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A Comparative Analysis of Japan and the Philippines from Internationalization Perspectives

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Abstract

This study provides a comparative analysis of the internationalization of higher education systems in Japan and the Philippines across four dimensions: historical influences, internationalization processes, educational standards, and implementation challenges. Using a comparative research design and a modified qualitative meta-analysis of 32 studies, the research examines national strategies shaping internationalization initiatives. Findings show that Japan prioritizes strategic recruitment of foreign expertise, English-medium instruction, and structured curriculum reforms, while the Philippines leverages English proficiency, regional partnerships, and reforms such as the K-12 program. Despite shared objectives of strengthening global engagement and competitiveness, both systems face challenges related to financial constraints, cultural identity, and governance. The study underscores the importance of context-sensitive policies that balance global integration with local priorities to advance sustainable internationalization in higher education.

Keywords

Comparative analysis, educational framework, higher education, internationalization

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Introduction

Internationalization in higher education refers to the integration of global, intercultural, and international elements into educational policies, curricula, and mobility initiatives. This study investigates internationalization in Japan and the Philippines, focusing on practical variables such as curriculum reforms, language proficiency, academic partnerships, and student/faculty exchanges as core dimensions of higher education internationalization.

Comparing Japan's and the Philippines' approaches to internationalization, this paper delves into the distinctive features and educational attributes within core internationalization processes aligned to higher education. Japan's higher education internationalization practices are recognized through undertakings in English-medium instruction, academic mobility, and collaboration with global institutions. These practices aim for capacity-building to enhance international faculty, students, and research (Knight, 2004; Yonezawa, 2020; Goodman and Harper, 2013). Philippine higher education institutions are embracing internationalization by enhancing English proficiency, reforming curricula, and implementing academic mobility initiatives, as well as forming partnerships, aiming to strengthen capacity and expand opportunities for students and faculty within a global context (Rivera and Tullao, 2020; Chao, 2017). Even with ongoing reforms, limitations in infrastructure and resources remain significant challenges (Orbeta, 2013).

Analyzing Japan and the Philippines reveals distinct internationalization approaches and education policy priorities, as Japan focuses on internal internationalization, particularly in faculty enhancement, while the Philippines highlights external mobility and curriculum alignment with global standards. Each higher educational system has unique characteristics, institutional structures, teaching approaches, research levels, civic participation, and community engagement, which shape or explain each country's approach to internationalization priorities in higher education.

The study analyzed the internationalization perspectives between Japan and the Philippines. Specifically, this study sought to seek answers to the following questions:

1. What are the distinctive features of higher education systems in Japan and the Philippines?
2. What are the attributes of educational internationalization processes in Japan and Philippines?
3. What are the educational standards in Japan and Philippines?
4. What are the challenges in the implementation of internationalization in Japan and the Philippines?

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on internationalization by providing a comparative analysis of Japan and the Philippines. It aims to identify best practices and highlight opportunities for collaboration and innovation in internationalization. By doing so, this study can serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, educators, and international organizations seeking to enhance global engagement and cooperation.

This study is anchored on the internationalization theory of Canadian scholar Jane Knight that states that internationalization in higher education involves incorporating international, intercultural, and global dimensions into the goals, processes, and execution of education that focuses on the activities, policies, and strategies academic systems implement to adapt to the global academic environment (Knight, 2004). The current study investigated the

internationalization framework to analyze the higher education systems of Japan and the Philippines, aiming to provide a nuanced comparative analysis of their Internationalization perspectives. This paper reviewed literatures on Higher Education focusing on Internationalization policies between Japan and the Philippines.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This qualitative comparative study investigates internationalization in higher education in Japan and the Philippines. The analysis centers on the four primary variables, namely: distinctive features, internationalization processes, educational standards, and challenges within the implementation of internationalization.

Relevant studies and literature published from 2020 to 2025 were selected based on their focus on these core internationalization variables. During the analysis, all literature was organized and compared under the same variable groupings. The research aims to provide a holistic picture of how Japan and the Philippines are navigating the complex terrain of higher education internationalization, identifying key policies, challenges, and practices unique to each country's context. The comparative approach between Japan and the Philippines revealed their distinct strategies and potential areas for mutual learning and collaboration. By examining these Asian countries, the study contributes to a broader understanding of internationalization trends in the region.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section deals with the internationalization perspectives of Japan and the Philippines regarding the distinctive features, internationalization processes, educational standards, and challenges.

Table 1. Distinctive Features of Higher Education Systems in Japan and the Philippines

Indicator	Japan	Philippines
Historical Influence	Japanese universities have a long-standing tradition of openness to learning, embracing best practices from other nations (Yonezawa, 2023).	Colonial history laid the groundwork for the Philippines' educational system, influenced by Spanish religious education and American democratic instruction (Eder, 2023).
Internationalization Approach	Japan is actively seeking foreign experts to enhance its system, but there is a limited focus on sending students and teachers abroad (Chen, 2022).	The use of the English language in the Philippines has enhanced international connections with schools despite its colonial roots still impacting its approach to international education (Vibar and Rosales, 2021).
Mobility and Exchange	Japan prioritizes importing foreign expertise and maintaining limited bilateral exchange	The Philippines faces significant structural challenges in its mobility programs due to

	<p>programs, prioritizing knowledge import over outbound mobility (Edwards and Ashida, 2021).</p>	<p>curriculum alignment complexities and resource limitations, hindering the implementation of comprehensive exchange initiatives (Mananay et al.,2024).</p>
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Reflected on Table 1 is a comparative description of the distinctive features of higher education systems in Japan and the Philippines based on historical influence, internationalization approach and mobility and exchange. Through the lens of historical influence, Japan's system evolved autonomously through the deliberate adoption of global practices, while the Philippines' framework emerged from colonial educational paradigms. Their internationalization approaches demonstrate Japan's calculated strategy of importing expertise while maintaining controlled mobility, in contrast to the Philippines' leverage of English proficiency for global academic integration. The mobility and exchange dimension highlights Japan's selective knowledge acquisition focus versus the Philippines' ongoing navigation of structural and resource challenges in implementing exchange programs.

Japan focuses on strategically recruiting foreign experts and carefully imparting knowledge through regulated academic mobility (Chen et al., 2024). Japanese institutions prioritize incorporating global expertise and enacting curriculum changes, especially in English language education, cross-cultural awareness, and international collaborations (Edwards and Ashida, 2021). Resource constraints and curriculum misalignment persist in hindering the complete implementation of mobility programs in the Philippines, indicating that thorough academic exchanges remain a vital area for curriculum reform (Mananay et al., 2024).

Japan's strategic approach—selectively obtaining international knowledge and incorporating it into local educational programs—contrasts with the Philippines' focus on utilizing language skills and local partnerships, including involvement in the ASEAN Mobility framework and K-12 reforms aligned with global standards. Japan's path to internationalization could strengthen with strengthened outbound mobility efforts and additional curriculum advancements. In the Philippines, focusing on internal structural and resource limitations may enhance the use of its English proficiency for increased dual degree and research collaboration possibilities (Mananay et al., 2024; Edwards and Ashida, 2021).

In summary, Table 1 illustrates how Japan and the Philippines have forged distinct, yet purposeful, paths in internationalizing their higher education systems. While each country's approach is shaped by its unique history and policy environment, both demonstrate ongoing commitment to strengthening their institutions through targeted internationalization strategies. This comparative perspective highlights opportunities for both nations to address persistent challenges and further enhance the global relevance of their educational practices.

Table 2. Attributes of Educational Internationalization Processes in Japan and Philippines

Indicator	Japan	Philippines
Policies and Initiatives	The Japanese government strongly encourages internationalization through programs such as the Worldwide 30 Project and the Top Global University Project, both of which aim to increase foreign student enrollment and boost university worldwide competitiveness (Nam and Cheng-Hai, 2022).	The Philippines' Commission on Higher Education (CHED) has also enacted policies that are in line with ASEAN integration and global norms, such as the K-12 program and cooperation with overseas universities (Cimene et al., 2023).
Curriculum Reform	Japan focuses on curriculum reform in the framework of education internationalization, which is heavily focused on improving English language instruction, global studies, and cross-cultural understanding at all school levels (Vicente et al., 2024).	The Philippines is implementing curriculum reform to enhance English proficiency and align with global standards. This includes Outcome-Based Education (OBE) and the K-12 education program, which prepares students for higher education and international opportunities (Genelza, 2022).
Student and Faculty Mobility	Japan promotes student and faculty mobility through exchange programs and partnerships with foreign universities, such as the "100,000 International Students Plan" and "Top Global University Project." These initiatives increase international students and faculty engagement, enhancing global competitiveness and cultural exchange (Kondo et al., 2024).	The Philippines supports international mobility through scholarships, exchange programs, and partnerships with foreign universities. These initiatives enable students and faculty to study abroad, engage in international research, and contribute to global academic networks, enhancing global exposure (Dantic, 2025).

Reflected on Table 2, Japan and the Philippines prioritize foreign student mobility as a key aspect of educational globalization. Japan's "100,000 International Students Plan" streamlines visa procedures, offers scholarships, and enhances campus amenities, while encouraging outbound mobility through exchange partnerships and financial initiatives (Nabeshima, 2025). The Philippines participates in regional initiatives like ASEAN International Mobility for Students, promoting cultural exchange and global learning opportunities (Bagayawa et al., 2024). The Commission on Higher Education supports these efforts by providing scholarships and collaboration agreements, leveraging the Philippines' strong English proficiency (Sayson, 2024). Both countries aim to provide students with global perspectives and capabilities.

Japan and the Philippines have redesigned their educational curricula to match the demands of a globalized world, focusing on English language proficiency, global studies, and cross-cultural understanding. In Japan, English is required beginning in elementary school, and universities have adopted English-medium instruction (EMI) with global topics (Shao and Rose, 2024). Outcome-Based Education (OBE) has been introduced into the Philippine K-12 system to improve global competencies and employability by aligning the curriculum with international standards (Samsi and Asiri, 2024).

Japan and the Philippines are implementing education policies to enhance their internationalization strategies. Japan's Top Global University Project provides funding for international programs, research collaboration, and curriculum innovation, attracting international students and faculty (Kim et al., 2024). The Philippines' K-12 curriculum aligns its basic education system with global standards, making graduates more competitive internationally (Faustino et al., 2024). The Philippine Commission on Higher Education supports partnerships with foreign universities and policies facilitating academic mobility and collaborative research (Juanzo, 2024).

Recent internationalization efforts in both nations emphasize enhancing academic partnerships, student mobility, and curriculum reform directly linked to institutional policies and educational outcomes. Both nations recognize the strategic importance of these policies in preparing their education systems for globalization and regional integration. Policy initiatives and reforms are increasingly measured by their influence on curriculum alignment, language proficiency, and mobility initiatives, ensuring that internationalization addresses the specific needs of higher education while maintaining institutional integrity and global educational standards.

Table 3. Maintaining Educational Standards in Japan and the Philippines

Indicator	Japan	Philippines
Curriculum Design and Relevance	Japan strongly emphasizes STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) while integrating traditional values and ethics (Adeoye, 2023). Education is tailored to meet the needs of industries and technological advancements (Kariya and Rappleye, 2020). Continuous updates ensure relevance (Komatsu and Rappleye, 2020).	The Philippines focuses on K-12 education with an emphasis on English proficiency and core subjects (Chin et al., 2022), but there are gaps in aligning the curriculum with global standards and local economic demands (Suarez et al., 2020). Some subjects are outdated or lack practical application (Fontillas et al., 2022)
Teacher Training and Professional Development	Teachers in Japan undergo rigorous and continuous professional development programs (Gavari-Starkie et al., 2021), emphasizing innovative teaching methods, subject mastery, and student engagement (Kihara, 2021). Teachers enjoy high status in society, motivating excellence (Nakao and Nishide, 2020).	While teacher training is mandatory, professional development opportunities in the Philippines are limited by funding and resources (Magallanes et al., 2022). Many teachers face challenges (Trinidad, 2020) such as large class sizes and lack of access to modern teaching tools, affecting quality (Alda et al., 2020).

Accessibility and Equity	Japan provides widespread access to quality education (Liu, 2022), supported by government subsidies and advanced infrastructure (Kihara, 2021). Disparities between urban and rural areas are minimal due to strong policy enforcement (Nakao and Nishide, 2020).	Accessibility to quality education in the Philippines is uneven (Cuaton, 2020), with rural and underprivileged areas facing significant challenges, including lack of infrastructure, learning materials, and trained educators (Suarez et al., 2020). Scholarships and funding are insufficient to address gaps (Magallanes et al., 2022).
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Japan and the Philippines strive to maintain high educational standards, but their historical, cultural, and socio-economic contexts create significant differences in their approaches (Kariya and Rappleye, 2020; Suarez et al., 2020). Table 3 highlights the comparative attributes of educational standards in both countries, focusing on curriculum relevance, teacher quality, and equitable access.

Japan's curriculum is regularly updated to balance forward-looking STEM and technological skills with cultural values, ensuring student preparedness for modern challenges (Adeoye, 2023; Komatsu and Rappleye, 2020). The Philippines, on the other hand, continues to implement major curriculum reforms, such as K-12, to address gaps in global alignment and practical application (Chin et al., 2022; Fontillas et al., 2022). Japan's structured approach to curriculum design ensures the correct alignment with industry and research needs (Kariya and Rappleye, 2020), while the Philippines faces struggles in maintaining its curriculum both globally competitive and locally relevant (Suarez et al., 2020).

Japan's focus on rigorous teacher training and continual professional development has contributed to high educational quality, supported by strong social status for educators (Gavari-Starkie et al., 2021; Nakao and Nishide, 2020). The Philippines also mandates teacher training, but ongoing challenges in funding, resource limitations, and large class sizes hinder teachers' ability to implement new curricula and innovations (Magallanes et al., 2022; Trinidad, 2020; Alda et al., 2020). Japan provides widespread and equitable access to education, with strong government enforcement minimizing rural-urban disparities (Liu, 2022; Nakao and Nishide, 2020). The Philippines, meanwhile, struggles with persistent inequity in access, particularly in under-resourced areas, due to infrastructure gaps and insufficient funding (Cuaton, 2020; Magallanes et al., 2022; Suarez et al., 2020).

Ultimately, these findings reveal that both nations are actively pursuing excellence in educational standards, though with differing priorities and challenges. Japan continues to set benchmarks with its cohesive approach to curriculum innovation, professional teacher development, and equitable access, while the Philippines demonstrates a strong drive for progress through ongoing reforms and targeted interventions to address equity and relevance in its educational programs. These contrasting efforts highlight the need for context-specific and sustained strategies to ensure and advance educational quality within evolving international standards.

Table 4. Challenges in the Implementation of Internationalization in Japan and the Philippines

Indicator	Japan	Philippines
Financial and Resource Constraints	Japan faces a significant gap in experts who possess both the classroom experience and the pedagogical expertise required to deliver English-Medium Instruction (EMI) effectively and in lack of EMI learning materials tailored for Japanese students (Aizawa and McKinley, 2020).	Limited faculty capacity/expertise to engage in internationalization and inadequate financial resources hinder global competitiveness and collaboration in the Philippine education system (Queroda, 2020).
Cultural Identity vs. Globalization	Japanese universities struggle to introduce EMI as a component of their internationalization due to language proficiency issues and cultural resistance (Harris and Strefford, 2022).	There is a tension between nationalism and the adoption of global educational models in Philippine education (Eder, 2020).
Governance and Policy Challenges	The process of recruiting students outside and within Asia demands an increase in funding for MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) scholarship, while recruiting undergraduate students requires curriculum reforms (Nam and Cheng-Hai, 2022).	The Philippines struggles to align internationalization strategies with national development goals, as hybrid models face obstacles in effectively blending global and local priorities (Chao, 2021).

Table 4 addresses the principal challenges in implementing higher education internationalization in Japan and the Philippines. Financial and resource constraints remain significant for both nations, although they manifest differently in each context. Despite Japan's efforts, there is a shortage of skilled professionals who can successfully implement English-Medium Instruction (EMI) and a lack of locally applicable EMI educational resources, impacting both teaching efficiency and student involvement (Aizawa and McKinley, 2020). In the Philippines, inadequate faculty training in global teaching methods and a lack of funds for faculty growth, modern infrastructure, and international partnerships persistently hinder advancement towards global educational integration (Queroda, 2020).

While Japan's challenges are focused on EMI and its resources for Global Citizenship Education (GCE), the Philippines faces broader systemic issues in engaging with internationalization efforts. Despite these differences, both countries struggle with a common issue: inadequate investment in human capital and resources, limiting their ability to compete on the global higher education stage.

Issues related to cultural and linguistic identity significantly influence the role of internationalization. Japanese universities continue to face challenges in the extensive implementation of EMI due to concerns over language skills and deeply rooted societal preferences for Japanese as the medium of instruction, which complicates global integration (Harris and Strefford, 2022). On the other hand, Philippine educational institutions must consistently find a balance between adopting foreign or Western educational models and preserving local cultural significance and institutional identity, leading to continual policy discussions and adjustments (Eder, 2020).

Governance and policy coherence further set apart each nation's reaction. In Japan, rising demand for MEXT scholarships and the rise of international students exert pressure on institutional frameworks to update curricula and offer more financial assistance. However, conventional governance and resistance to change frequently hinder the pace of reform (Nam and Cheng-Hai, 2022). In the Philippines, aligning international educational strategies with changing national development objectives creates uncertainty. Educational models that integrate global and local approaches encounter challenges because of partial policy structures and fluctuating priorities (Chao, 2021).

These results highlight that although Japan and the Philippines face comparable types of challenges—resources, culture, and policy—their paths toward internationalization are shaped by local circumstances. Effective reform will necessitate that each country tackle internal obstacles by concentrating on investments in knowledge, enhancing institutional policies, and maintaining a commitment to cultural-linguistic contexts.

Implications

The findings from this comparative study highlight the need for context-sensitive approaches that can help sustain educational excellence while prioritizing local realities. Policymakers and university leaders are encouraged to adopt robust governance mechanisms, promote targeted investment in faculty expertise and academic infrastructure, and design internationalization policies that safeguard both global standards and local values. By inferring on information based on each context, Japan and the Philippines can strengthen their capacity for meaningful, sustainable internationalization and contribute to the broader advancement of higher education in a globalized world.

Japan and the Philippines both seek to internationalize their higher education systems, yet their efforts are shaped by distinctive historical, cultural, and structural factors. Findings from this comparative study emphasize the importance of tailoring internationalization approaches to fit the educational realities of each context. In Japan, substantial government initiatives—such as the Global 30 Project and Top Global University Project—reflect a top-down approach designed to boost international student enrollment and expand English-medium instruction (EMI). Despite considerable investment, Japan still faces practical challenges, including a lack of faculty skilled in EMI, language resistance, and demographic decline, highlighting the limits of solely relying on resource-based solutions.

The Philippines, meanwhile, prioritizes international linkage policies, mobility programs, and curricular reforms aimed at increasing global engagement. However, effective internationalization is often hindered by limited resources for faculty development, persistent infrastructure gaps, and equity concerns in access to international opportunities. These barriers highlight the need for targeted faculty training, stronger quality assurance mechanisms, and investment in academic infrastructure to ensure inclusive participation in international programs.

A key implication is that cultural and linguistic tensions play a decisive role in both countries. This means that efforts to globalize should reach international standards with the preservation of local values to ensure legitimacy and sustainability. Governance and policy alignment are also critical. This emphasizes that robust frameworks are necessary to reach international ambitions with practical realities and existing educational priorities. Overall, the study shows that advancing higher education internationalization in diverse country contexts requires context-sensitive strategies—combining resource investment, policy innovation, and respect for cultural identity—to achieve broad-based and sustainable outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Japan and the Philippines remain steadfast in their commitment to internationalizing their higher education systems through a range of targeted strategies and policy initiatives. Japan's government-led projects (such as the Top Global University Project and 100,000 International Students Plan) emphasize the expansion of English-medium instruction (EMI), student mobility, and institutional partnerships to foster a more globally integrated academic environment. The Philippines, in turn, pursues internationalization through curriculum reforms, investment in faculty development, and participation in regional collaborations, particularly within the ASEAN framework. Despite their shared objectives, both nations encounter contrasting challenges stemming from resource allocation, faculty competencies, and the rise between global engagement and the preservation of cultural identity. Japan's efforts are often hampered by language barriers, demographic shifts, and the slow pace of curricular adaptation, while the Philippines continues to address resource gaps, teacher training, and ensuring equitable access to international opportunities.

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Author's Bionote

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A teacher by profession, a mother by heart, a writer by chance, and a researcher by choice, Cristie Ann L. Jaca embodies the spirit of lifelong learning and service to others. She earned her Bachelor's of Secondary Education major in English, pursued higher learning with a Master of Arts in English Language Teaching and a Doctor of Philosophy in Education (Research-Oriented) at the University of San Carlos. Further developing and strengthening her expertise and passion for teaching and learning, she completed a Master of Education and a Doctor of Education in Early Childhood Education at Cebu Technological University.

As a passionate teacher-researcher, she believes that teaching is not only about imparting knowledge but also about discovering new ways to inspire learners. Her journey as a writer grew naturally from her commitment to share insights, while her dedication to research reflects her belief that education thrives when teachers themselves remain learners. She has published several journal articles, written several books, stories, and poems that are products of her heart for teaching and her passion for learning. Likewise, she is also a distinguished and well-known speaker both nationally and internationally in teacher training during seminar-workshops and more often in conferences as a resource speaker. However, as humble as ever, she remains low-key despite her notable achievements. She is likewise a futurist and an environmental advocate.

Guided by her heart as a mother and her calling as an educator, she continues to touch lives, bridge learning gaps, and advocate for meaningful innovations in education.

Joevie Alvarado is a doctoral candidate pursuing a Doctor in Development Education (DevEdD). She earned her Master of Arts in Education (MAEd), major in Science Education, from Cebu Normal University and holds a Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSEd) in Biology from the University of San Carlos. In her collaborative research, she has contributed to studies on the global effectiveness of curriculum implementation and the role of inquiry-based pedagogy in enhancing academic performance. Her more recent research involvement focuses on the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in educational settings, particularly examining teachers' perspectives toward AI-driven adaptive strategies for personalized learning. Through these collaborations, she contributes to ongoing discussions on digital transformation and evidence-based instructional frameworks in education.

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Meriam C. Angana is a dedicated educator with a strong passion for teaching and leadership development. She is actively engaged in academic and professional growth, balancing her roles in instruction, research, and continuing education. In her collaborative research, she has contributed to studies on transformational leadership, teacher development, and curriculum design. Committed to shaping future learners and leaders, she seeks to contribute meaningfully to collaborative projects that advance educational practice and school improvement