued) Requests to the host university in Japan at the time.

In terms of results by region, Asian students ranked ‘Requesting the government to issue visas for students’ higher, yet felt that all other items were equally important, with ‘Support for employment’ (400 points) coming in higher than for European students. European students, conversely, tended to score lower on all items than Asian students because of the large number of ‘N/A’ responses. Among them, ‘Financial support’ (222 points) and ‘Consultation on future life plan’ (183 points) were higher than ‘Support for employment’ (151 points). From this, it can be seen that Asian respondents, many of whom were studying abroad at their own expense for the purposes of earning a degree, felt that they required further assistance from their universities for all items, while European respondents, many of whom planned to study abroad on exchange, did not plan to live or work in Japan for an extended period of time, and therefore tended to desire less support from their universities overall compared to their Asian counterparts. This indicates that they tended to expect less support than Asian students.

Future Plans to Study in Japan

When asked about their future plans to study in Japan, 82% of respondents replied they were still waiting to enter Japan (Figure 9.11). On the other hand, 2% of respondents planned to study in a country other than Japan. Even with the new policy, Measure (19), announced on November 8, there still remained a high degree of dissatisfaction among international students concerning the Japanese administration’s response, including comments such as ‘I don’t know when I will be able to come to Japan.’ Some of them complained of physical and mental health problems, while others expressed dissatisfaction with their future plans, among other serious complaints. Some gave up studying in Japan and elected to study in other countries. It is noteworthy that 82% of the respondents remained hopeful and were waiting for the opportunity to enter Japan in this challenging situation.

By region, 87% of Asian students said they were still waiting to enter Japan, while only 76% of European students responded similarly. Instead, they were more likely to describe their situation in detail as ‘other,’ such as ‘I have been waiting to come to Japan for a year and a half,’ or ‘If I cannot come to Japan by spring, I will turn it down.’ Since the time difference was less for Asian students, the impact of online classes on their health was minimal, and because many respondents planned to stay in Japan for a long time as degree-seeking students, it can be said that they still had some motivation to wait to enter Japan. European students, on the other hand, found it difficult to wait longer for their arrival in Japan because the time difference between Japan and Europe was so enormous that it impacted their health when attending online classes, and because many of them planned to study abroad as exchange students, making it challenging for them to postpone their studies.

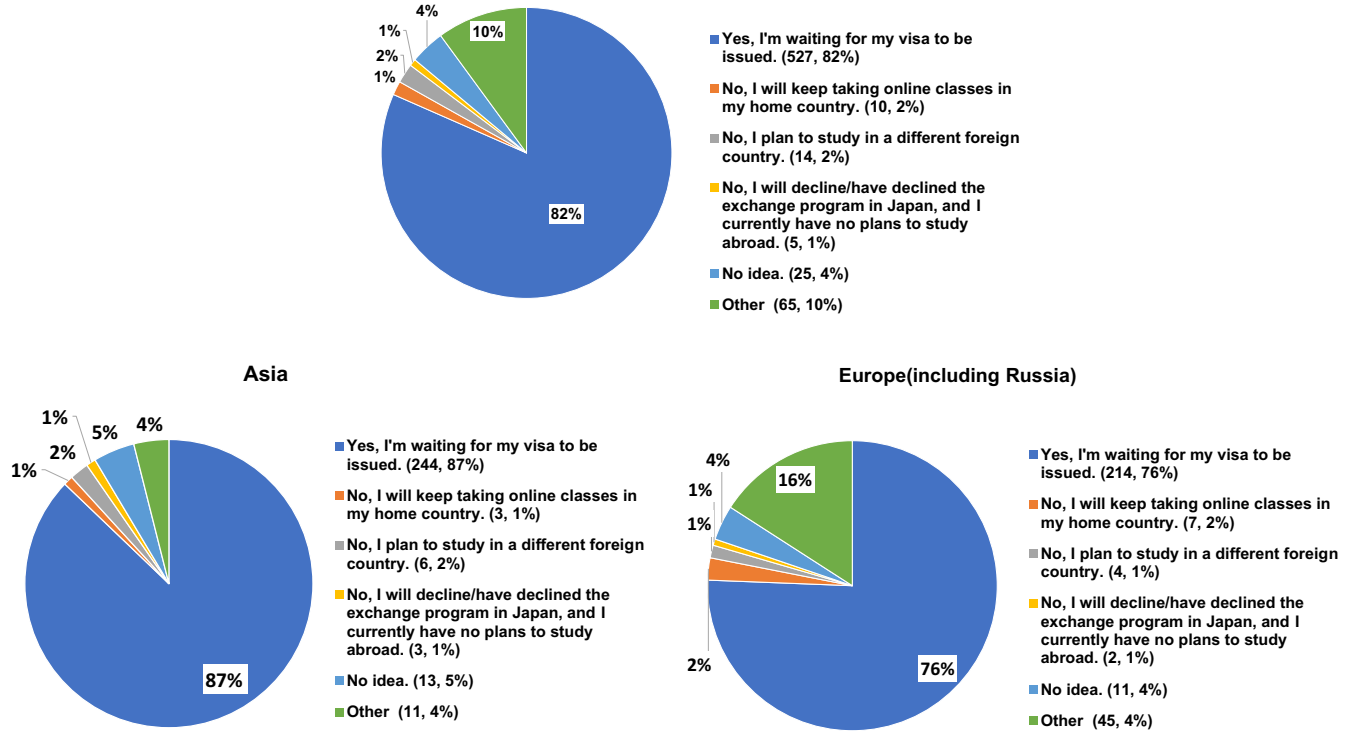


Figure 9.11 Future plans to study in Japan.

Respondents' Most Affected by COVID-19 (Descriptive Responses)

This survey included an open-ended question for the respondents about what had been most impacted by COVID-19. Due to space limitations, we present the open-ended responses and trends separately for Asia and Europe. Their descriptive responses were corrected for minimal grammatical errors, but otherwise their responses are presented as the original.

Asian Students Most Affected by COVID-19

First, many of the Asian respondents had planned to stay in Japan for an extended period of time, as many of them were in science and engineering fields and their purpose for studying in Japan was to obtain a degree; so they wrote about scholarships and employment. In addition, many students were considering career advancement in Japan and were waiting to quit their jobs at home to begin their studies in Japan. It was clear that their inability to come to Japan had a significant impact on their life plans and the difficulties they faced in their home countries. Below are some descriptive responses:

- 1) After sufficient vaccination, I was hoping that I would be allowed to enter immediately. The Olympics was given importance and students were neglected. This is unique to Japan; all other countries are more considerate to students. I regret selecting Japan for studies abroad. (India, obtaining a degree, privately financed, currently participating in a study program, but taking online classes from their home country)
- 2) I am from Myanmar. Currently, I am facing not only COVID-19, but also the military coup. (...) My dream of studying in Japan came true when I got a scholarship and became a master's student at E University. I thought that finally I could solve my family's financial problems and be able to enjoy studying in my dream country. But, it has still not happened yet. I am still in my country and worrying about the scholarship fee, and I am still unable to provide for my family. (...) When the Japanese students are sitting in the classroom and I am alone in my room while staring at my computer screen... While Japanese students are discussing and performing the group project together, I am alone, unable to help, and unable to enjoy my student life. I thought that my study journey in Japan would be full of happiness and I could make a lot of foreign friends, but in reality, it was the opposite. In a person's life, youth is a thing which you cannot buy with money and cannot get back once time has passed. (Myanmar, obtaining a degree, privately financed, currently participating in a study program, but taking online classes from their home country)
- 3) I've arranged everything including my career path and school for my children accordingly. I took a study loan from the bank as initial funding after learning of my arrival in Japan in March so I could depart in April. It was so decisive since there was no information about border restrictions either from my country or from Japan. In the end, I spent it to support my family

life while waiting for Japan to open the border. Now, I have to sell my property here to cover it while my scholarship is unavailable due to still being overseas. It is going to be canceled, too, by the foundation if I cannot enter Japan in February 2022. (Indonesia, obtaining a degree, privately financed, currently participating in a study program, but taking online classes from their home country)

European Students Most Affected by COVID-19

Regarding European students; 34% of them major in Foreign Studies, 12% in the Humanities and 10% in Social Sciences (Figure 9.6). In addition, numerous students enter Japan through exchange or accredited study abroad programs, where the purpose of studying in Japan is to earn credits. From their responses, it was clear that many were not coming to Japan to pursue a career, but rather because they had a strong interest in Japan and Japanese culture and wanted to experience and deepen their knowledge of the country. Furthermore, due to the enormous time difference, there were numerous serious accounts of health issues resulting from late-night online classes and a feeling of ‘social isolation’ despite being in their home countries.

- 1) As I said COVID-19 and the Japanese border restriction constrained me to attending class during the night. Each day, I have to wake up at 1 am and be dynamic the whole night until approximately 9 a.m. This put me in social isolation because I do not have the same routine as my family or my friends and I am in bad health condition. Since I started the classes, the lack of sunlight and the night class brought me exhaustion and weakened me to all viruses, such as influenza. Owing to my night class, I could spend entire weeks without going outside. Also, all the classes are designed to be taken in person in Japan, and the workload is heavy for these conditions.

These were not good conditions to work under, so I had to make a decision to move to Thailand and get courses during the day. (France, Credit acquisition, exchange program, currently participating in a study program, but taking online classes from their home country)

- 2) I already had to postpone my exchange year by a year last year because they didn’t announce anything before the term was about to start and I couldn’t postpone it this year again, as the exchange is compulsory for me. Classes are from 1 a.m. to 10 a.m., which greatly affects my physical and mental health. I’m losing the majority of my scholarship because I’m not in Japan and had to move to my parents’ place. (They obviously don’t sleep in the daytime and are loud.) With classes at this time and no sleep throughout the day, I didn’t really learn much of the content of the lectures to be honest. Of course, the other benefits of an exchange semester (cultural exchange and understanding) are completely non-existent. (Germany, Credit acquisition, exchange program, currently participating in a study program, but taking online classes from their home country)

Discussion

As described above, this survey received responses from students waiting overseas in various countries and regions, and in a wide variety of study abroad situations, majors and grades. From the responses, it was evident that the students who were waiting overseas at that time were experiencing extremely serious situations, and that the Japanese side did not comprehend them. It is obvious that they wanted to express their frustration and situation to the Japanese side through this questionnaire. The students who responded to this survey represent only a minor fraction of the 150,000 international students waiting to study abroad. However, it is anticipated that many times as many students as respondents have declined to study in Japan and have chosen other destinations. Under these circumstances, their responses to this survey and their desires to study in Japan are extremely valuable to those involved in the education of international students in Japan. The survey revealed the following three points.

Trends in Responses by Region

Respondents from different regions (Asia/Europe) displayed diverse reactions to Measure (20) and the impact of COVID-19.

Students from Asia tended to plan long-term, degree-seeking study-abroad programs, and many of these students chose to quit their jobs to study in Japan. They reported anxiety and difficulties, such as the termination of their scholarships, delays in their studies, research, and careers and an inability to set future plans due to not being able to enter Japan. In particular, based on their descriptive responses, students from Myanmar, Bangladesh, Indonesia and India appeared to be particularly anxious.

Contrastively, many European students, who were mostly short-term exchange students, complained of mental health issues stemming from online classes at night. They described in detail how, even at home, they lived day and night in reverse, had no time to socialize with family and friends, experienced ‘social isolation’ and were unable to live a minimally healthy and cultural life, even though they were in their own country. It was also found that the hosting of the 2021 Tokyo Olympics and the fact that Japan was the only G7 country to close its borders, but still sent Japanese students overseas, while overseas students to Japan were not allowed to enter Japan, further fueled and inflamed their mounting anxiety and burgeoning anger.

Critical Support for Inter-institutional Exchange in the New Normal Era

The study identified that the prolonged pandemic amplified the mental burdens on both inbound and outbound students. Many respondents reported mental health problems, especially among students waiting to enter Japan who took online classes at night. Referring to Nakano (2022), what their opinions

suggest is valuable for the progressive development of study abroad programs in Japan during the new normal era. Specifically, important are (1) outreach-type support and (2) information sharing. Regarding (1), Nakano (2022) presented a case in which a Japanese exchange student desired to answer the survey to share her difficult experiences during the most challenging period of the COVID-19 crisis. In this survey was also a response saying, ‘To reiterate, I am truly sorry if any of my responses were disrespectful, I just meant to try to get my feelings of frustration and loneliness across, since I truly love Japan and would like to live there.’ (420, Netherlands, accredited student, at the time studying abroad, but participating online.) Through the survey, the students received the opportunity to convey their current situation and voices. This survey illuminated their situations, which the international student admissions staff could not have imagined, and facilitated drawing attention to the importance of outreach-type support. Regarding (2) the importance of information sharing, it is clear from the survey responses that it is imperative to provide an environment where affected students can easily consult and ask questions and share their ever-changing situations.

In addition, although the survey results were compiled and released as a preliminary report³ at the end of December 2021, we were not able to analyze the descriptive responses at that time. This time, through the analysis of the descriptive responses, the situations and tendencies of the respondents, which could not be seen merely through the selective responses, emerged. We felt that when inter-institutional student exchange is restricted due to a challenging situation such as a pandemic in the future, those in charge of international student education are required to collect the descriptive responses of the affected students to better understand their situations.

In addition, the survey suggests that the alternative of synchronous online classes was not beneficial to students waiting to enter Japan. Forcing them to live day and night in reverse can be considered a cruel measure. From the university’s point of view, it was unavoidable that online classes were offered as a temporary measure because the university believed that international students would soon be able to enter Japan in October 2021, but as a result, the physical and mental burdens on the students waiting overseas were greatly amplified. In the future, with the development of the metaverse and other technologies, there is a possibility that good alternative courses could be offered online. However, it will be necessary to consider a new system for when similar situations arise in the future, taking into account the method of credit acquisition and whether or not double enrollment would be permitted.

Comparing the Trends of International Students from Asia and Europe to Japan

By comparing respondents from Asia and Europe in this study, we were able to identify regional trends (Table 9.3). Students from Asia tended to major mainly in science and engineering and to study in Japan for extended periods of time

Table 9.3 Characteristics of international students in Japan from Asia and Europe

	<i>Asian students</i>	<i>European students</i>
Purpose of Study in Japan	Mainly degrees acquisition	Mainly credits acquisition
Major of International Students (Top 3)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Science and engineering 2. Foreign studies 3. Business majors 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Foreign studies 2. Science and engineering 3. Humanities and social sciences
Study Abroad Term	Mainly more than 1 year	Mainly 6 months to less than 1 year
Student Tendency	Mainly for career advancement	Mainly for studying Japanese language and culture

to obtain a degree. European students, on the other hand, tended to major in liberal arts subjects such as foreign languages, humanities and social sciences, and to study in Japan for less than a year to earn credits.

The above trends may be useful when considering study abroad programs in Japan and strategies for recruiting the talented international students required in the new normal era. For example, as shown in Figure 9.10, since Asian students tend to choose degree programs that require more than one year to complete in order to advance their careers, they expect a wide range of support, including livelihood support, employment support, financial support and life planning counseling, in addition to academic-related assistance such as credit and degree acquisition. Furthermore, it is important to understand that Asian students, especially those from Myanmar, Bangladesh, Indonesia and India, may be coming to study in Japan with their lives and daily lives on the line for an education in Japan. In addition, given the great number of students majoring in science and engineering, science and engineering departments and graduate schools should be particularly aware of the assistance and support available specifically for Asian students. In terms of recruiting strategies for outstanding students, according to Nakano and Sengoku (2023), the current support system for directing students to study abroad in Malaysia allocates students in order of their grades up to high school, so for Malaysian students, studying in Japan is an alternative destination if they cannot study at their first-choice, English-speaking university. In addition, students who have already selected Japanese in high school, really love Japan, and desire to study in Japan are not sent to Japan. Therefore, it is essential to establish a system that places a priority on students who are excellent and whose first choice is to study in Japan.

As for European students, there is a tendency for students who like Japan and want to deepen their expertise in Japanese studies, such as Japanese language and culture, to study in Japan for six months to a year through the exchange program, rather than for career advancement. We believe that preparing a system that permitted them to learn as much as possible about Japanese language and culture in depth during their exchange period would

lead to improved satisfaction. In addition, although many of the students do not even wish to work in Japan after studying abroad, there is a possibility that in the future they will become bridges between Japan and the rest of the world as enthusiasts of Japan. Therefore, it will be necessary to devise a mechanism to build and maintain a network between them and Japanese students and universities.

The above is a comparison of international students from Asia and Europe in Japan as revealed by this survey and proposes points to be considered in the future. Of course, some of the Asian students were exchange students studying Japanese, while others were European students studying science and engineering, so these variances ought to be taken into account. From this survey, and from the survey as a whole, it can be said that the respondents who chose to study in Japan risked their lives and livelihoods, waited to enter Japan or experienced mental or physical illness, but still wanted to study in Japan for two years are extremely valuable to Japan. We believe that future responses to these students may have an impact on the progressive development of study programs in Japan during the new normal era.

Conclusion

In the above paper, we presented the real voices of the students who were waiting to study abroad at a time when Japan restricted the admission of international students due to the coronavirus pandemic and summarized the support necessary for them in the future. We were also able to paint a detailed picture of their situations that could not have been imagined from the Japanese side alone. In addition, since there were almost equal numbers of respondents from Asia and Europe, we could compare and analyze their responses and show their respective trends.

First, regarding the support needed in the future, it should encompass (1) outreach-type support and (2) the importance of information sharing. This has been mentioned by Nakano, Ishikura, Kondo (2020a, 2020b), and Nakano (2022), and it was often mentioned in several questionnaires (surveys 2 and 7 in Figure 9.1) during the pandemic. This is something that should be considered in future situations where student exchanges are suspended.

In addition, the trends in the responses of Asian and European students also revealed trends in study abroad activities. From this, we also discussed the support needed for each international student in the future along with strategies for recruiting excellent international students. The respondents to this survey were students who really desired to study in Japan. Based on the trends in their responses, the suggestions we received will be vital to students studying in Japan during the new normal era. We also believe that methods to attract students who are not yet interested in studying in Japan are issues that should be considered in the future.

The limitations of this survey include the fact that we were not able to collect the voices of students who withdrew or gave up studying in Japan before

answering the questionnaire, and the fact that we were not able to conduct a follow-up survey of the respondents because the responses were anonymous. Nevertheless, their responses are valuable to those involved in study-abroad programs in Japan and should be employed in the education and evolution of study-abroad exchanges during the new normal era. First of all, it would be helpful to know what challenges they faced and what difficult times they endured, and to consider and imagine them in the new normal era, when restrictions on inter-institutional student exchange have been eased, in case similar situations arise in the future. To this end, we plan to conduct a survey in the future to find out what prospective students are looking for in studying in Japan during the new normal era. We hope that these surveys will contribute to the development of inter-institutional student exchange in Japan and around the world.

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Notes

- 1 “Kokunai Daigaku, Ryuugaku Saikai e: Wakuchin Sesshu Shinten Oikaze [Japanese Universities to Resume Study Abroad, Tailwind of Vaccination Progress]” *Nihon Keizai Shimbun (The Nikkei)*, July 10, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXZQOUE0340M0T00C21A7000000/?unlock=1>.
- 2 User Local text mining tool is available online for free. <https://textmining.userlocal.jp/>.
- 3 “Addition of data up to and including ‘Measure (22)’: Reception of International Students Waiting to enter Japan of New measures for border enforcement (19) (Second Report)]” December 16, 2021. retrieved from <https://newnormal-jointintlresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/92ca73bf6248522375d45732b8c41c90.pdf>.

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Note

For understanding the situation at that time, I would like to introduce a descriptive response by a respondent (420, Netherlands, accredited student, at the time studying abroad, but participating online):

For my younger students, I wish they would read what I wrote above about the difficulties I face every day. However, they will not have to read it, as I have already personally told them. I wrote about it before, but these past two years of exchange students do not live on an uninhabited island. We talk to our younger students and tell them about our experiences. Since most of these experiences are negative, they will only hear about the negative parts. Some of them will ignore it, as they might be able to study abroad, but others will be deterred. The current border policy is therefore not only hurting current students, but will also influence the decisions of future students and negatively impact the image of Japan in general.

For study abroad professionals, I would like them to know of the struggles us students go through. I have mentioned it before, but those who have already given up on Japan are less likely to take part in this survey than those who have not yet given up hope, or cannot afford to give up. The responses you get to this survey might be toxic, insulting or even somewhat painful to read. To that end, I'd like to point out that the target group of this survey has been waiting for weeks, months and some have even been waiting years at this point. They might be very emotional, as I know that some of them had to give up on their dreams, some had to quit their jobs and there are even those who lost their homes and livelihoods because of these closed borders. These stories are not handpicked, but are numerous. These people had to give up on their dreams and stayed home or left for countries where they would be welcomed.

To add insult to injury, those who actually were eligible to enter Japan this month, November, had to give up due to various other reasons. The application process necessary to get a visa is so complicated, onerous and draconian that those who should have been entering this month can only try to enter halfway through December and some even towards the end

of January. In addition, the quarantine requirements are sometimes so expensive, upwards of \$2000 (see the article), that some students do not even bother trying anymore. These were the people that cared enough about Japan to invest their time getting an education that could bring them to Japan, saved money and spent countless hours studying Japanese. These dedicated people are giving up, as Japan has robbed them of years of hard work. This story of a French student comes to mind: <https://tinyurl.com/4rtju45z>

I also want to share my personal frustration as I have been following Japanese politics and every single update on these border issues. It appears to me as though the Japanese government is willfully ignorant of the impact closed borders have on respective students. Some organizations, whose members include language schools and universities and therefore do have a bias, have submitted proposals and petitions to open up the borders for students. They have not, to my knowledge, gotten any tangible response. A more recent article by NHK, JP stated that the Japanese government wants to incentivize online classes, as enrollment has dropped. This reasoning is clearly backwards, as most students drop out because of online classes that take place during the dead of night.

Furthermore, I would like to point out that the Japanese public seems to be under the impression that a significant amount of the covid cases in Japan during the past few waves were brought in by foreigners, which is utterly ridiculous, as the borders were closed and the only people entering Japan, were Japanese. Flight data shows that the vast majority of people entering Japan during this time were Japanese. The Japanese public has been able to go to other countries on a tourist visa, while those traveling to Japan for essential business cannot even enter. In this case, I am not talking about students, but about interns, trainees and those like them. The sheer amount of misinformation is astonishing.

If any of my responses were disrespectful in any way, I wish to apologize. I am also aware that the responses to this survey are more objective than personal; however, it is a really difficult situation to be in and looking at most Japan-focused news outlets and Japanese news sources, it just looks like no one is actually talking about us students in any significant way. None of our voices are being heard, or perhaps they are being heard, but not understood or sometimes even ignored. It is a very dire situation for around 150,000 students. This figure does not even include those who have already given up at some point in the past two years or whose semesters have already ended. To reiterate, I am truly sorry if any of my responses were disrespectful, I just meant to try to get my feelings of frustration and loneliness across, since I truly love Japan and would like to live there.