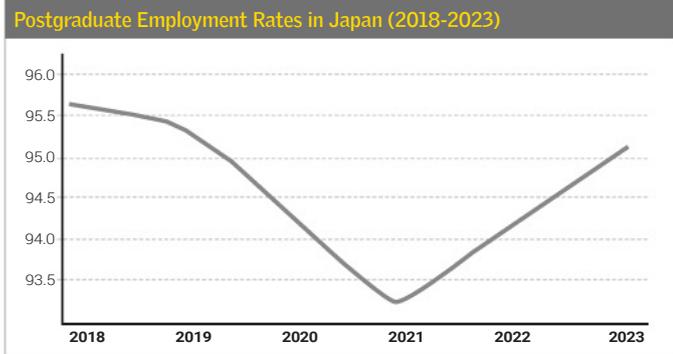
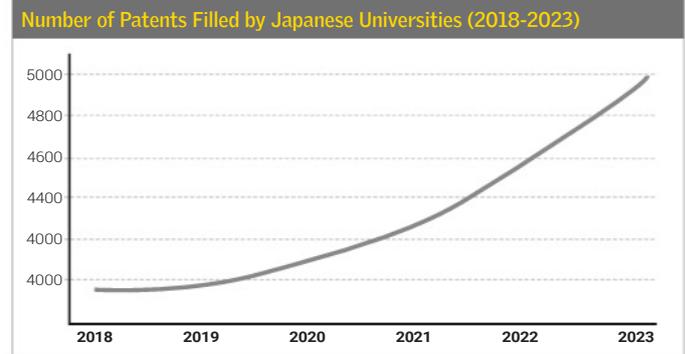


Japan's Universities Evolve Toward Globalized Education

Education in Japan is undergoing a transformation to attract more international students, enhance global partnerships, boost innovation and adapt academic programs to today's globalized world.



Source: OECD Education at a Glance 2023



Source: JPO Status Report 2023

For decades, Japan's higher education system has been deeply intertwined with the nation's unique socioeconomic landscape. Traditionally, universities in Japan were closely aligned with national policies aimed at economic and social development, creating strong synergies with private companies and establishing advanced research facilities dedicated to national technologies. This Japan-centric approach has fostered significant technological advancements and a robust labor market, yet it has also limited the global presence and attractiveness of Japanese universities to international students and faculty.

The pressing need for globalization within Japan's higher education sector is now more evident than ever. As Japan grapples with prolonged economic stagnation and a looming demographic crisis, the government has prioritized revamping the education system to foster globally competitive human resources. The Kishida administration, for instance, has earmarked 300 billion yen to bolster the global standing of Japanese universities in science and technology research and aims to attract over 400,000 foreign students.

Despite these efforts, international students currently comprise only about 5 percent of Japan's tertiary education population, compared to over 20 percent in countries like the U.K. and Australia. This discrepancy highlights the challenges Japanese universities face in adapting to a rapidly globalizing world. However, recent initiatives and evolving strategies suggest a promising shift.

Enhancing Global Values

Dr. Kazuhiro Chiba, president of the Tokyo University of Agriculture and Technology (TUAT), emphasizes the importance of embracing and sharing Japan's rich cultural heritage while also fostering global values. "The most crucial aspect of education lies in embracing the rich values that Japan has nurtured throughout its extensive history," he states. "Our vision extends beyond economic success or groundbreaking in-

novations; it revolves around cultivating individuals who can contribute to global well-being, especially as we face environmental degradation and resource scarcity."

Dr. Chiba underscores the need for a distinctly Japanese educational experience that goes beyond merely offering English-language programs. "Japanese universities are rich in diversity and emphasize individuality based on innovation and originality. At TUAT, we aim to create opportunities for both Japanese and international students to delve into how to implement new ideas leading to innovation," he explains. This approach seeks to draw from Japan's unique cultural context while fostering a global outlook.

Addressing Demographic Challenges

The demographic crisis in Japan, characterized by a shrinking population and an aging workforce, poses significant challenges to the country's economic vitality. Kamado Shigeharu, president of Nagaoka University of Technology, highlights the crucial role universities play in addressing these issues. "Diverse perspectives are essential in pushing forward innovation," he notes. "When Japanese students interact with foreign students, it creates a culture of community and diversity in ideas and thinking."

President Kamado also points out the advantages of Japan's safe environment and advanced facilities, coupled with the affordability offered by a weak yen. "Japan is one of the safest countries in the world and has some of the best facilities for students. Couple that with a weak yen, and there is a good opportunity for foreign students to come to study in Japan," he asserts. These factors, along with the practical training programs and strong industry-university collaborations, make Japan an attractive destination for international students.

Enhancing Employment Opportunities

One of the criticisms of Japanese universities is the perceived difficulty international students face in securing employment post-

graduation. However, this trend is changing. Takeo Kikkawa, president of the International University of Japan (IUJ), emphasizes the increasing openness of Japan's corporate world to international graduates. "The trend has been changing over the past five years, with the number of foreign workers in Japanese companies more than doubling," he says.

IUJ, where over 90 percent of students come from abroad, has implemented frameworks to bridge the gap between students and employers. "We issue a résumé book annually to explain students' backgrounds and past careers, which we distribute to partnering companies," Dr. Kikkawa explains. This initiative helps international students navigate Japan's complex job market and increases their employment prospects.

Leveraging Digital Transformation

Digital transformation (DX) and the integration of information and communication technologies (ICT) are revolutionizing education globally, and Japan is no exception. Dr. Monte Cassim, president of Akita International University, discusses the impact of these technologies on Japan's education landscape. "The advent of DX technologies marks an irreversible transformation," he asserts. "COVID-19 accelerated this realization, offering alternatives to face-to-face interactions."

Dr. Cassim highlights the balance between digital convenience and the importance of interpersonal engagement. "While DX technologies have aided us in various ways, face-to-face learning remains crucial for building friendships and establishing interpersonal relationships," he notes. Akita International University has invested in upgrading its DX infrastructure to enhance learning outcomes while maintaining a strong emphasis on human interaction.

Fostering Unique Educational Experiences

Japan's universities are striving to create unique educational experiences that attract international students. Dr. Yasuhiko Kawamura, president of Tokushima Uni-

versity, speaks to the benefits of university consolidation and collaboration. "There will be an increasing number of local universities undergoing consolidation to enhance collaboration in fostering innovative ideas and making education more efficient and attractive," he predicts.

Tokushima University, with its strong regional ties and advanced facilities, actively collaborates with other universities to offer a broader curriculum and more affordable education. "We are developing an online platform that brings together local universities to facilitate cooperation," Dr. Kawamura explains. This network aims to make education more accessible and enrich the student experience.

Dr. Takashi Irisawa, president of Ryukoku University, meanwhile emphasizes the integration of global and local perspectives as a key characteristic of his institution. "Ryukoku

University places a strong emphasis on language learning and integrates the positive aspects of Western education with the spirit of Buddhism," he states. This approach fosters a unique educational environment that resonates with both domestic and international students.

Dr. Irisawa highlights the importance of addressing contemporary social issues through education. "We are striving to create new values and address social issues such as poverty, conflict and education for all," he explains. Ryukoku University's commitment to these goals positions it as a hub for innovative and socially responsible education.

Tradition Meets Innovation

Japan's higher education sector is undergoing a significant transformation as it seeks to enhance its global outlook, research capabilities and teaching excellence. The concerted efforts

of universities and the government aim to create a more inclusive and diverse academic environment that attracts global talent.

The unique proposition offered by Japanese universities—a blend of advanced education, a vibrant technological ecosystem and a culturally rich society—makes Japan an increasingly attractive destination for international students and faculty. As Dr. Chiba of TUAT aptly puts it, the goal is to "nurture a higher level of skills, capabilities and qualities that transcend mere economic achievements" and to cultivate individuals who can contribute to global well-being.

By embracing both its rich cultural heritage and the demands of globalization, Japan's higher education sector is poised to become a dynamic hub for the world's brightest minds, fostering innovation and addressing the pressing challenges of our time.