

Covid-19 and Its Impact on Bangladeshi Students in Japan

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Abstract- The outbreak of COVID-19 caused a massive shock to the higher education sector, dramatically changing the lives and plans of international students, which are easily visible from the travel restrictions, social distancing and wearing masks, isolation measures, quarantine, campus closure, border closure, non-availability of part-time jobs, withering away economic supports etc. Japan is one of the top destinations for international students, especially from Bangladesh, who intend to build a career in multinational companies. Every year, many foreign (international) students are enrolled in undergraduate and graduate-level education at different universities and training colleges in Japan. A big chunk of Asian students, especially South Asian and Southeast Asian students, dream of studying in Japan. This paper aims to identify the challenges of Bangladeshi students who are now studying in Japan and passing through their hard times in the post-COVID-19 era. Research is designed to thoroughly investigate the Bangladeshi students' activities and lifestyles to assess the challenges and formulate a problem-solving strategy. Multiple apparatuses were employed to triangulate the data. The outcome of this research is significant in identifying and mitigating the problems, and as a result, foreign students' service to higher education institutions could be more efficient and reliable.

Keywords International Students, Japan-Bangladesh, Foreign Students, Higher Education, Mental Health, Covid-19

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1. Introduction

For Bangladeshi students, Japan is considered a desirable study-abroad destination because it offers a good number of scholarships and the opportunity for part-time jobs. Part-time job opportunities in Japan are dependent on Japanese language ability. For example, students capable of primary-level language could find a job (transport companies, where work is not involved with the customer), packing, hotel cleaning and bed making. If a student is capable of intermediate level Japanese language, they can find a job as a café/restaurant staff, convenience staff, store staff or any type of service counter. If students can perform at an advanced level in Japanese, they can find a job in a call centre, as a receptionist, or in any conversation- and a writing-friendly part-time job. Academic tuition fees in Japanese universities are lower than in the UK or the USA. Additionally, almost all Japanese universities offer scholarship programs and tuition reduction programs. Graduate schools of national and private universities vary from 820,000 JPY-1,000 000 JPY.¹ As the tuition fees in Japan are affordable and part-time jobs are available for students, many Bangladeshi students are showing interest in studying in Japan. Also, many scholarships are available for students, like the Japanese government (MEXT), Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO), and other scholarships provided by private foundations [Figure 1]. According to a report by ‘Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO), 2018’, a total of 3,640 Bangladeshi students are studying in Japan.²

Scholarship Name	Percentage
Monbukagakusho	82.39 %
Other Scholarships	6.68 %
Rotary Yoneyama Memorial Foundation	4.27 %
JDS	4.02 %
Asian Youth Fellowship (AYF)	0.79 %
Self-Financed	0.79 %
JICA Counterpart Training	0.44 %
UNESCO	0.32 %
Japan Foundation Fellowship	0.28 %

Figure 1: Types of Scholarship for Bangladeshi Nationals who studied in Japan³

In the last three to four years, it is unfortunate that higher education is one of the

¹ <https://www.studyinjapan.go.jp/en/planning/academic-fees/>

² https://www.studyinjapan.go.jp/en/_mt/2020/08/date2019z_e.pdf

³ <https://www.bd.emb-japan.go.jp/en/education/statiscalInfo.html>

most damaged sectors that has particularly been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. It caused study disruption for students across the world. Also, this disruption caused mental hazards for hundreds of students who were unable to enter a designated country or had to continue their studies without scholarships. On the other hand, part-time jobs are also not an easy task to find. So, to discuss all these problems, present research is undertaken, and discussion is very important for further solutions.

2. Bangladeshi Students in Japan amid Covid-19

According to data from the Japan Students Services Organization, the total number of international students studying in Japan was 3,12,214 in 2019 and 279,597 in 2020. 11% of international students decreased from the previous year. The JSSO report also shows that, in 2019, there were 3,527 Bangladeshi students, and it was 3,098 in 2020. That means 13 percent was decreased.

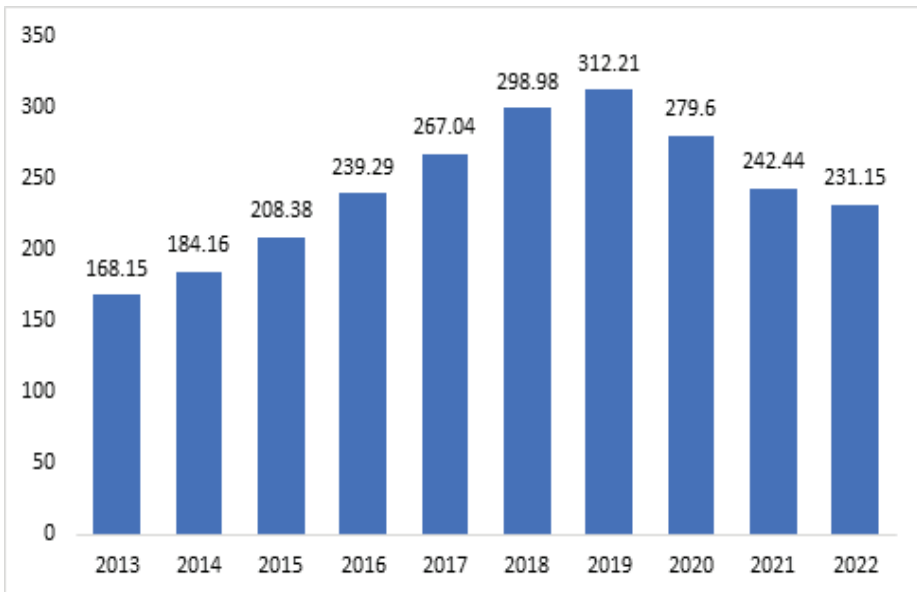


Figure 2: Number of international students in Japan⁴

When the Omicron variant of the COVID-19 virus arrived in 2020, Japan circulated some of the strictest rules of border controls and prohibited all new entries by non-Japanese people. It includes foreign students, foreign family

⁴ <https://erudera.com/statistics/japan/japan-international-student-statistics/>

members of Japanese citizens, and permanent residents who were outside Japan at that time. Later, a state of emergency in 17 prefectures of the country, including the Japanese capital, Tokyo, was imposed on March 21 to combat coronavirus. With the approval of an expert panel headed by Shigeru Omi, the country's government took a policy decision in this regard. In April 2020, the Japanese government raised the daily limit of people allowed to enter Japan to 10,000 and removed the pre-existing spectator attendance limit for large-scale events. Approximately 4,00,000 foreign students were waiting to enter Japan while the host organizations submitted online applications and completed visa screening.⁵ In Japan, from 3 January 2020 to 19 July 2023, there have been 33,803,572 confirmed cases of Covid-19, with 74,694 deaths reported to WHO. As of July 3, 2023, a total of 401,459,622 vaccine doses have been administered.⁶

In the Covid-19 border restriction system, Japan first banned the entry of Chinese nationals from Hubei province due to the Coronavirus in January 2020, which gradually expanded to 24 countries by the end of March. Within one month of COVID-19 being declared a pandemic, Japan banned entry into the country by foreign nationals, including all foreign residents of Japan, up to 73 nations. In May 2020, Japan expanded its entry ban to cover a total of 100 countries. Further, on 28 August 2020, the ban was extended to cover 159 countries. On November 8, 2021, Japan opened its borders to foreign students, interns, and business travellers. After the discovery of the highly contagious Omicron variant, Japan banned the entry of non-resident foreign nationals again on 30 November 2021. Since March 2022, Japan has finally allowed foreign nationals to participate in tourism.⁷ After the COVID-19 special crisis period, foreign students' entrance again started in Japan in March 2022. The pandemic crisis has made us rethink the capabilities of online learning platforms, accelerating students' capability worldwide. In some cases, remote learning has also been accepted due to the health crisis. The challenges faced by international students are considered a key indicator of higher education and a priority factor for a prospective student's future planning.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Factors behind Studying Abroad

Globalization of higher education has improved student desire for higher education. Since many students want to study abroad, cross-border higher education has developed significantly. Thus, several scholars have investigated

⁵<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/japan-maintain-most-border-restrictions-until-end-february-2022-01-11/>

⁶ <https://covid19.who.int/region/wpro/country/jp>

⁷ <https://www.japantimes.co.jp>

why students learn overseas.⁸ The three-step strategy is appropriate for illustrating the chosen practice for pursuing higher education. The three steps consist of determining whether to study abroad or stay in one's own country, selecting a desired destination to study overseas, and choosing a college or university. Although this is a typical step in the decision-making process, some students pick higher education institutions without considering the goal. The push-pull paradigm influences most of the literature addressing the function. Usually, motivation factors are undesirable characteristics of students' home countries that urge them to study elsewhere. Pull factors relate to the attractive attributes of locations that lure students to study abroad. The push and pull elements that attract and inspire students to pursue higher studies abroad are defined in the first phase of the three-phase model, which determines whether to study overseas.⁹

Six fundamental pulling factors affect parameters.¹⁰ The first factor impacting the degree of destination recognition is the knowledge of the hosting country. The degree of additional referrals throughout the decision-making process is the second consideration. Parental opinion is crucial to the ultimate choice.¹¹ The third consideration is cost, which encompasses not just living expenses but also social costs such as security. According to Eder et al. (2010), money is seen as the most influential aspect in the final selection, although safety is one of the critical concerns. The fourth component is environmental factors, such as climate, and the fifth factor is geographic closeness. The sixth draw element is any social connection to a known individual or family residing in the destination.

In contrast, the forces include an absence of a high level of education in the countries of origin, difficulties in developing competitiveness, and the political or economic situation that compels students to leave their home country. Pull and push forces are the individual determinants of a student's decision to study abroad. Nevertheless, using this framework to distinguish the different elements of a diverse group of students during the decision-making process is challenging. Various incentives inspire university students to study abroad.¹²

As students have more options for preferred places and academic programs, their

⁸ Li, M., & Bray, M. (2007). Cross-border flows of students for higher education: Push-pull factors and motivations of mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong and Macau. *Higher education*, 53, 791-818.

⁹ Jiani, M. A. (2017). Why and how international students choose Mainland China as a higher education study abroad destination. *Higher Education*, 74, 563-579.

¹⁰ Mazzarol, T., & Soutar, G. N. (2002). "Push-pull" factors influencing international student destination choice. *International journal of educational management*, 16(2), 82-90.

¹¹ Bodycott, P. (2009). Choosing a higher education study abroad destination: What mainland Chinese parents and students' rate as important. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 8(3), 349-373.

¹² Mazzarol, T., & Soutar, G. N. (2002). "Push-pull" factors influencing international student destination choice. *International journal of educational management*, 16(2), 82-90.

motives for studying abroad have grown more complicated and diverse. The human capital theory was used as an alternative method to explain the conditions for studying abroad to understand the variables that impact studying abroad and decision-making comprehensively. Human capital has three dimensions: educational, social, and cultural. Intellectual capital refers to the learned information about the degree program, social capital for the resources amassed while studying abroad, and cultural capital for educational accomplishments. Furthermore, from the theory of human capital, studying abroad displays instrumentalism, since students see higher education as a chance to enhance their income and get a good return on their investment in higher education.¹³

3.2 Internationalisation of Higher Education and Student Movability During COVID-19

Before the present public health emergency, there had been a growing number of requests for a critical evaluation of the direction of the globalisation of education, especially when individuals began to doubt the value and advantages of international education. The Covid-19 epidemic raises concern over the sustainability of IHE. Various communities of global education stakeholders are conscious of the devastating consequences of the pandemic on IHE and, especially, foreign student mobility. In addition, for institutions of higher education and international organisations, research institutions and teams such as the Institute of International Education, World Education Services, and the British Council have been working on this topic. All these estimates forecast a drop in international students' mobility and the number of international students in the top destination nations.

Marginson (2020) stated that the adverse consequences of the epidemic of student interchange would create considerable financial challenges for organisations and governments that depend on international student tuition. Foreign education will also become a buyer's market, with international students becoming valuable resources. Inequality in the distribution of the pandemic throughout various countries and regions will result in student migration patterns varying across locations. After this period, East Asian nations with a stronger position and more control over pandemics would become prospectively significant study destinations.

The Covid-19 pandemic also modifies the relative importance of each aspect

¹³ Mixon Jr, F. G., & Hsing, Y. (1994). College student migration and human capital theory: A research note. *Education Economics*, 2(1), 65-73

influencing students' and their families' decisions and country selections for studying abroad. The epidemic has affected their decision-making to emphasise health, security, and safety. In the United Kingdom, Europe, and Australia, Asian students and residents who wear face masks have been subjected to prejudice and even physical attacks, according to media reports. Such visuals would have altered students' overseas education plans and decisions.¹⁴

In addition to the safety and health considerations of international students who terminated their intentions to study overseas during the pandemic, the negative limitations implemented by famous study-abroad destinations impede the mobility of international students. For instance, the federal government of the United States has passed a policy restricting the granting of student visas to international students who intend to enrol only in online courses for the following fall semester. This initiative was terminated after fierce protests from international students and some of the most renowned universities in the United States.¹⁵ However, this law has negatively impacted many international students who want to study in the United States. The strategy increased the adverse effects of the epidemic on global higher education.

3.3 Student's Barriers While Going to Japan During COVID

Globally, Covid-19 has had a massive impact on education. Beginning in 2020, the outbreak of Covid-19 pushed many higher education institutions to adapt to online teaching and restricted the global mobility of students. The situation has been particularly challenging for students who want to study abroad since they face several difficulties. Japan, a popular destination for international students, has also been affected by the virus, and prospective students have encountered several barriers. UNESCO estimates that the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic has harmed the education of approximately one billion students.¹⁶ The pandemic caused the closure of schools and institutions, interrupting the academic calendar for international students. Students who had planned to continue their studies in Japan were compelled to change their plans, and many were left unsure of their future steps.

¹⁴ Zhang, X., Wong, G. T. F., Liu, C. H., Hahm, H. C., & Chen, J. A. (2022). International student stressors and mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic: a qualitative study. *Journal of American College Health*, 1-7.

¹⁵ Jordan, M., & Hartocollis, A. (2020). US rescinds plan to strip visas from international students in online classes. *The New York Times*, 14.

¹⁶ McCarthy, N. (2020, March). COVID-19's staggering impact on global education. *In World Economic Forum* (Vol. 26).

Travel restrictions are one of the most significant challenges students face while pursuing higher education in Japan during Covid-19. Japan imposed tight travel restrictions to limit the spread of Covid-19, which has upset international students (Xiong et al., 2020).¹⁷ The Japanese government has prohibited issuing visas to nationals of more than 150 countries, including India, Bangladesh, and other South Asian nations, that are the primary providers of international students. This has made it hard for students to go to Japan, forcing many to delay their studies. In addition to travel restrictions, students also struggle with financial constraints. The pandemic has significantly impacted the global economy, and many families struggle to make ends meet. Studying abroad in Japan may be too expensive for many families. In addition, the pandemic has led to the loss of work, negatively impacting several families' earnings. Due to financial constraints, several students who hoped to continue higher education in Japan have had to postpone their plans.¹⁸ The pandemic has also affected the mental health of students. Data indicates that the epidemic has raised student anxiety and despair. Students have acquired stress and anxiety due to the epidemic's uncertainty and the disruption of daily life. Away from their families and networks of support, the situation has been particularly difficult for international students.

Due to the stress of handling the pandemic while studying abroad, several students have been forced to defer their education due to mental health issues.¹⁹ Learning the Japanese language was another hurdle students had to overcome to go to Japan. Japan has a unique culture and language, which constantly challenges international students. The pandemic has made it more difficult for them to master the language. The closure of language schools due to the outbreak has prevented students from enhancing their Japanese language skills before their arrival. Language proficiency is sometimes needed for admission to Japanese higher education institutions, which may be a significant obstacle.²⁰ The pandemic has also affected the social aspects of studying abroad. In addition to academic development, studying abroad offers an opportunity to experience a new culture and make new friends. It has been hard for students to communicate with one another and make new friends due to the epidemic's resulting social isolation strategies.²¹

¹⁷ Zhang, X., Wong, G. T. F., Liu, C. H., Hahm, H. C., & Chen, J. A. (2022). International student stressors and mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic: a qualitative study. *Journal of American College Health*, 1-7.

¹⁸ Coffey, J., Cook, J., Farrugia, D., Threadgold, S., & Burke, P. J. (2021). Intersecting marginalities: International students' struggles for "survival" in COVID-19. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 28(4), 1337-1351.

¹⁹ Chen, J. H., Li, Y., Wu, A. M., & Tong, K. K. (2020). The overlooked minority: Mental health of international students worldwide under the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. *Asian journal of psychiatry*, 54, 102333.

²⁰ Bhandari, D., Kotera, Y., Ozaki, A., Abeyasinghe, S., Kosaka, M., & Tanimoto, T. (2021). COVID-19: challenges faced by Nepalese migrants living in Japan. *BMC public health*, 21(1), 1-14.

Additionally, the closure of social places such as cafés and restaurants has impeded students' exposure to Japanese culture.

4. Methodology

4.1 Objectives of the Study

This research was conducted through a qualitative research method, following triangulation methods, using interviews, surveys, and document analysis to address the study objectives and acquire a clear perception and comprehensive insight into the foreign students studying in Japan. The research was designed to conduct a single issue of 'Covid-19 and Bangladeshi student's challenges' initially, but later, when students discussed many aspects of their challenges, the research found other themes to discuss. Multiple apparatuses (e.g., online interviews, group discussions and semi-structured questionnaire survey) were employed to analyze the data. The outcome of this research will help identify and mitigate international students' problems. As a result, international students' service in a higher education institution could work more confidently. Qualitative research methodologists provide proper guidelines when choosing samples, but qualitative research sample sizes should be manageable to extract factual data. On the other hand, qualitative research methodologists also recommend that the sample sizes must be generous to achieve the saturation point of data as well as the theoretical saturation point for research queries. The targeted sample structure was approximately 500, though only 204 samples could be collected, which is a research limitation. Two broad themes for the research objectives are:

1. How does Covid-19 create problems in international students' overall study plans?
2. What are the challenges of Bangladeshi students in Japan, and what strategies should we follow to deal with these challenges?

4.2 Research Design and Data collection

Both primary and secondary data have been collected for better insight into the subject. Primary data is collected through an online questionnaire survey and interviews. Some secondary data related to the COVID-19 pandemic and Japan has been collected from daily newspapers, Facebook, personal websites, etc. A questionnaire was used as the main data collection instrument for this study. A close-ended and open-ended questionnaire and a semi-structured questionnaire were used for the interview sessions, which were conducted via Zoom. The

²¹ Levine-West, G., Lam, Y., & Schaeffer, G. (2023). Study abroad in a (post-) pandemic world: Our new normal and some reasons for optimism. *L2 Journal*, 15(2).

questionnaire consists of 20 items, all providing sufficient information to answer the research questions and the analysis section.

4.3 Problem Statement of the Study

The main instrument of this research is the collection of interview data, which needs adequate time, and collecting the contact information of the Bangladeshi students in Japan and ensuring their positive attitude towards the interview was quite challenging. Unfortunately, we managed a small number of students, though many agreed to the interview. Because of their daily routine in Japan (class schedule and part-time job), many students were unable to attend the scheduled interview session. Moreover, many just avoided the online interview session (probably because they did not want to share problems). An internet survey within the known range of the population available in Japan completed the questionnaire survey. Data on the large proportion of Bangladeshi students now working in Japan was also crucial, which is a limitation of this study. Also, there is not enough literature available to relate to the field of study regarding the perspective of Bangladesh.

5. Findings and Discussion

Globalization and internationalization of higher education have significantly increased student desire to study abroad. The three-step strategy for pursuing higher education consists of determining whether to study abroad or stay in one's own country, selecting a desired destination, and choosing a college or university. The push-pull paradigm influences most literature, with six fundamental pulling factors affecting parameters. The human capital theory provides an alternative explanation for studying abroad, focusing on educational, social, and cultural factors.

The Covid-19 pandemic has raised concerns about the sustainability of international higher education and student mobility. The pandemic has affected decision-making, focusing on health, security, and safety. Additionally, negative limitations implemented by famous study-abroad destinations impede the mobility of international students, such as the US's policy restricting student visas for online courses. Covid-19 has significantly impacted education, affecting around one billion students worldwide. Travel restrictions, financial constraints, and mental health issues have made it difficult for international students to study in Japan. The pandemic has also impacted the social aspects of studying abroad, as students struggle to communicate and make new friends. The closure of language schools and social spaces has hindered students' ability to adapt to the new culture and make new friends.

This study investigates foreign student activities, lifestyles, problem assessment,

and problem-solving strategies, enhancing confidence in higher education institutions. This research focuses on interviewing Bangladeshi students in Japan despite challenges such as limited attendance and avoidance due to schedules and a lack of literature. A group session and internet survey were conducted, but more research is needed.

Sampling: This study's survey work involved 204 participants who completed the questionnaire, while approximately 100 students were interviewed via Zoom sessions [Table 1].

Table 1: Sampling Method, Population and Size

Sampling Method	Sampling Population	Sample Size
Survey (Questionnaire)	Bangladeshi Students in Japan	204
Interviews (Zoom Sessions)		100

Demographic Information: The gender distribution of students pursuing higher studies in Japan is relatively balanced, with 62.7 percent of participants being male and 37.3 percent being female [Table 2].

Table 2: Demographic Information of the Bangladeshi students

Gender	Percentage
Male	62.7
Female	37.3

Findings: Data shows that a vast number of students choose to pursue higher education in Japan. 60.8 percent said that they chose Japan for high educational standards, 8 percent said about low tuition fees and generous scholarships, 3.9 percent said that they were learning Japanese while earning a degree and settlement somewhere else; 3.9 percent of students said that they chose Japan for discovering Japan’s rich cultural heritage; 14 percent student thinks that they choose Japan because it is a safe, peaceful place to study; 10 percent students choose Japan for improving employability [Figure 3].

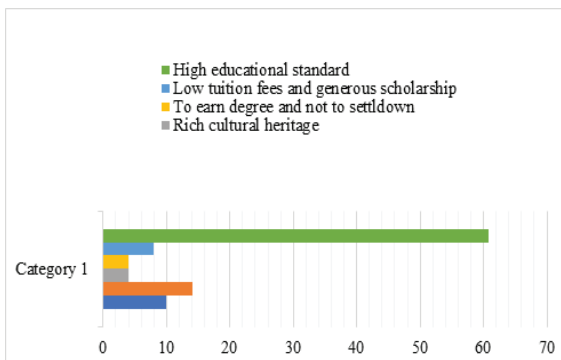


Figure 3: Current reasons for studying in Japan and living conditions

This table shows the current programs enrolled by Bangladeshi students living in Japan [Table 3].

Table 3: Current Enrolled Programs of the Bangladeshi Students in Japan

Enrolled Program	Percentage
Doctoral course	36
Masters level	28
Undergrad students	22
Exchange students	2
Language school students	6
Research students	6

Bangladeshi students are very optimistic about the living conditions in Japan. Fifty-six percent said it was much better than their home country. 6% said it was worse, 12% said it was the same, and 26% said it was better [Figure 4].

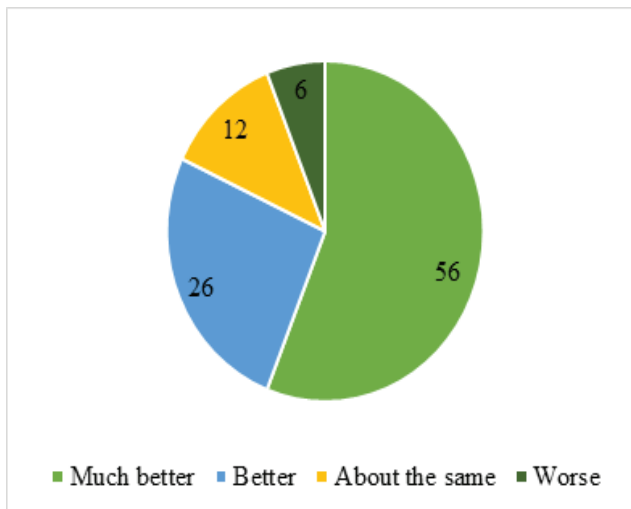


Figure 4: Bangladeshi students' living conditions in Japan

Twelve percent of students have lived in Japan for over four years. Twenty-eight percent said they have been in Japan for 1-2 years, meaning they arrived just before Covid-19 [Figure 5].

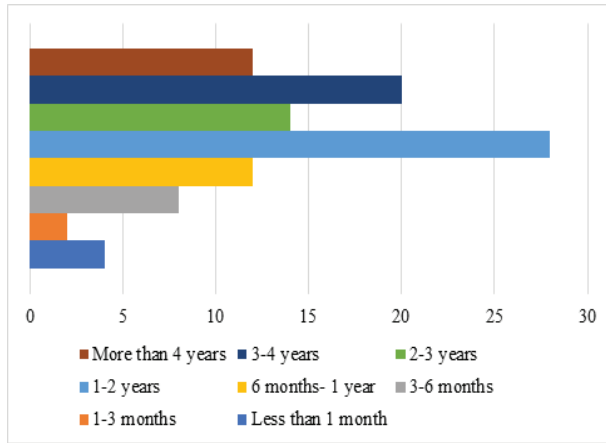


Figure 5: Bangladeshi students' length of Study in Japan

This table shows the presence of international students in Japanese classrooms [Table 4].

Table 4: International students' rate in the classroom

Number of International Student: Class	Percentage
I am the only one	4
2-4 students	32
5-8 students	30
9-12 students	14
More than 12 students	20

Regarding the support from Japanese Universities, 38 percent claimed it to be excellent, while 36 percent said it to be good. Ten percent said fair, and 2 percent said poor [Figure 6].

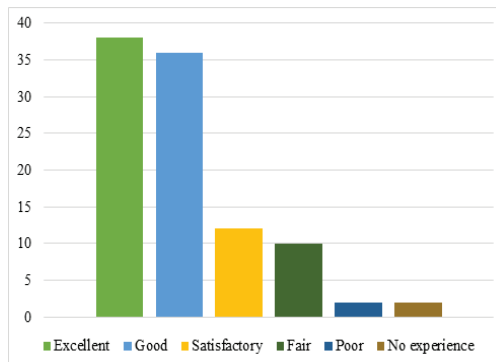


Figure 6: Quality of services offered to international students

This table states the sources of information regarding travel restrictions for international students in Japan [Table 5].

Table 5: Bangladeshi students getting information regarding travel restrictions

Sources of Information	Percentage
Via university website	33.3
Via foreign student division of their university	33.3
Via website of Immigration Services Agency of Japan	25.5
Others (via email from university, student services organisation, university admin emails, social media, and news)	7.9

This table shows the adequacy of support from universities for international students in Japan [Table 6].

Table 6: Adequate support from university for international students

Adequate Support from University	Percentage
Yes	70.6
No	3.9
Neutral	25.5

Regarding support from the social media groups, 35.3 percent said that social media helped them by providing necessary information in different cases; 33.3 percent student thinks that social media can help and offer suggestions in any problematic situation; (like someone is facing a problem on report writing or feeling any abasement etc.); 11.8 percent student thinks that social media can act as a friend; and 19.6 percent also think that social media is a good friend because someone from somewhere could join in a group call and solve any problem [Figure 7].

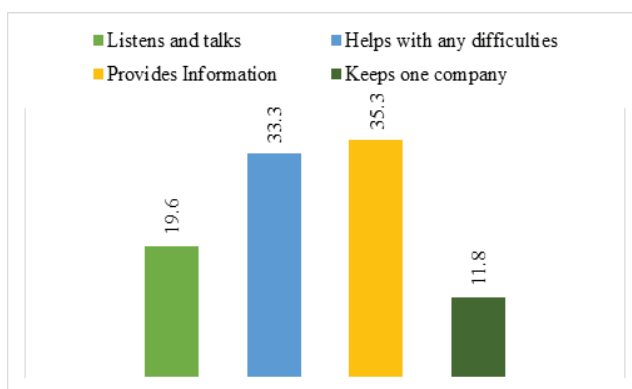


Figure 7: Social media group support for Bangladeshi students

Fifty-one per cent of students said they are just beginners and face great difficulties in speaking, listening, reading, and writing [Figure 8].

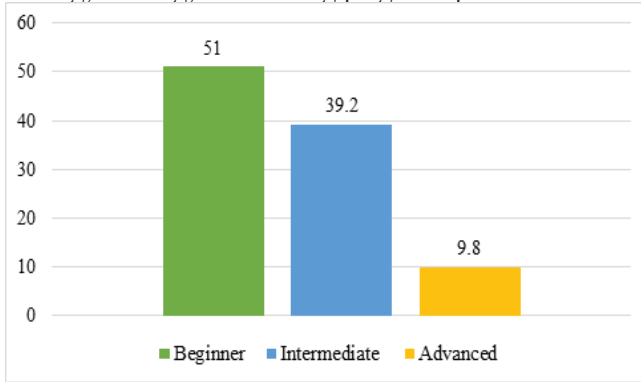


Figure 8: Bangladeshi students' Japanese language proficiency

25.6 percent of students are thinking of changing their career plans. 29.4 percent said 'No'; 33.3 percent responded about partial changing [Figure 9].

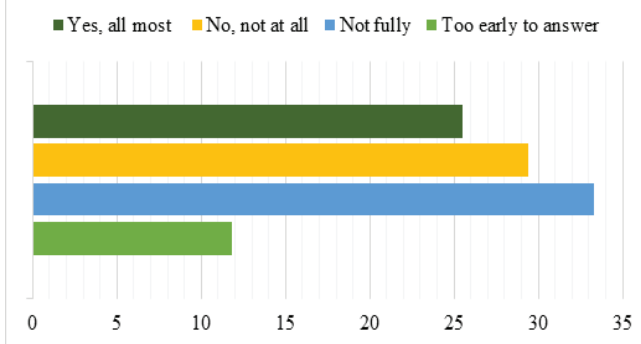


Figure 9: Impacts on post-graduate career plans for Coronavirus

This table shows the expected support from the universities to international students in Japan [Table 7].

Table 7: Expected support from the University to international students

Adequate Support from University	Percentage
Yes	70.6
No	3.9
Neutral	25.5

Regarding the online class system, 13.7 percent of students think that online classes

are positive; 51 percent said they are somewhat positive; 27.5 percent believe they are somewhat negative, and 2 percent said they are extremely negative [Figure 10].

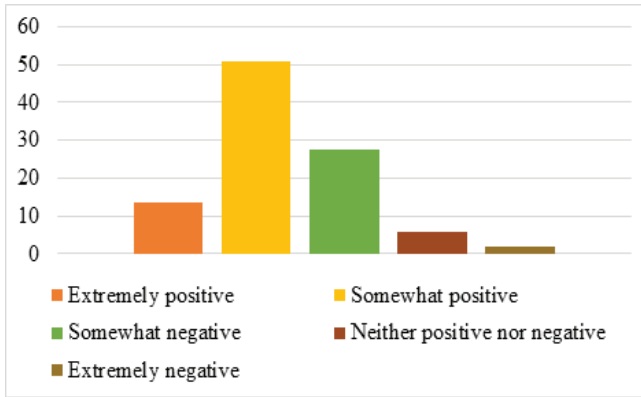


Figure 10: Impact of the online classes

The table below shows the sources of educational expenses of Bangladeshi students studying in Japan [Table 8].

Table 8: Source of educational cost of Bangladeshi students

Source of Educational Cost	Percentage
Full scholarship	49
Partial scholarship	25.5
Self-funding	25.5

Naturally, Covid-19 has spread concern about part-time job facilities. The question was, ‘Do you think that it is difficult to get a job during the COVID-19 pandemic and that this situation is affecting your daily life?’ 45.1 percent strongly agreed with it, and 43.1 percent somewhat agreed [Figure 11].

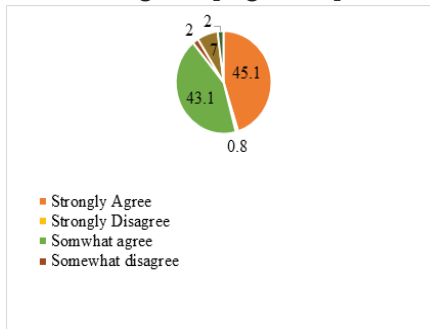


Figure 11: Possibility of getting a job or part-time job during Covid-19 for international students
Again, there is a question, “Beyond classes, what other academic activities are you

planning to participate in that were cancelled or impacted by remote learning?” 17.6 percent spoke about internships, 29.4 percent said of academic clubs, 19.6 percent voted for research, 29.4 percent said about the conference, and 2 percent said nothing. Some important concerns are identified from the survey questionnaire of Bangladeshi students [Figure 12].

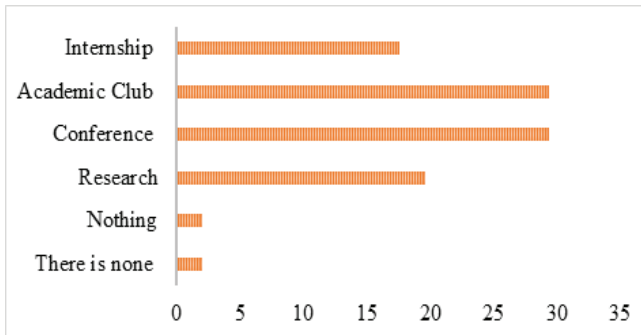


Figure 12: Cancellation of Extra curriculum activities of international students for Covid-19

The table below shows the factors that were concerning for students during the coronavirus pandemic in Japan [Table 9].

Table 9: Concerning factors of students during the coronavirus pandemic

Concerning Factors during Coronavirus Pandemic	Percentage
Session completion in time	31.4
The possibility of entering higher studies	25.5
Getting a part-time job for financial support	23.5
The possibility of returning home without completing the study	9.8
Situation of the job market after graduation	2
Interrupted the semester	2
Communication with others if fallen in sickness or corona	2

5. Challenges

There are many challenges to face with international students in Japan, and the pandemic has made them a thousand times harder. One significant difficulty is getting support in English. From school notices to general mail from the ward office and relevant companies are in advanced-level Japanese, which most students need help understanding. It can be very alienating, and students find asking for help with these troublesome. Another challenge is that most students’

Japanese academic demands differ hugely from their previous systems. It takes a significant amount of time to adjust to the new systems.

English is not applicable everywhere in Japan. Due to the lack of knowledge of Japanese, students also could not get part-time jobs as expected. So, this language challenge also includes other issues like job and income issues. To cope with the language issue, most of the students start practising Japanese on their own. After a couple of months, they can learn and listen to quite a handful of basics in Japanese. Students often try to figure things out among themselves, as it is not possible to ask for help from tutors or international student advisors every time. Because of the pandemic, meeting people has become difficult, so they often must make extra efforts to solve these problems with others. Students must be gritty to withstand the first exposure to the system. With a few semesters into the system, it gets easier.

In a Japanese university, there are two types of international students. 1. The student who is studying with Full Scholarship 2. Privately funded students. Scholarship students face challenges when it comes to correspondence. On the other hand, privately funded international students face financial difficulties when they first enter the campus. A part-time job can solve this problem if the student can speak good Japanese. A particular challenge has been identified in all the interviews: 'own group' culture. This type of student always makes discussions in their group; they avoid Asian or less developed country students and do not want to share information. This issue seems natural, but sometimes it creates a mental hazard for some Bangladeshi students. Challenges will exist in every sphere of life, but if the problem has been pre-identified, it will be easy to overcome, especially mental crises that can be mitigated.

Bangladeshi students discussed this in an open session (Group discussion). Based on their discussion, an important aspect has been identified: the necessity of physical contact with students. All the interviews were positive about physical class, discussion, and training sessions. They strongly suggested offline classes and neo-normal lifestyles. Some other distinguishing issues are 1) language barrier, 2) inability to make friends, 3) struggles with taxes, and 4) food intake.

Japan has become a dream nation for many nations' youth. Especially for students who want to study automobiles or want to work in the IT sector, Japan is the first choice to build their careers. Pursuing this dream is getting more challenging day by day. As we all know, a common challenge for foreign students is the language barrier. Foreign students from third-world countries face racism almost everywhere, even in part-time jobs where they experience behaviour discrimination. In Tokyo, many well-known companies or shops do not hire South Asian employees. Japan is a homogeneous country that prioritises nationalities that resemble its own.

Almost all the students admitted that understanding the Japanese language is complex, and many misunderstandings have occurred. Instead of the standard Japanese language, some instructors use local pronunciation, which is more difficult to understand. Every country has its local tone in language, which is naturally difficult for foreigners even though they know the language. In Bangladesh, we also have different local Bangla languages, and sometimes, the Bangla language is not understandable by other Bangladeshis. So, the language barrier is always there, and this challenge is difficult to overcome. British sociologist Basil Bernard Bernstein (1924-2000) worked on socio-linguistics and tried to connect the manner of speaking and social organisation. He made a significant contribution to a sociolinguistic theory of the language code. His theory explains the inequalities of language use based on social class. Bernstein's theory has two codes: elaborated code and restricted code. The restricted code is for insiders capable of understanding assumptions; on the other hand, the elaborated code is for outsiders, which is thorough, relatively formal, and full of details.²²

In the classroom and daily life, Japanese language proficiency is also important. Even in the online classes, sometimes the instructor used complex Japanese terms that were not understandable, and occasionally Bangladeshi students felt too shy to ask repeatedly. So, parts of the classes had always been blank or untouched for them. They must spend extra time learning daily Japanese life and particular terminology for their study field. The speech rate and pronunciation of English words are also different from those of Bangladesh, so Bangladeshi students face a significant challenge in coping at the educational level.

Another challenge is making friends. All Bangladeshi students said that there are some foreign students in every class. One discussion informed that Chinese and Vietnamese in his class, though nobody was interested in making friends with him. Another discussant said that five international students were studying in his class; all of them were Chinese, and they always stayed together. They rarely speak with him. He also informed me that even in the classroom group discussion, nobody invited him to a group until the teacher asked them to do it.

At present, the global economy is facing a challenging time. Even the first world nations face a high inflation rate and an unstable economy as a side effect of post-COVID and international political unrest. Like any other developed country, Japan is also facing the same problem. High inflation and economic instability badly affect the everyday lives of ordinary people in Japan. While Japan is suitable

²² Bernstein, B. (1964). Elaborated and restricted codes: Their social origins and some consequences. *American anthropologist*, 66(6), 55-69

for foreign immigrants for many reasons, the recent occurrences in the global arena have impacted their lives significantly. 'Due to an unstable economic situation, Japan's government has made their tax system much stricter by making major reformations. During this tax reformation, the most shocking part was that students and dependents were now income tax,' said a group discussant. She also informed us that, in Japan, those with the status of foreign student and dependent have permission to work as part-timers for no more than 28 hours per week with up to 8 hours per day during extended school vacations. However, their income was not deducted from income tax until the new tax reformation.

As their information, 'National tax' deducted from the part-time job salary is called 'Income tax'. An employer of a company or a shop owner will deduct this tax money and pay it to the Department of Revenue instead of a student. The income tax is based on the amount earned from jobs. If it is translation work, the tax deduction will be 10% for those who stay in Japan for more than one year and 20% for those whose income is more than 1,000,000 JPY. The National Revenue Office will report the students' income information to the local offices, and a student will be charged local municipal Taxes separate from the national tax (Japan Study support information). To simplify, this new tax law applies to those who hold student or dependent visas. They must pay a 10% tax if their earnings exceed 80,000 yen. Every month, if they cross 80,000 yen in wages, they must pay a 10% tax on the total amount. This tax will be deducted by their company, which pays the salary. Foreign students are the primary sufferers of this new tax system. . International students are the primary sufferers of this new tax system. Students face financial crises, especially those living in urban areas like Tokyo.

At present, Japan is experiencing a peak in price hikes. The price of every single consumer goods is increasing rapidly. For foreign students who must bear their expenses, several difficulties arise. 80,000 yen is very little to maintain an average life in urban areas in Japan. Even house rent, gas, water, and electricity bills are increasing rapidly. For the sake of their own lives, many students or dependents are now starting to work illegally, which is called a 'hand cash job'. This is the only way to work as many hours as possible or earn as much without worrying about restrictions or fees. However, this illegal way of earning money is becoming a significant danger for them. Many handicapped companies are now starting to provide hand-cash jobs, but at the end of the month, they are giving tax in the name of their hand-cash employee, which is worse than the legal system. Nowadays, many student visas have been cancelled for this illegal job. Students who do not know the company or tax system are primarily victims of this handwork and tax system. Many companies that provide hand cash jobs pay lower wages, too. Despite knowing this fact, many foreign students are eager to work complex cash jobs rather than legal bank payment jobs because 28 hours or an 80,000-yen salary

is not enough for their livelihood in Japan, especially for students who are studying in Japan by their self-finance, like Japanese language school or professional training college mostly known as 'Senmon-Gakko'. Usually, these types of educational institutions do not provide any scholarships for students. For students studying in Japanese universities, whether private or national, the Japanese government offers many kinds of scholarships for self-financed students, making their lives much more accessible than those of other educational institutes.

The current price hike and the tax system have made foreign student's lives miserable, even though last year, when the price hike badly hit the consumer market, the Japanese government provided 50,000 yen to everyone whose earnings are below 80,000 yen and recently, the government started providing free rice to those whose monthly income is less than 80,000 yen. But are these enough? If we look at other countries, we will hardly find a country that charges tax for foreign students. No matter how many steps the government takes for those whose earnings are below 80,000 yen, taking tax from students is unacceptable. This year, many foreign students lost their visas and were forced to go back to their countries. The common reasons are working part-time for more than 28 hours or taking a hand-cash job. Again, many cunning companies provide hand cash jobs, but in the end, they deduct tax in the name of the employee. This trap is ruining many international students' lives and shattering their dreams. Crossing the required working hours or escaping tax is a big crime in Japan. For this crime, international students cannot get any mercy, and the sad part is, despite knowing this fact, many students are still working illegally to escape the tax and live more solvent. This scenario explains how desperately students are trying to avoid this tax or are unwilling to pay this tax to the government.

Food is another big challenge for international students in Japan, especially students who come from South Asian cuisine-based countries. Adopting Japanese food is very difficult at the beginning. Though Japanese restaurants are not that costly compared to their grocery pricing, Japanese food has little variety on its menu. Students who are Muslims must face a big challenge in maintaining halal food. Halal food is scarce, and halal foods are costly, too. Japanese people are very obsessed with pork or ham. Bento, a kind of set menu box, is very famous and convenient in Japan, but for Muslims, it is tough to find any eatable bentobox (single-serving packed meal) because most contain pork or ham. Even salad or pasta bento boxes include ham, a form of pork meat. For Muslims, vegan and vegetarian students struggle with food in Japan; even buying simple chips or biscuits is a big challenge for those who maintain their food restrictions.

Japanese groceries are way too expensive. If we look for vegetables, Japan does not have much variety of vegetables either. Despite the disadvantages, Japan remains a desirable country for multiple reasons. Firstly, Japanese society is very

respectful of the religious values that the immigrants bring with them and maintain in their daily lives. In the group session, almost all the students said they never felt embarrassed to hold religious practices that are naturally apparent in public. Japanese people respect everyone's religion and religious restrictions. However, many companies do not allow hijabs for Muslim female employees, and it is a fact that hijab-wearing Muslim women are very few in Japan. Maybe Japan is not ready to adopt this fact yet.

Although Japanese people as a society are very career-oriented and ever-focused on continuous progress, they are insensitive to many emotional aspects of themselves and the people around them. This aspect is a proven challenge for every international student. Moreover, this also may have a direct correlation with the 'suicidal tendency' among the youth of Japan. During a group discussion, one student shared her experience in this way: *'when I was new in Tokyo, one day, I was returning home after finishing my class. Suddenly, my train stopped, and they announced that the train would not go further because an accident occurred at the next stop (which meant someone committed suicide at the next stop). It was the first time I encountered this kind of suicidal incident. But soon, I realized how common it is for people who have been living here for a significant period. One can get used to hearing about such incidents but can never get used to the fact that this is a prevalent phenomenon showing the ill state of the mental well-being of society'*.

The group discussion shows that Japan's convenient transportation system is a very appreciated factor for intra-city and intercity travel. The travelling experience is comfortable, with different features that accommodate every passenger with an extensive range of needs. The buses for intercity travel even have hygienic toilets and female priorities. Though there are various challenges, students' opinions are very positive based on their living experience, and they agree that Japan is one of the safest countries in the world.

6. Significance

Understanding the condition of international students studying in Japan during the Covid-19 period is the primary goal of this research. Through small-scale participatory research, this research describes the view of students regarding higher education and the challenges in a pandemic. Research shows that 37.5 percent of the interviewees are female students now studying in Japan. Results from an annual survey of international students in Japan by JASSO have demonstrated that the number of international students has decreased by 13.2 percent from 2020 to 2021, from 2,79,597 to 2,42,444 students. From 2015 to 2021, the number of international students in Japan peaked in 2019, totalling 3,12,214. Because of the Covid-19 outbreak in late 2019, the number of international students decreased by 22.3 percent. The report also shows that there

are 1,36,111 male international students and 1,06,332 female international students in Japan. The latest UNESCO Institute statistical data shows that 60,390 Bangladeshi students pursued higher education abroad in 2017, and it is recorded that Japan has become the 7th most popular study-abroad destination for Bangladeshi students. Data analysis shows that various causes motivate Bangladeshi students to pursue their studies in Japan; a diagram shows the issues [Figure 9].

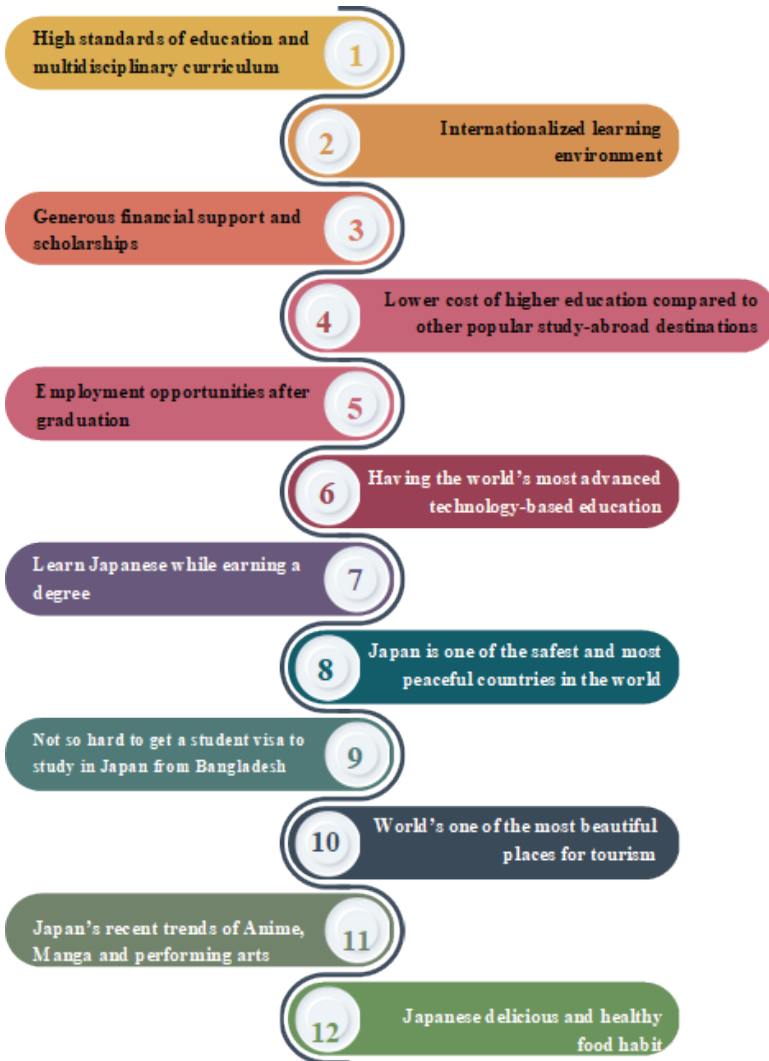


Figure 13: ‘Why Japan?’ -Student’s motivation for pursuing study in Japan

Regarding changing the academic plan, 25.5 percent of interviewees agreed that their plan changed in diverse ways. Many students express their anxiety about a permanent job after completion of studies in Japan. Many want to shift to another country as soon as possible. It is important to consider the specific dynamics involved, as this may reveal the greatest implications for international student flows for years to come. From the interview session, it has been revealed that language capability is a great challenge for Bangladeshi students in Japan. The notice and email from the university are all in Japanese in almost all cases. So, students must be worried and face problems understanding the notice or email.

One student mentions the importance of a part-time job for an international student. In the COVID-19 era, part-time job facilities must be limited, and in that case, challenges for international students are increasing, which should be mitigated by taking various steps. They also discussed the new tax law in Japan, which seems to be a crucial challenge for foreign students in Japan.

7. Strategies for Overcoming the Challenges

The coronavirus outbreak has fundamentally changed the global higher education landscape in 2020. In the space of a few months, this has had a dramatic impact on international student flows, forced us to rethink the capabilities of our online learning platform and impacted a range of other elements within the sector. In these times of rapid change, we believe it is more important than ever to listen to student feedback to plan for the dynamics of student demand and inform about student recruitment strategies. From travel bans to social distancing, isolation measures, quarantines, campus closures and border closures, students in the higher education sector have been dramatically affected by the spread of the coronavirus.

This was when more and more countries introduced travel bans and isolation measures to try to limit the spread of the virus. So, it makes sense that this coincided with the largest increase in those changing their plans, contributing to more general uncertainty and uneasiness about their ability to study abroad. The current pandemic crisis has helped us to accelerate digital transformation at the education level. It has forced us to think and plan to take online classes and use various student online platforms, like Zoom, Google Meet, and others. 27.5 percent of Bangladeshi students who are studying in Japan think that online classes do not fulfil their desires.

To overcome the language barrier, both English and Japanese courses should be mandatory for at least one year so that foreign students can build themselves to adjust. Lifestyle in Japan without the Japanese language is quite impossible; from the education arena to the entertainment zone, it is mandatory everywhere to understand the Japanese language. Without understanding the Japanese language, life will face unbearable stress. Part-time time will be impossible also. Though

English is more accepted everywhere, it is also tough without the Japanese language. It is always difficult for a foreign student to adapt to the local culture, so the challenges will be there, and to overcome those, every student should be more attentive and enthusiastic to achieve the goal.

8. Conclusion

Studying abroad is always challenging in terms of cultural adoption and shock, as well as in foreign languages and sociological aspects. The article shows that international students somehow overcome problems with the help of university foreign student services or by their own motivation and strength. Bangladeshi students are also becoming able to develop new strategies to overcome all problems. Bangladeshi students are mainly facing challenges with language and food; some students are even minimizing their daily expenses because of low-budget scholarships, which could hamper their educational life. With so many challenges, students always try their best to cope with the new life. Research data shows that Bangladeshi students are very adaptive regarding cultural shock and the education system in Japan. Japan is also very supportive towards international students from undergrad to PhD level. We need to understand the challenges and overcome the process, and that can be possible with the cooperation of both parties, international students and the host university. Challenges will always be there, but enthusiasm can only motivate success.

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