# Japan's Global 30 Program: The Push and Pull Factors of International Student Mobility

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**Abstract.** The Internationalization of Japanese higher education started in 1982. The original target set back in 1983 of attracting 100,000 international students to Japan was accomplished in 2003 due to Prime Minister Nakasone's "International Student 100,000 Plan". From that original plan, The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has concentrated its energy on internationalizing higher education by forming an educational system called the Global 30 Project (G30). The G30 Project and other programs were instituted to turn Japan into an international destination for higher education. Data in this paper is based on surveys directed at prestigious universities in Japan. The focus of this study is on the pull factors that attract international students to Japan and the particular G30 participating university, and the push factors that contributed to participants deciding to leave their home country. Findings in this report will be used to identify pull factors of the G30 program. Results will assist in future recruiting efforts.

**Keywords:** Global 30 Program; Higher education; International education; Japan

## History of the Internationalization of Japanese Higher Education

The push to move Japanese higher education into a period of internationalization started in 1982 with the establishment of the Nakasone cabinet. Japan and other industrialized nations recognized the need to adapt to the new era of interconnected societies that were undergoing cultural, monetary and political transformations as world economies were being transformed by great technological and communication advances (Burgess, Gibson et al., 2010). Nakasone's 1984 policies laid the foundations needed to have Japan integrate into the international community 'international country' by creating the National Council on Educational Reform (NCER).

When Prime Minister Nakasone took office in 1982, Kenichi Koyama, a close

advisor to Nakasone, wrote a lengthy article, known as the "grand design" (Pyle, 1987) outlining the future direction of Japan. The four dimensions of Nakasone's "grand design" was a kind of road map for what Nakasone's administration would accomplish. The second dimension called for Japan to be a more international state. From Nakasone's perspective, Japan needed to harmonize its national policies and institutions to be more flexible, to allow Japan's economic, social and education system to undergo major changes. A significant aspect of Nakasone's drive to internationalize Japan was to overhaul its educational system by attempting to be more internationalized by creating a scheme to attract more international students.

**The International Student Plan**
The most significant educational reform, pioneered by Nakasone, was the plan to attract 100,000 international students by the beginning of the year 2000 (hereafter called "the International Student 100,000 Plan"). As the International Student 100,000 Plan was in its infancy and planning stages, a report published clarified the close relationship between Japan's new internationalized educational policies to political and financial interests, The Report of the Advisory Group on Economic Structural Adjustment for International Harmony, published in April 1984, set in motion several transitional national policies to propel Japan into the future. The report stated "the time has come for Japan to make a historical transformation in its traditional policies on economic management and on the nation's lifestyle."

A more in-depth, fundamentally important report was published two years later in 1986, the Second Report on Educational Reform; it delved into more detail on the essentials of internationalizing the education system of Japan, appealed for sweeping changes. The comprehensive report sought to change the basic premise of the Japanese educational philosophy to one that underscored the importance of "freedom, autonomy, and responsibility, principles that differed from traditional Japanese education." The most important aspect of the Second Report on Educational Reform called for more international influence through exposure from a more internationalized curriculum and through intercultural communication, The International Student 100,000 Plan and future programs targeting the increase of foreign students in Japan, and, more generally, internationalization of Japanese education, are rooted in these values found in the report:

> Internationalization in education is not limited to the system but involves liberalizing Japanese Education and the consciousness of its educators. To this end, it is important to foster through every possible educational opportunity, constant interests in and tolerance of what is different, and establish an educational system with the capacity for self-renovation that can handle ever-changing international relations with flexibility and improve itself on its own (Koyama 1986, p.2).

**Features of the G30 Project**

According to the Japan Association of Student Services (JASSO) as of 2013, there were 135,519 foreign students enrolled in Japanese private, public and national universities (JASSO, 2013). At this rate of foreign student enrollment it would appear that the goal of 300,000 foreign students by 2020, set by MEXT is not an attainable goal.

The original policies of the G30 Project were established in 2001 with the intentions of promoting 30 prestigious universities (Yonezawa, 2010). These innovative policies included a 15 billion Yen budget to expand 30 institutions that would be recognized as the 'internationalized core'. The core or key component of this venture of creating an internationalized core was to recruit international students to Japan.

The premise of the G30 project is to internationalize higher education in Japan. In 2009, 13 universities were selected to be part of the G30 project offering degree programs in a wide range of disciplines ranging from life science, agriculture, environmental studies, information and communication technology and social sciences to name a few. All courses are taught entirely in English; however, G30 students also take Japanese language classes as part of the curriculum. The G30 project consists of national and private universities; each university has autonomy over the organization, management, acceptance, curriculum and other aspects related to the education of international students. The 13 G30 universities are as follows: Doshisha University, Keio University, Kyoto University, Kyushu University, Meiji University, Nagoya University, Osaka University, Ritsumeikan University, Sophia University, Tohoku University, University of Tokyo, Tsukuba University and Waseda University.

**Attracting International Students**

The core principle behind the Global 30 Program is to capitalize on the vital opportunities that are related to a more internationalized higher education system e.g. intellectual resources and international alliances.

One of the most prominent factors affecting the internationalization of higher education is the mobility across borders of international students. There have been numerous significant studies conducted on significant aspects of international student mobility since the 1980s (e.g. Lee and Tan 1984; McMahon 1992; Marazzarol and Soutar 2001; Altback 2004). Factors and influences have drastically changed since those informative studies; international student mobility has increased dramatically. Economic conditions of receiving and hosting nations have altered the overall supply and demand of international student programs.

Altbach's historic study investigating international student mobility identified the 'push-pull' model that identified reasons why some students were 'pushed' from their home country due to negative social, academic and financial situations, and, why others were 'pulled' by foreign universities offering favorable educational conditions such as significant financial scholarships and

better economic opportunities (Altbach 1998, p. 240). The connection between push and pull factors is often complex that is affected by an intricate set of socio-economic, political and financial factors. In some cases, the host nation is uncertain or uneasy about subsidizing programs for foreign students, whereas, host nations view hosting and subsidizing education for foreign student as an investment and as a method of improving the overall educational system. According to Davis (1995) 'push' factors do not provide a precise set of patterns or reasons why students seek to study overseas. Conversely, 'pull' factors of the host nation and/or universities in question include modern facilities, comfortable economic situations and favorable political environment.

In 1984, Cummings conducted research into the complex patterns that influenced the immigration and migration of secondary education. In 1992, McMahon published informative research that pinpointed several key features that impacted the decision making process of an international student to seek an education overseas. The "push" and "pull" model (McMahon, 1992) helped direct future research by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) where three distinct stages were labeled in the pursuit of a university education in a foreign place. First, the preliminary decision to seek an international education is made. Inevitably, the decision to not study domestically is ultimately affected by a "push" factor previously published by McMahon (1992). The second stage is choosing a host country, which is affected by the following factors: (1) awareness of host country, (2) advice from family and friends, (3) issues related to finance, (4) development in the host country, (5) close proximity to the native country, and (6) recommendations from family and/or friends who previously lived in the host country (Mazzarol et al., 1997, cited in Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002). The third and final stage is when the student chooses which foreign university to attend. In 1985, the Iwao study (cited in Chandler, 1989) carried out in Japan to classify key reasons why a foreign student chose to study in Japan; it identified an interest in Japanese language and culture as major factors in the decision to study in Japan. Another early study by Hicks and Amifuji (1987) showed academics were the most important factors where students gained the most satisfaction out of improving their Japanese language abilities, obtaining knowledge that would benefit their future, and the potential to join work-study programs at a Japanese company.

**Importance Of Research**
This study attempts to provide additional scholarly knowledge on the push and pull dynamics that impact the decision-making process international students face when choosing Japan as a destination country. Specifically, pull factors of G30 Japanese universities are identified and analyzed.

**Research question**
What aspects of higher education of international students in the G30 Program may be expanded, modified, or improved to enhance Japan's international competitive position in attracting students worldwide?

**Method**
**Data sources and analysis**
The data presented in this paper were collected by an online questionnaire service. Data presented and analyzed in this paper represents 2 survey questions designed to measure the specific pull factors of the Global 30
Program. Further research is currently being conducted to evaluate challenges of intercultural communication that exist within the G30 program. The questionnaire consisted of 28 questions to assess students' perspectives in the following areas: demographics, factors that influenced their decision to choose Japan as a destination country, issues related to intercultural communication, perceptions of their educational experience and future aspirations upon completion of their degree. Apart from questions related to demographical information, all questions had an option for open-ended responses. The abovementioned questions consisted of 5-point Likert scale questions, and Radio Button Grid questions that allowed respondents to rank specific choices. In addition, a Chi-Square test was used to collect data identified in Table 1. Participation in this survey was voluntary and participants were required to answer consent questions before continuing with the questionnaire.

**Participants**
Data were collected from May 16th, 2014-July 31st, 2014. There were 96 total respondents with a breakdown of 52 Males (54.2%) and 44 females (45.8%). The Age range of the respondents was 18-24 years old. Of the 96 respondents, 36% were first year students; 29% second year students; 20% third year students; 15% fourth year students. There were no graduate students who took part in this survey. The original target of this research was to get 200 respondents. It should be noted that all of the 13 Global 30 Universities in Japan were contacted by email to outline the goals of the study and to invite each university to participate in this research project. Of the 13 universities designated as G30 universities, 4 agreed to participate in this study. The remaining 9 universities either did not respond to the researcher's request or refused to participate for various reasons. The distribution of nationality represented in this study are as follows: China, 26 (27.2%); Indonesia, 13 (13.6%); Japan, 9 (9.4%); Vietnam, 9 (9.4%); South Korea, 6 (6.3%); India, 5 (5.2%); Malaysia, 4 (4.2%); Singapore, 4 (4.2%); Taiwan, 4 (4.2%); Thailand; 3 (3.1%); Egypt, 3 (3.1%); Hong Kong, 2 (2.1%); Argentina, Brazil Kenya, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, U.S.A. 1 (1%).

There are several factors that affect the distribution of nationalities in the Global 30 program. Participating Global 30 universities have recruiting offices in Hanoi, Vietnam; Seoul, South Korea; Beijing and Shanghai, China; Jakarta, Indonesia. Further research must be conducted to analyze the direct impact recruiting offices have on the distribution of nationalities. In addition, further research must be conducted on how each participating Global 30 University actively works to advertise and promote their degree programs worldwide.

Majors represented of the 96 respondent are as follows: Civil Engineering 39; Mechanical Engineering 11; Social Sciences 9; Agriculture 8; Applied Chemistry 6; Aerospace Engineering 3; Biological Sciences 3; Japan Studies 2; Policy Science

2; Environmental Science 1; Chemistry-Biology (combined major) 1; Applied Physics 1; Environmental and Information Sciences 1; Others 9.

## Results

In Table 1., the first survey item to be explored, "my primary reasons for choosing to study at my university are related to the following". The data represented in Table 1 clearly shows that the location of the national and private universities was of a moderate importance to the 96 respondents. 37.5% listed this quality as "important". Conversely, respondents did select the "specific course of study offered (Major)" and "positive reputation connected to my university" as "Important" or 67.7% and 62.5% respectively. These factors directly relate to a previous study by Mazaarol and Soutar (2002) where specific factors were characterized as having an impact on international and domestic students in Australian educational institutions. The six variables identified in this study were "the quality and reputation of the institution, the recognition of the institution's qualifications in their own country, the international strategic alliances the institutions had, the quality of the institution's staff, its alumni base and its existing international student population" (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002:87).

**Table 1: Factors Influencing University Choice (n = 96)**

|  | Number of Students (%) | | Male | Female |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Specific course of study offered (Major)* | | | | |
| Not important | 5 | (5.2%) | 1% | 4.2% |
| Somewhat important | 26 | (27.1%) | 15.7% | 11.5% |
| Important | 65 | (67.7) | 37.5% | 30.1% |
| *Positive reputation of my university* | | | | |
| Not important | 9 | (9.4%) | 5.2% | 4.2% |
| Somewhat important | 27 | (28.1) | 15.7% | 12.5% |
| Important | 60 | (62.5%) | 33.3% | 29.1% |
| *Location* | | | | |
| Not important | 14 | (14.6%) | 5.2% | 9.4% |
| Somewhat important | 46 | (47.9%) | 29.2% | 18.7% |
| Important | 36 | (37.5%) | 19.8% | 17.7% |

Table 2. Factors Influencing Choice of Japan as Destination Country identifies reasons why international students decided to choose Japan as their country of choice. "My primary reason for choosing to study in Japan are related to the following", This Chi-Square Test item listed eight items that respondents ranked from "not important", "somewhat important", and "important". Of the 96 respondents, 81.3% stated, "not being accepted to my first choice country", as "not important". This is significant in that it shows that for the vast majority of the students who took part in this survey indicated Japan was their primary selection for choosing a host country. This data corresponds to (Mazzarol et al.,

1997) recognition of factors discovered to impact how students select a host country. They acknowledged that the "knowledge and awareness" of the host country in the student's home country had a direct influence on the availability of information related to the host country as a possible destination for overseas study. Also, part of this factor was the destination's reputation for quality (Mazzarol et al., 1997). This theory also supports the data from Table 1 where 62.5% of respondents listed "positive reputation connected to my university" as an important factor when selecting which university to attend. Another key factor in choosing to study in Japan is the "availability of financial aid and/or scholarships", where 56.2% of respondents chose this variable as "important". This factor is related to cost, another key factor identified by (Mazzarol et al., 1997). In addition, specific courses offered throughout the G30 universities seem to be somewhat appealing to international students. 52.1% selected "opportunity to pursue a career in my field of interest" as "important".

**Table 2: Japan as Destination Country**

| | Not important | Somewhat important | Important | Responses |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ability to study in English while living in Japan | 6.3% (6) M=3.15% F=3.15% | 28.1% (27) M=13.5% F=14.6% | 65.6% (63) M=37.5% F=28.1% | 96 |
| Availability of financial aide | 19.8% (19) M=10.4% F=9.4% | 24% (23) M=11.4% F=12.6% | 56.2% (54) M=32.3% F=23.9% | 96 |
| Opportunity to pursue a career in my field of interest | 6.2% (6) M=2.1% F=4.2% | 41.7% (40) M=23% F=18.7% | 52.1% (50) M=29.2% F=22.9% | 96 |
| Affordability of the Global 30 program | 10.4% (10) M=7.3% F=3.1% | 43.8% (42) M=18.7% F=25.1% | 45.8% (44) M=28.1% F=17.7% | 96 |
| General interest in Japan and Japanese culture | 16.7% (16) M=7.3% F=9.4% | 37.5% (36) M=18.75% F=18.75% | 45.8% (44) M=28.1% F=17.7% | 96 |
| Interest in learning the Japan language | 31.3% (30) M=13.5% F=17.8% | 38.5% (37) M=23% F=15.5% | 30.2% (29) M=17.8% F=12.4% | 96 |
| Close to my home country | 45.8% (44) M=27% F=18.8% | 32.3% (31) M=11.4% F=20.9% | 21.9% (21) M=15.6% F=6.3% | 96 |
| Not being accepted to my first choice country | 81.3% (78) M=44.8% F=36.5% | 13.5% (13) M=6.3% F=7.2% | 5.2% (5) M=3.1% F=2.1% | 96 |

**My primary reason for choosing to study in Japan are related as above.**
*M=Male*

*F=Female*

More recent findings by Macready and Tucker (2011) identified 'push' factors in international student mobility that are relevant to the 'push' factors found in this study of international students in the Global 30 Program. Although no statistical information was found on the most prevalent 'push' factors, the following list is representative of general 'push' factors found to have attracted international students to the Global 30 program.

**Table 3: 'Push' Factors of International Student Mobility**
o   High-quality study opportunities
o   Specialize study opportunities
o   Language
o   Affordable cost
o   Recognized qualifications
o   Prospects of successful graduation within a specified time
o   Effective marketing

*Note.* Adapted from Macready & Tucker, 2011: p. 21-25

## Discussion

As outlined by MEXT in the 5-point framework for establishing measures to successfully implement the "300,0000 International Student Plan", the underlining reasons behind the G30 program are to internationalize higher education in Japan or "promote the globalization of universities" (MEXT, 2009a). The thirteen universities chosen, as G30 institutions were to "increase courses taught in English. For Japanese universities to attract quality students, "raising the quality of education and research in universities has become the most important factor in attracting high-caliber foreign students" (Kitayama, 2003, p. 72). As the Japanese language is of little commercial use outside of Japan, the most effective approach to attracting foreign students was to offer full-degree programs in English. This was a means of attracting advanced international students "who otherwise would not have considered studying in Japan (Tsuneyoshi, 2005, p. 65)." The data represented in Table 2 clearly shows the importance of offering English degree programs. 65.6% of respondents reported that the "ability to study in English while living in Japan" was a major pull factor in deciding to study in Japan. Only 6.3% of respondents list this reason as "not important". English is considered a global language and is an essential component in attracting quality international students who by their presence increase the diversity of student population on campus and contribute to the internationalization of the domestic student body. The results of this research project clearly indicate that academic courses offered in English are a very important 'pull' factor in attracting international students (de Wit, 2005; Wachter, 2005).

In a related study conducted in China, Zheng's (2003, p. 226) identified crucial factors that influence Chinese students' decision to study overseas. Zheng's study identified the following concerns in order of importance: issues related to economics (29%), educational aspects (27%), personal issues (15%), social aspects (13%), issues related to culture (9%), and political factors (7%). In connection

with economic concerns, availability of financial aid and affordability were cited as the most important factors; educational factors demonstrated that 65.6% of students surveyed indicated that "ability to study in English while living in Japan" was of paramount importance. Zheng's findings in 2003 are comparable to the findings of this report that identify the most significant 'pull' factors in attracting international students; quality of education and affordability of that education are the top considerations. In summary, Table 2 provides comparisons of fundamental 'pull' factors that affect students when deciding to choose Japan as a host nation. Main 'pull' factors specific to this program are (1) full degree programs offered in English, (2) financial aid, (3) career prospects, and (4) overall affordability.

The results of this analysis are analogous to Mazzarol and Soutar (2001), a study of international students from many different countries who lived and studied in Australia. The study ranked student responses as to why they decided to choose Australia as a destination country. Leading reasons were quality and reputation of degree program, quality of education, and opportunity for scholarships. These results mimic this study in that leading pull factors of international students in Australia appear to be quite similar to international students in Japan. Reputation, high standard of education, affordability and financial assistance remain essential pull factors sought by international students in these two studies.

## Conclusion
This study indicates the most important factors students considered in selecting a host country are: specific majors offered, the excellent reputation of the select universities and the availability of obtaining a university degree, in specific course, content in English. Referring to Mazaarol and Soutar (2001) and the 'push' and 'pull' factors that greatly affect the movement of international students across global borders, Japanese universities and the administrators who dictate policy can work toward improving already existing positive 'pull' factors while working toward enhancing additional 'pull' factors to attract more international students to Japan.

Japan as a host nation can enhance certain pull factors by maintaining current tuition levels, facilitating the process of obtaining financial aide, easing restrictions on obtaining student visas and working with local authorities to help international students in certain geographical areas to feel more welcome.

Analyzing data from this study show that there are distinct pull factors that are attracting students to the G30 program and specific G30 universities. On a micro level, specific courses offered through the 13 G30 universities, and the excellent reputation shared by those participating universities are major pull factors for students when deciding which G30 University to select. On a macro level, academic pull factors are: the potential of pursuing a desired career, and the opportunity to enroll in a four-year degree program where all course work is offered in English. Economic pull factors of the G30 program are its affordability, and readily available financial aide. The differentiating and most

important factor of the G30 program, compared to other international study programs in Japan, is the availability of all degree course work in English. Greater recruiting efforts need to be made to increase the total amount of international students in the G30 program by creating marketing schemes that highlight its attractive points such as its affordability and excellent reputation of participating universities. Japan has many attractive points as a destination nation most of which are widely publicized and well known to youth around the world. Japanese culture is known worldwide in terms of its food, animation and sub-culture. By combining target marketing of these appealing characteristics together with the opportunity of living and studying in a fascinating country while obtaining a degree in English, Japanese institutions can be successful in increasing the number applicants to the G30 program.

## Limitations

This study identifies pull factors that attract international students to the G30 Program; however, certain limitations remain. There were no graduate students included in this study. In addition, future research could be further divided by identifying specific pull factors in each major represented in the study. Lastly, a larger sample size is needed to more accurately analyze the various pull factors outlined in this study. Thus, it is essential to obtain access to all G30 students in the thirteen participation universities in order to attain more detailed and thorough statistics.

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