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# **The relationship between intercultural communication competence and perceived challenge and its effect on the success of studying in Japan: A case study of international graduate students in JAIST**

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## **Abstract**

With the inevitable internationalization trend among higher education institutions, besides Japanese-medium instruction (JMI), English-medium instruction (EMI) and English-taught programs (ETPs) have been prevailing in Japan in recent years. International students more likely tend to participate in EMI/ETPs, especially at the graduate level. Some of the previous work suggests students with higher English proficiency can gain better learning experiences. In contrast, some other researchers argue students with higher English proficiency still struggle with learning in the form of EMI/ETPs. On the one hand, we can see the conflicting findings, conclusions, and claims on proficiency's role in the EMI/ETPs from previous work. On the other hand, some researchers are continually calling for attention to another language-related skill—intercultural communication competence (ICC) in recent years.

Unlike language proficiency, ICC is an indicator both linguistically and culturally relevant to an individual's skill. Yet, there is a noticeable lack of investigation about ICC's effect on international students' on-campus experiences in Japan. In particular, we

do not know the relationship between this skill level and students' perceived challenge degree. We also do not know how this skill-challenge balance affects students' perception of success.

This study investigates the relationship between ICC and perceived challenges in international graduate students' learning experiences and this balance's effect on their perceived success.

The main objective is to investigate the effect of the different ICC-challenge balance on international students' perceived success of studying in Japan.

The first sub-objective investigates the relationship between international students' ICC and the perceived challenge.

The second sub-objective investigates the ICC's effect on international graduate students' learning experiences in Japan.

The convenience sampling and data collection approach were applied in this study. The online survey was designed with four demographic questions and 23 Likert Scale questions. Participants are international students from different schools of Japan Advanced Institution of Science and Technology (JAIST). One hundred thirteen valid questionnaires were retrieved through Google form. Data were coded and processed by Microsoft Excel and IBM SPSS 26.

The results of the data analysis showed that all four ICC factors correlated with different perceived on-campus challenges, with the team effectiveness factor being the most correlated to the perceived challenge. However, some of the correlations differed significantly, depending on the way of student grouping. Further, individuals' ICC-challenge degrees are grouped into H-H, H-L, L-H, and L-L quadrant. Using the plot box,

different ICC-challenge balance groups showed their various characteristics with the perceived success. Overall, the perceived success degree decreases in the order of H-H, H-L, L-H, and L-L. However, the perceived success degree would be changed as changing the way of grouping, either.

The prior study highlighted that the international student population in Japan is highly homogeneous, as more than 90% of the students are from Asia. Research on EMI has argued students' language proficiency and has linked it to their learning success. The results of this study show that although this is considered a highly homogeneous group, ICC varies significantly across student groups and shows more complex correlations in terms of the degree of perceived challenges and success with different student groups. Although this is a preliminary study, international students' ICC includes more content and involves more complex dimensions than single language proficiency. Whether individual ICC differences contribute to teaching difficulties in EMI and student dissatisfaction or academic failure in learning merits further study.