



## Global Report

# Removing the “Japanese language barrier” and providing a favorable learning environment for international students: HGP is facilitating the advancement of globalization

The latest increase in the number of inbound exchange students at Hitotsubashi University was achieved through a program in which we revised our admission requirements for Japanese proficiency, which had previously acted as a barrier for prospective international students, and reformed our international education provision. This article introduces the initiatives adopted as part of the **H**itotsubashi University **G**lobal Education **P**rogram (HGP). This program has played an important role in promoting the advancement of globalization throughout the university while also helping to increase the number of inbound exchange students studying here and the number of Japanese students going abroad to study.

Japanese universities are currently pursuing a wealth of initiatives aimed at promoting globalization. One such example is the effort to promote the influx of international students. As part of the 300,000 International Students Plan enacted by the Japanese government in 2008, which aims at “boosting the number of international students to 300,000 by 2020,” each university in Japan has continuously striven to create a campus with an international appeal.

If a university wishes to attract more international students, simply expressing a desire to do so is not enough. It must also enhance its educational infrastructure and internationalize the education it provides. Hitotsubashi University has established its own unique global education program, known as the “**H**itotsubashi University **G**lobal Education **P**rogram (HGP),” and dramatically increased the number of inbound exchange students on campus as a result.

### Lowering the admission requirements for language proficiency to improve the student exchange system

The critical issue that Japanese universities face when admitting international students concerns the requirement of Japanese language proficiency for applicants (prospective students). In the past, Hitotsubashi University required these students to have intermediate Japanese language proficiency (N2 in the Japanese

Language Proficiency Test) or higher. In other words, exchange students from our overseas partner institutions who wished to study at Hitotsubashi University needed to have studied Japanese for a considerable time, and those who did not have some degree of achievement in and strong motivation for studying Japanese were ineligible for admission, regardless of their academic merits. Moreover, with the impact of English as a de facto lingua franca and the rise of the Chinese language due to globalization, the number of inbound exchange students gradually declined as our partner institutions scaled back their Japanese language education. Several of our partner institutions abolished their Japanese departments or majors, and we experienced problems such as the discontinuation of student exchange programs. In 2010, the university established the HGP as a way of addressing this situation. With a





focus on enhancing the scope of English-medium instruction (EMI) courses and basic Japanese language courses, the HGP aimed at reforming the student exchange system so that even students who had not studied Japanese could enter the university on the strength of their English proficiency. This would enable us to secure academically capable inbound exchange students and expand the pool of partner institutions. In 2010, when the program began, there were 58 courses. However, the number of HGP courses has continued to increase, reaching 136 courses in 2016 (a combined total of 106 EMI courses consisting of Japanese Affairs courses and specialized courses in social sciences, 19 basic Japanese courses, and 11 Academic Skills in English courses). The number of exchange students coming from partner institutions abroad has also increased significantly, from 47 in 2009 to more than 130 in 2016. Already one of the top-ranking higher education institutions in Japan, it can be said that Hitotsubashi University was an appealing academic destination for ambitious students at our partner institutions. The measures we took to ease the obstructive admission requirements for Japanese language proficiency (replacing them with requirements for English proficiency) and expand the scope of EMI courses proved successful and widened the potential for admitting outstanding inbound exchange students.

### **The enhancement of global education under the HGP has produced various additional benefits**

The HGP aimed at increasing the number of inbound exchange students at the university by establishing more EMI courses and improving basic Japanese language courses. Over the last six years, it has not only experienced remarkable success in achieving this aim

but has also produced other positive effects.

The first benefit is that our inbound exchange student population has grown more diverse. Due to our efforts to ease language requirements, the aspirations of students affiliated with our overseas partners who wish to study at Hitotsubashi University have diversified. Our international exchange students have various motivations and backgrounds: (1) Japanese language major students aim to acquire intermediate or advanced Japanese proficiency through our Japanese language courses, (2) Japanese or Asian studies major students take courses in Japanese affairs and Asian studies based on their interest in Japanese culture and society, and (3) others pursue Japan-related studies while specializing in social science subjects such as economics and management. However, in addition to international exchange students “studying about Japan” (that is, focusing specifically on Japan), Hitotsubashi University has also begun to attract international exchange students “studying in Japan” (that is, specializing in social sciences with Japan as their target area) from all over the world. Moreover, because the HGP is open to all students at the university, our students as a whole are now able to learn together, teach each other, and deepen their exchanges with one other free from any divisions, for example those between degree-seeking Japanese and international students, undergraduate and graduate students, and students of various majors and specializations. In other words, by taking EMI courses in the HGP, students now have the opportunity to encounter a more diverse range of students on campus and experience a more global environment.

The second benefit is the strengthening of the Center for Global Education’s capacity to respond to more diverse Japanese language learning needs. Ever since the introduction of the HGP, the needs for Japanese language among our exchange students have broadened: some students seek to acquire enough Japanese to get



by in daily life, some desire to study Japanese intensively, and others, who were already at the intermediate level before arriving in Japan, wish to acquire advanced Japanese proficiency. To meet these various needs, it is important to provide Japanese language courses for different purposes, different skills, and different levels. This is where the strengths of the Center for Global Education come into play. Because more courses are now conducted in English, the demand for basic Japanese language education has grown, which has further strengthened the Japanese language teaching capacity of the Center for Global Education.

The third benefit is the increase in the number of partner institutions with which we engage in student exchanges (from only 20 universities for university-wide student exchanges in 2009 to 66 universities for university-wide student exchanges and 10 faculties for faculty-based student exchanges in 2016) and the corresponding increase in the number of Hitotsubashi University students studying overseas at our partner institutions. When a student exchange agreement is concluded between universities, the same number of students are sent and received by each institution (out-

with a certain level of proficiency in Japanese or English, we also introduced new admission requirements, including a cumulative score of 2.7 on a 4.0 grade point average (GPA) scale and recommendation letters from academic advisors/supervisors. These changes have allowed us to focus on academic ability and diligence and admit high-caliber students. In fact, several of our partner institutions have informed us that Hitotsubashi University is the most popular and competitive exchange destination in Japan.

At the same time as generating these various benefits and impacts, the introduction and development of the HGP have become key factors in the promotion of globalization throughout Hitotsubashi University as a whole.

### Changing our mindset to focus on international education that can respond to globalization

Hitotsubashi University has maintained its original practices of welcoming international students who have high-level Japanese proficiency and are seeking a



bound and inbound) each year. Students can study at the partner institution by paying tuition fees to their home university (mutual exemption of tuition fees). In other words, for Hitotsubashi University to send a certain number of students to a partner institution, we must also admit the same number of students from that institution to study at our university. Our efforts to enhance the scope of EMI courses and basic Japanese language courses through the HGP were made in response to the needs of renowned universities overseas, thereby increasing the number of partner institutions. Moreover, now that exchange students come to Hitotsubashi University from a larger number of partner institutions, we send more of our students to these overseas institutions (a chain of expansion in international student exchange).

The fourth benefit is that we have been able to attract excellent, hard-working exchange students from our partner institutions. As mentioned before, all international students previously needed to have at least an intermediate level of Japanese language proficiency to study at Hitotsubashi University. However, although the language requirements were lowered with the introduction of the HGP so that students could enter

degree and of nurturing individuals who can contribute to the world through education conducted in Japanese. Simultaneously, it is pursuing initiatives related to securing a wide range of international exchange students and responding to globalization through the HGP. In addition to improving the quality and quantity of our education, one important point when approaching these challenges was to change the collective outlook of the university. An example of this is making our basic Japanese language course a regular credit-bearing course.

Before the HGP was established, advanced Japanese language skills were regarded as a minimum requirement for international students seeking a degree at Hitotsubashi University. Therefore, the basic Japanese language course was provided only as a preparatory program for non-matriculated, international research students and was not included in the course credit system because it was not a regular credit-bearing course. Accordingly, international exchange students who completed the basic Japanese language course could neither earn credits for the course nor transfer them as credits to their home universities. In contrast, courses in non-English foreign languages (second foreign languages) have been included in the credit system since



their inception. For international students, Japanese is a foreign language studied just like any other, so it could be considered quite unfair that they were unable to obtain credits for the basic Japanese language course. The evidence suggests that many international exchange students now choose Hitotsubashi University because basic Japanese language courses are treated as regular courses that carry credits.

We must also develop an international outlook as a university that provides education from a global perspective, not only for the citizens of our own country but also for people from all over the world. This implies that we must be willing to improve the quality of the education we offer by considering the diverse viewpoints of international students without being caught up in the conventional Japanese “model/form.” Professor Hiroshi Ota, from the Center for Global Education (HGP Director), explains, “To promote international education for a globalizing world, we must first improve the ‘openness’ of the university as well as our ‘flexibility’ in welcoming a diverse range of students. Then, by improving the international ‘compatibility’ of our educa-



tion, we will enhance ‘connectivity’ with other universities around the world, allowing us to improve the ‘mobility’ of our students and staff and faculty members through a network of various universities throughout the world. Through this process, the ‘diversity’ of the university will be enhanced. By setting this chain in motion, we will be able to become more international in the true sense.”

### More EMI (English-medium instruction) courses and globalization at the institutional level

More than six years have passed since the HGP was established in 2010. During this time, the number of EMI courses has continued to increase. This is partly due to the “Shibusawa Scholar Program” in the Faculty of Commerce and Management and the “Global Leaders Program” in the Faculty of Economics, both of which were selected in 2012 for the “Go Global Japan Project” sponsored by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), Japan. These programs increased the number of EMI courses in the Fac-

ulty of Commerce and Management and the Faculty of Economics, giving impetus to efforts to establish an English-based learning environment on a large number of specialized EMI courses throughout the HGP as a whole. Moreover, each faculty has begun to offer a greater number of specialized EMI courses in its own way, with the Faculty of Law expanding its scope of course offerings primarily in the areas of political science and international relations and the Faculty of Social Sciences introducing more sociology courses since 2015.

From now on, the HGP will aim to increase the number of Japanese students taking its courses. Open to all students at Hitotsubashi University, HGP courses reduce the barriers between international students and Japanese students and between undergraduate and graduate students. Reportedly, Japanese students who

are anxious about their English proficiency tend to hesitate about registering for HGP courses, as they are concerned that their GPA might decline. However, the HGP also provides a series of courses called “Academic Skills in English” in which students can acquire the English skills necessary to take classes in English. Furthermore, the “HGP Seminar,” which features guest speakers from outside the university, is open to anyone and provides students with an opportunity to experience what it is like to take classes in English. In addition to enhancing the scope of EMI courses, we will improve the quality of both Japanese language courses that match the diversifying needs of international students and academic skills courses aimed at eliminating Japanese students’ anxiety about taking classes in English. Through this broad range of initiatives, the HGP is spearheading the globalization of the university as a whole.

Universities must reform their systems from an international perspective to keep pace with the progress of globalization. As the nucleus of Hitotsubashi University’s international education, the HGP will undoubtedly continue to play an important role in promoting further reform.