

## University Administrators' Visions for the Recovery of International Student Exchange in a Post-COVID-19 World

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### Abstract

**Objectives:** Little is known about how international functions of higher education, such as exchange programmes, can be resumed during recovery from a disruptive global crisis, such as COVID-19. We collected the opinions of administrators of international exchange programmes regarding their plans to resume their exchange programmes in the recovery phase and identified variations in the responses concerning institution type (public vs. private) and the presence or absence of a medical school.

**Method:** We used multiple-choice survey questions in our study, resulting in 180 valid responses. We examined overall patterns using descriptive statistics and institutional uniqueness using Fisher's exact test.

**Results:** Governing organisations and domestic university networks are expected to initiate the resumption of student exchange programmes. Respondents indicate that they would rely on infection prevention experts

at their institutions as sources of information for their decision-making. Public universities would rely more extensively on their staff's opinions whilst private universities would consult with external experts. Universities with a medical school indicated a greater likelihood of referring to the opinions of experts at their institutions.

**Implication for Theory and/or Practice:** Higher education systems vary across nations. However, extant studies have shown some shared features, and the findings may have implications for higher education institutions internationally. Policy incentives and support may encourage public universities to participate in the global recovery of international education. During global public health infectious crises, institutions without a medical school may require more government support.

**Conclusions:** Institutional variations should be considered to effectively encourage universities to adapt to changing dynamics in the recovery of international education.

**Keywords:** *student exchange, higher education, COVID-19, international education administrators, emergency management*

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## Introduction

Higher education has been impacted by earlier pandemics, such as those of the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) disease (2003), the A (H1N1) influenza epidemic (2009), and the Middle East respiratory syndrome contagion (2012). In early 2020, the world again suffered another pandemic, COVID-19. In the context of such “wicked problems” (Rittel & Webber, 1973, p. 160), higher education institutions (HEIs) have learned lessons that will help them prepare for later unanticipated disasters and mitigate adverse impacts. In the international education sector, universities have managed multifaceted challenges in international exchange, transborder online education, and systemic curricular modifications for new mobility programmes during these pandemics. However, little is known regarding how university administrators in international education might decide to resume their international student exchange in the recovery phase from the disaster. Under the uncertainty due to COVID-19, university leaders of exchange programmes were anxious with respect to policymaking decisions based on information from stakeholders, including university staff, students, local authorities, the government, and international partners. Hence, exploring the perspectives of international administrators at HEIs in Japan was deemed important for understanding their expectations and information needs for decision-making to swiftly resume study-abroad programmes.

## Literature Review

The impact of COVID-19 has been unprecedented. We considered the COVID-19 crisis to be a wicked problem for HEIs. A wicked problem is defined as a poorly defined problem, dependent on various dynamic components, and not easily resolved due to its intricacy (Rittel & Webber, 1973). Like COVID-19, a wicked problem induces a series of related issues, and a solution frequently generates another problem, which renders both difficult to address simultaneously (Oleksiyenko et al., 2021). This scenario leads to an increased difficulty for policymakers in terms of decision-making (El Masri & Sabzalieva, 2020; Moon, 2020; Peters, 2017). Confronting COVID-19, HEIs were called upon to cancel on-campus events (Ammigan et al., 2022),

transition quickly to online teaching (Ammigan et al., 2022; Tesar, 2020), cope with digital infrastructural inequity among students (O’Shea et al., 2022; Tasci, 2021), alleviate anxiety among students (Jones et al., 2021), and transform laboratory workflow due to school closure policies—all at the same time. Some universities experienced financial challenges in developing facilities for new online platforms (Coulton, 2020; Tasci, 2021). In this societal turbulence, HEIs were required to make policy decisions for alleviating elusive situations by drawing on information from various stakeholders.

When COVID-19 had its first impact on Japan, most universities shifted their instruction to online platforms, as was done in many other countries (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Technology, 2021). By its fourth wave in May 2021, when we collected the data for our study, Japan confirmed positive cases totalling approximately 70,000, with 6,000–7,000 daily cases counted. By contrast, European and North American countries had already abandoned their virus containment restrictions, including border restrictions, owing to fewer cases and hospital admissions. Japan kept its conservative border regimen and was internationally criticised for that decision. In February 2022, Japan declared that it would reopen its borders and relax its daily entrance cap to 7,000. Similarly, Japanese HEIs are often considered insular, characterised by sluggish internationalisation efforts, with an international-to-domestic student ratio lower than global standards, and a lack of diverse perspectives in the teaching content of domestically educated professors (Breaden & Goodman, 2010, 2020; Huang & Horiuchi, 2020). This backdrop may have affected their outlook on the crisis and how the new normal of international higher education will unfold.

## **Disaster Management Framework**

The idea of the wicked problem was developed in the organisation planning literature (Peters, 2017). To conceptualise HEIs’ management planning to address disasters, the disaster management framework—a three-phase, recurring procedural framework for emergency management—is useful, involving mitigation/preparedness, response, and recovery (El Masri & Sabzalieva, 2020; Izumi et al., 2022; Worsely & Beckering, 2007). Mitigation or preparedness generally includes the identification of potential risks and response strategies to reduce or minimise adverse consequences by preempting a crisis. Some researchers distinguish mitigation from preparedness, but the review by Kunz and Reiner (2012) demonstrated no clear significance to the distinction. The response phase focuses on personal and communal health and safety at the onset of a crisis. Action is taken to ensure that loss and suffering are minimised, and necessary care is available. Recovery is adopted to reconstruct damaged infrastructure and seek alternatives to run the given enterprise adequately. These phases do not always progress linearly and partly overlap with each other (Tesar, 2020; Worsely & Beckering, 2007).

## **Being Prepared to Mitigate Crisis Impacts**

Even before COVID-19, researchers have documented lessons from previous disasters to prepare for future challenges and to mitigate unwanted impacts. For example, Asian transborder HEI networks were established to address the research agenda of transdisciplinary risk management, dissemination of knowledge to wider societies, and cooperation among HEIs and various stakeholders (Matsuura et al., 2019; Shaw et al., 2011). These initiatives emphasise the significance of multisector, multidisciplinary approaches for reducing the adverse impact of disastrous events (Matsuura et al., 2019). In response to the H1N1 flu, the Japanese government developed a framework for infectious disease control that eventually served to provide a foundation for a disaster management committee (Expert Committee for the Control of the COVID-19; Shiroyama, 2020, p. 195) to contain COVID-19 in 2020 and potentially other viruses in the future (Shiroyama, 2020). Following this initiative of the central government, Japanese local stakeholders also established new measures against a potential surge in influenza (Shiroyama, 2020).

In other countries, SARS and H1N1 flu also led to transborder crises that affected HEIs (Carnegie et al., 2021; Castiello-Gutiérrez & Lizárraga, 2021). An important lesson was that campus closure was effective for

containing the spread of infection since HEIs are important hubs in local communities (e.g., Uscher-Pines et al., 2007). When the SARS pandemic spread in Asian countries, online teaching, flexible work hours, and telework were encouraged to reduce social interaction (Lai & Tan, 2015). However, recent studies identified varying degrees of preparedness in technical infrastructure and user skills between countries that have limited the effectiveness of online teaching (Coulton, 2020; Soroya et al., 2020). Furthermore, several reports have indicated that collecting and sharing varied opinions from members of institutions for the development of policy decisions are laborious (Fischer, 2009) and that providing a range of updates at one's institution responding to the fast-changing situation is important amid the transborder crises to prevent confusion among students and staff (Koralek et al., 2016; Schwartz & Bayles, 2012). These experiences promoted societal learning and helped HEIs maintain normalcy during the recent crisis. Many universities developed disaster management protocols after previous crises although they were not designed for ones as severe as COVID-19 (Kruse et al., 2020).

The international education enterprise has also accumulated knowledge from previous experience to ensure preparedness for future disruption. Some institutions have previously implemented policies to ban international travel in response to government travel warnings (Friend, 2011). To prevent the spread of viruses among international students, who tend to travel between countries, quarantine regulations have been promulgated following the SARS outbreak for students who return from affected countries or develop symptoms of a contagious disease (Lai & Tan, 2015). Moreover, international students may be unable to return home due to border control policies (Beaton et al., 2007; Coulton, 2020). In such cases, a careful arrangement of university accommodation was necessary to maintain social distancing among students (Uscher-Pines et al., 2007). Another lesson has been the importance of concrete risk-management planning with diverse stakeholders, including staff members at one's institution, international counterpart institutions, and insurance companies (Friend, 2011; Shaw et al., 2011).

### **Crisis and Response to COVID-19**

After the onset of COVID-19, many researchers in international education reported a range of responses amid various restrictions. As such, insights obtained from this unprecedented event can contribute to informed decision making in future practice and policy (Moon, 2020; Rumbley, 2020). Although universities strived to establish support systems for the safety of inbound and outbound international students (Beaton et al., 2007), some students experienced impaired learning opportunities, psychological and health concerns, and precarious support systems similar to their domestic counterparts (Coulton, 2020; O'Shea et al., 2022). Their problems also included facing a long-term travel ban (Coulton, 2020; O'Shea et al., 2022; Wen & Tian, 2022), discrimination (Rumbley, 2020), and loss of student immigration status. Students from countries with a lower socioeconomic status faced financial insecurity due to the loss of part-time employment (Coulton, 2020; Mok & Zhang, 2021). Although universities exerted efforts to address these challenges by providing feasible support and facilitating technological innovation, other students abandoned their travel plans or changed their destination due to unfriendly visa policies or long-term entry restrictions (O'Shea et al., 2022).

The COVID-19 disaster has also disrupted university management and scholarly activities. For universities that rely on international students as a source of revenue, strict border control has imposed financial challenges (e.g., Brunner, 2022; Carnegie et al., 2021; Wen & Tian, 2022). Travel among scholars has also been restricted (Tasci, 2021), and many international academic events have been cancelled although many of these events were held virtually instead. Unsurprisingly, universities have not addressed these challenges independently but have constantly drawn support and vital information from local stakeholders and transnational university networks (e.g., Ferencz & Rumbley, 2022; O'Shea et al., 2022).

### **Recovery: Looking Ahead**

Recovery from disasters can lead to new practices (Cohen et al., 2021; Izumi et al., 2022). Looking ahead to

the period of recovery, scholars have stressed the need for universities to navigate the new normal of international education (e.g., Ferencz & Rumbley, 2022). For now, the strategic use of virtual and in-person modes is expected to continue for administrative service, regular teaching, and transnational educational exchanges (Chasi, 2022; Mok & Zhang, 2021; Zhang et al., 2021). However, international office leaders' views of policy decisions at HEIs in the recovery phase from the disaster remain unclear. Even in the crisis management literature, recovery is largely ignored (Kunz & Reiner, 2012). Nowadays, HEI leaders are increasingly expected to make policy decisions in collaboration with a range of actors, partners, and allies (Ferencz & Rumbley, 2022). During the COVID-19 pandemic, Japanese HEI leaders developed their policy changes by integrating faculty, student, and parent voices, as well as the decisions of neighbouring institutions (Hayashi et al., 2022). In the international education sector, the significance of organisations, such as the Association of International Educators, was evident through their role in providing information during the swine flu outbreak (Fischer et al., 2009) and the COVID-19 pandemic (Ferencz & Rumbley, 2022). Nomizu (2004) also reported that during SARS, the moves of international partner universities were considered in recovery decision-making regarding international exchanges in Japan. However, systematic studies on this topic remain scarce.

Hence, whilst international education has been gradually recovering, a systematic documenting of relevant experiences would be valuable to prepare for unexpected future events. Research has suggested that students would soon become mobile even after the unprecedented COVID-19 crisis (Mok & Zhang, 2021). During the early recovery phase, they paid attention to whether host institutions were equipped with sufficient measures to counteract infectious diseases (Mok & Zhang, 2021). Shrewd decision-making is vital for the new dynamics of international education to seamlessly foster soft power on the national level (Wen & Tian, 2022). Students will change their destinations as universities and countries fail to swiftly accommodate the demand of students for international learning opportunities (Mok & Zhang, 2021).

### **Potential Institutional Variations in the Recovery Phase**

When facing disruptive infectious disease outbreaks affecting HEIs, it is unknown if policy initiatives and support should consider the unique institutional characteristics of HEIs. Specifically, little is known of institutional variations in strategies to be undertaken in the recovery phase. The literature has documented that such differences in institutional decision-making and support needs are to be expected. For example, public universities are more dependent on central government recommendations in their decision making, and private universities enjoy greater autonomy (O'Shea et al., 2022), which is also the case in Japan (Breaden & Goodman, 2020). All national universities in Japan are largely state funded, have greater government holdings, and see themselves as promoters of national projects (Goodman, 2010). Private universities are more reliant on tuition fees (Yonezawa et al., 2009) and more likely to incorporate the voices of students and parents in policymaking (Breaden & Goodman, 2020). The different primary sources of revenue between the two types may result in the (de)centralised orientation of policy development (Breaden & Goodman, 2020). A study elsewhere identified the autonomous and rapid response of private universities in providing online education after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (Mehareen et al., 2021). Yonezawa et al. (2009) further argued that Japanese national universities refer to their international rankings and profile to a greater extent than private universities do. Overall, private universities may be less interested in global dynamics in the recovery phase from disaster experience.

Furthermore, Weible et al. (2020) argued that societies and governments acknowledged the benefits of scientific expertise during such an uncertain time. Jones et al. (2021) reported that medical schools offered resources and materials for their local community during COVID-19. Sullo and Brody (2021) described how medical faculty members and librarians supported the decision making of their deans and local public health systems and officials. Accordingly, considering the unique advantages of medical schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, universities with medical schools might have strategically consulted with their experts and their advice might

have contributed to the decision-making of international administrators for resuming student exchange. Japanese universities vary in terms of the disciplines they are composed of; a few universities comprise schools of various disciplines, but some others only have one school. The presence of a medical school may explain different decision-making processes in the reopening of student exchange programmes for universities.

We sought insights into the decision-making of administrators in Japanese HEIs in disaster recovery to support improved social collaboration among various stakeholders. To identify effective emergency management, determining what information to share with whom is key (Rumbley, 2020). Various stakeholders operating at different levels among local, national, and international actors should share responsibility in a demanding emergency (Rumbley, 2020). The lack of understanding of how institutions with different features, such as whether institutions are national versus public and with or without a medical school, behave and expect external support during the recovery phase may lessen the effectiveness of their support. Although no individual can offer holistic solutions for a wicked problem in an HEI (Rittel & Webber, 1973), lessons learned from COVID-19 may support future resilience in the better preparation of HEIs for future crises (Beaton et al., 2007; Brunner, 2022; Castiello-Gutiérrez & Lizárraga, 2021).

## Context

Our study was conducted in Japan, which has approximately 800 4-year HEIs comprising 90 national, 100 prefectural public, and 600 private universities (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2023). Most universities possess an office of internationalisation initiatives, which oversees study-abroad programme management, facilitates internationalisation at home, and provides support for international staff members. The Global 30 and Top Global University initiatives, which spanned the 2010s to the 2020s, were government-led initiatives to diversify Japanese universities' international activities; significant funds were infused into particular universities to strengthen internationally competitive education and engage in world-class research (Breaden & Goodman, 2020). Despite these government-led programmes and efforts, Japanese universities have encountered multiple challenges in fostering robust internationalisation through motivating students to be internationally active, facilitating faculty members' readiness to integrate internationalisation into the curriculum, and reinvigorating the university system to adapt to the transformative internationalisation dynamics worldwide (e.g., Brotherhood et al., 2019; Yonezawa, 2010).

## The Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

Our present study identifies how university administrators in international education might decide to resume their international student exchange in the recovery phase following the COVID-19 pandemic. This objective was operationalised through the following research questions (RQs):

**RQ1:** Which stakeholders do international administrators think would be appropriate to lead a discussion for the recovery of university student exchange in postpandemic?

**RQ1-1:** Are there any differences in patterns of responses between public and private universities?

**RQ2:** Apart from national immigration policies, what information do international administrators rely on when deciding to resume student exchange?

**RQ2-1:** Are there any differences in patterns of responses between public and private universities?

**RQ2-2:** Are there differences in patterns of responses between universities with and without a medical school?

## Methods

### Instrumentation

Our article only reports the results of the two major items of the survey that address our goals for this study. The opinions of international education administrators were collected with the survey, which included multiple-choice questions. This format of multiple-choice questions was selected to minimise the effort of the respondents to complete the survey and obtain as many responses as possible given the circumstances regarding COVID-19. The respondents answered the following questions using several options provided. A maximum of three items could be selected. We considered three responses reasonable for determining prioritisation among international administrators.

#### **Q1: Which stakeholders do you think would be appropriate to propose, discuss, and build consensus on a framework for student exchanges following the end of the pandemic?**

- Researchers and academic societies
- National and regional networking of high-level decision-makers (e.g., university associations)
- Consultants and other experts
- Initiatives of leading universities
- Transnational network organisations conducting research and suggestions on international education (e.g., Association of International Educators, European Association for International Education, and Japan Network for International Education)
- Government or government-equivalent organisations (e.g., Ministry of Education and Japan Student Services Organisation)
- International organisations (e.g., Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development)
- Individual universities
- Other

#### **Q2: Apart from national immigration policies, what information do you rely on when making decisions about resuming student exchange programmes?**

- Students' opinions
- Parents' opinions
- Opinions and advice from staff and experts with knowledge of infection control measures in the same institution
- Opinions and advice of external risk management experts, study-abroad agencies, or consultants
- Actions of leading universities
- Information from domestic university associations
- Information from international university associations
- Actions of benchmarking universities
- I do not know what information to rely on
- Other

## Data Collection and Analysis

Our study was approved by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, Ochanomizu University, Japan (Reference no. 2021-13). We recruited administrators who oversaw both inbound and outbound student exchange programmes and held leadership roles in the top-tier planning process of these programmes. We sent recruitment messages to the international education administrators at each HEI via the Japan Association of National Universities, Japan Network for International Education, and email lists of Japanese higher education scholarly societies. We collected responses from February to June 2021, during the fourth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Japan.

We received 180 responses, all of which were deemed valid as there were no missing records. However, the exact number of invitations sent was unknown as we could not determine the precise number of administrators who were members of either the Japan Network for International Education or the targeted academic societies. Of a total population of approximately 800 Japanese HEIs, slightly less than one-fourth of the institutions responded to the survey. In all, 41% of the informants (74 universities) worked for national public universities, 28% ( $n = 50$ ) for prefectural public universities, and 31% ( $n = 56$ ) for private universities. We refer to both national and prefectural universities as public universities. Of 180 universities, 46 had medical schools. The status of the person who responded was categorized as follows: executive board members of HEIs (e.g., vice-chancellor, president, or executive board member,  $n = 22$ ); division leaders (e.g., division director, manager, or chairperson,  $n = 59$ ); administrative staff in charge of student exchange programmes ( $n = 92$ ); and academic staff (e.g., professors) ( $n = 4$ ).

We summarised the data descriptively, including frequencies and percentages. We also applied Fisher's exact test to examine if the two sets of binary categories (between public and private universities and between universities with a medical school and those without) were associated with administrators' responses ( $\alpha = .05$ ).

**Table 1.** Demographic Profile

Profile information		<i>n</i>	%
Type	National public university	74	41.1
	Prefectural public university	50	27.8
	Private university	56	31.1
Medical school	Yes	46	25.6
	No	134	74.4
Status	Executive board member	22	12.2
	Division leader	59	32.8
	Administrative staff	92	51.1
	Academic staff	4	0.2

## Results

**RQ1:** Which stakeholders do international administrators think would be appropriate to lead a discussion for the recovery of university student exchange postpandemic?

Figure 1 provides a summary of responses to the first research question. A large majority ( $n = 115$ , 64%) indicated that governmental organisations such as the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, and the Japan Student Services Organization were suitable agencies to do so. Networks of high-level policymakers ( $n = 106$ , 59%) and international educators' networking organisations ( $n = 74$ , 41%) followed as leading agencies in developing new student exchange initiatives. Furthermore, 58 administrators (32%) indicated that individual institutions should independently develop the formulation of postpandemic student exchange programmes. Conversely, few administrators identified international organisations, such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development ( $n = 11$ , 6%), as leaders facilitating recovery dialogue. The option of an external consultant and experts was seldom selected ( $n = 3$ , 2%).

**Figure 1.** *Who Should Lead a Discussion for the Recovery of Student Exchange Following the Pandemic?*

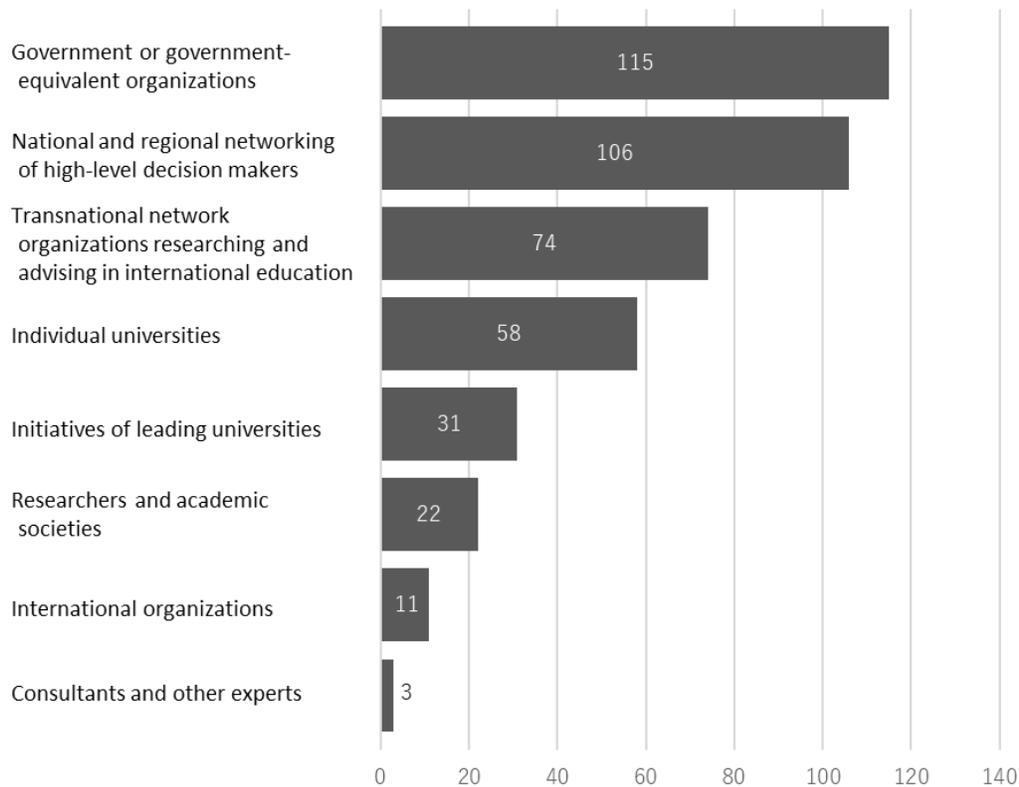
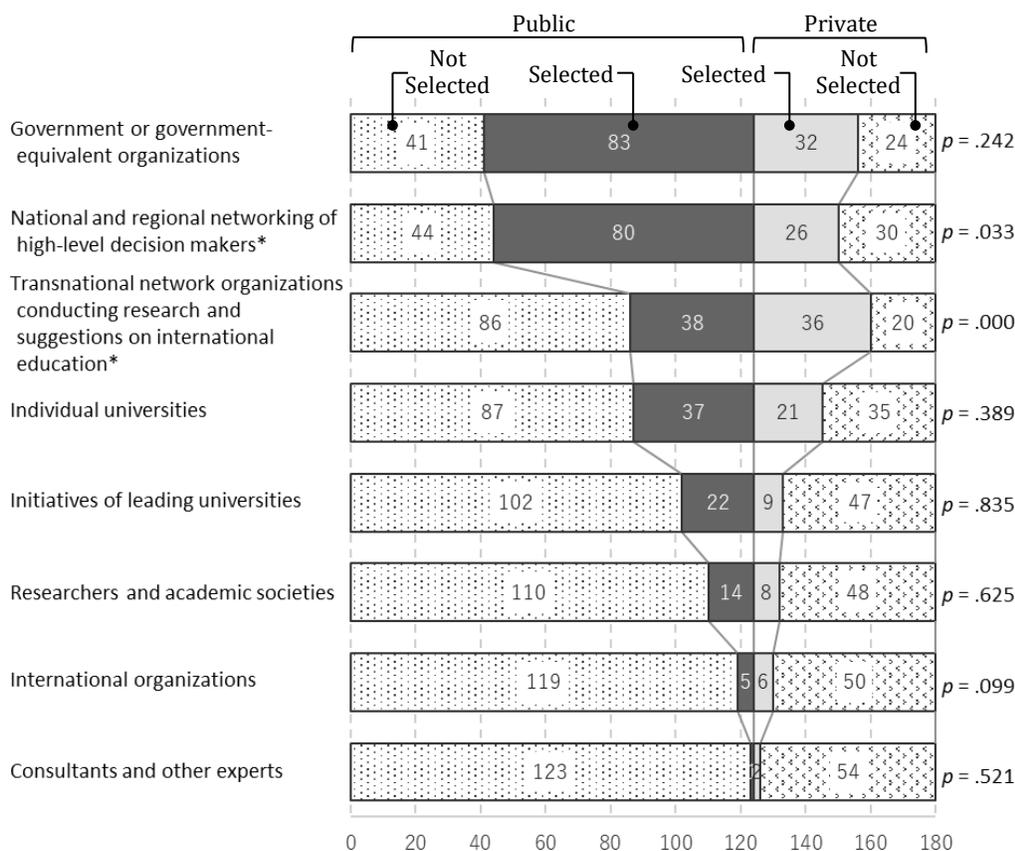


Figure 2 presents the differences in responses based on a public or private university. International administrators at public universities largely expected the leadership of the government at both the national and regional levels. Specifically, approximately two-thirds of administrators at public universities expected to look to the initiatives of governing organisations ( $n = 83$ , 67%) and national and regional stakeholders ( $n = 80$ , 65%). Private universities counted on these organisations and networks of government organisations to a lesser degree ( $n = 32$ , 57%) although Fisher's exact test indicated a statistically nonsignificant result ( $p = .242$ ). Private universities less frequently selected the choice of national and regional networking of high-level decision makers ( $n = 26$ , 46%) than did administrators at public universities ( $p = .033$ ).

**Figure 2.** Key Stakeholders for International Administrators at Public and Private Universities

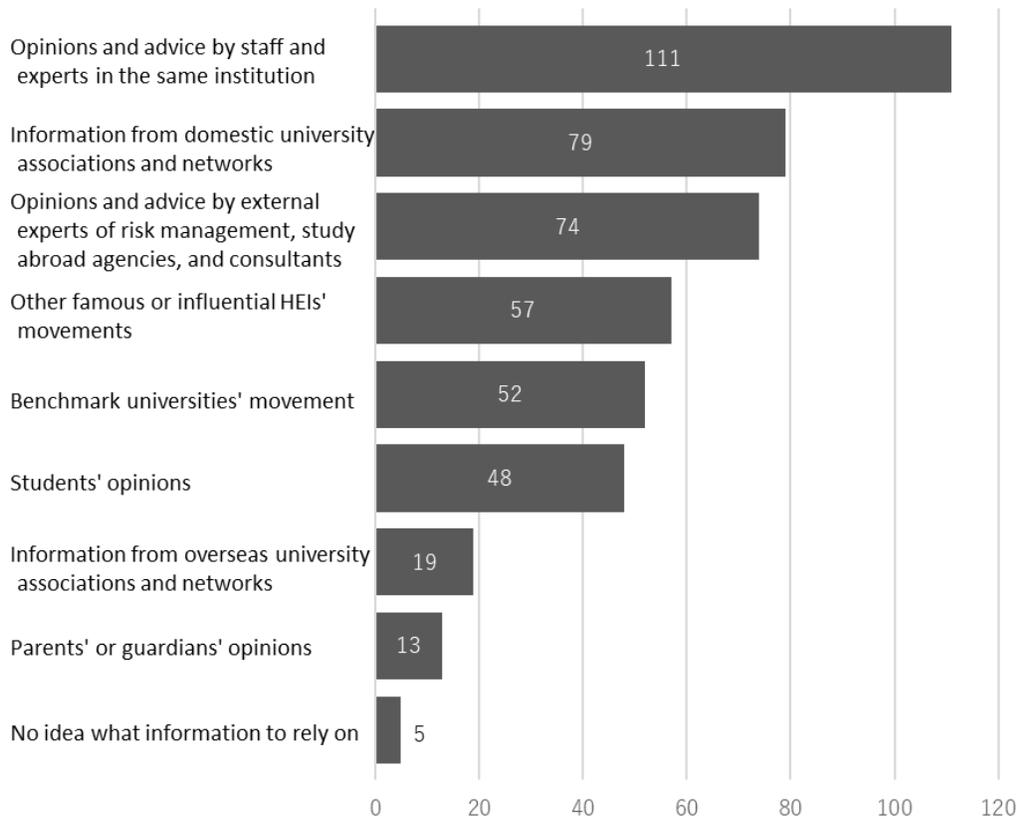
Note: \*  $p < .05$ .

By contrast, private universities showed a higher degree of expectation from transnational networks for the postpandemic recovery of international education ( $p < .001$ ). Roughly two-thirds of international administrators at private universities ( $n = 36$ , 64%) agreed that transnational organisations play a leading role in initiating international programme recovery; however, this rate was much lower at public universities ( $n = 38$ , 31%).

**RQ2:** In addition to national immigration policies, what information do international administrators rely on when deciding to resume student exchange programmes?

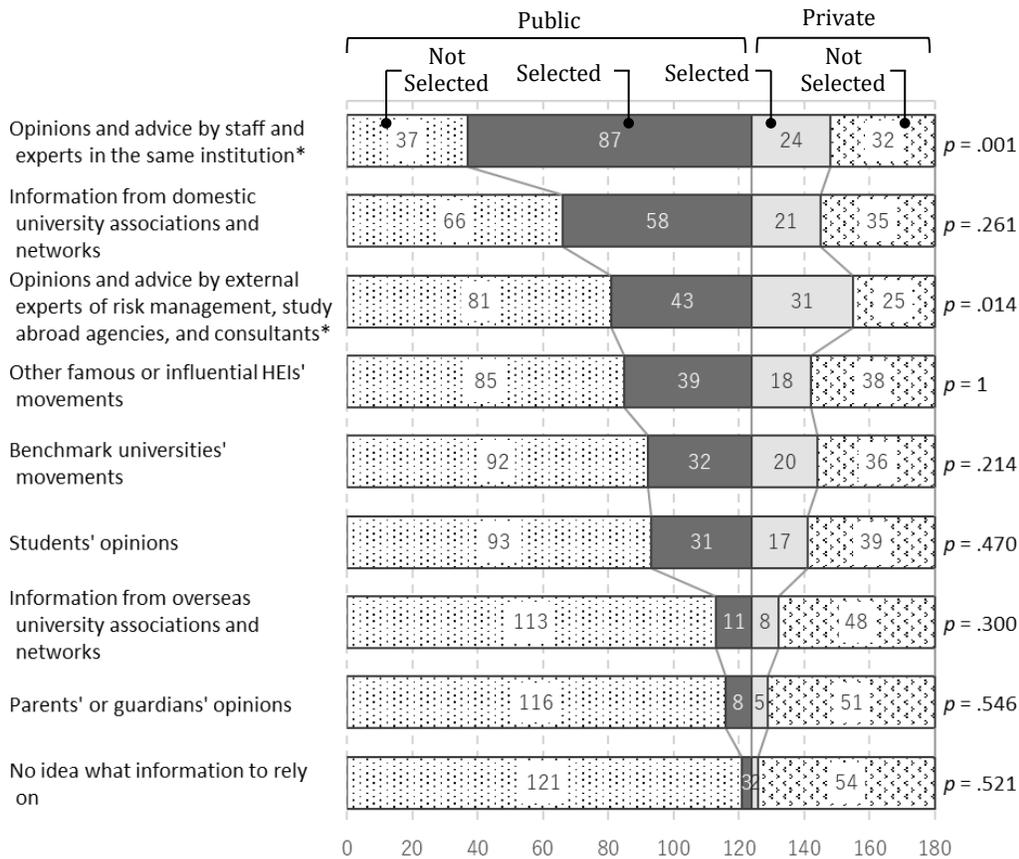
The second major question involved what information the administrators would refer to when deciding on resuming student exchange programmes (Figure 3). The greatest number of informants ( $n = 111$ , 62%) referred to the option of their staff specialised in infection control measures, followed by information from domestic university associations and networks ( $n = 79$ , 44%) and specialists in risk management, study-abroad agencies, or consultants ( $n = 74$ , 41%). More than one-fourth of informants chose the following three options: the actions of leading HEIs ( $n = 57$ , 32%), the actions of benchmarking universities ( $n = 52$ , 29%), and student opinions ( $n = 48$ , 27%). Very few informants ( $n = 5$ , 0.3%) responded that they had no idea what information sources they would look to.

**Figure 3.** Information Sources International Administrators Would Rely on to Reopen Student Exchange Programmes



General trends in international administrators' responses (RQ2-1) were comparable between public and private universities (Figure 4). However, different patterns appeared. First, public universities expressed greater deference to the opinions and advice provided by staff at their institutions ( $p < .001$ ). Fewer administrators of private universities, about 43% ( $n = 24$ ), expressed the intention to refer to this group, whilst at public universities, the rate reached 70% ( $n = 87$ ). Second, a greater reliance ( $p = .014$ ) was seen on the opinions offered by external experts of risk management, study-abroad agencies, and consultants at private universities ( $n = 31, 55\%$ ) relative to public universities ( $n = 43, 35\%$ ). The largest number of international administrators at private institutions chose this option, while it ranked third among representatives of public universities.

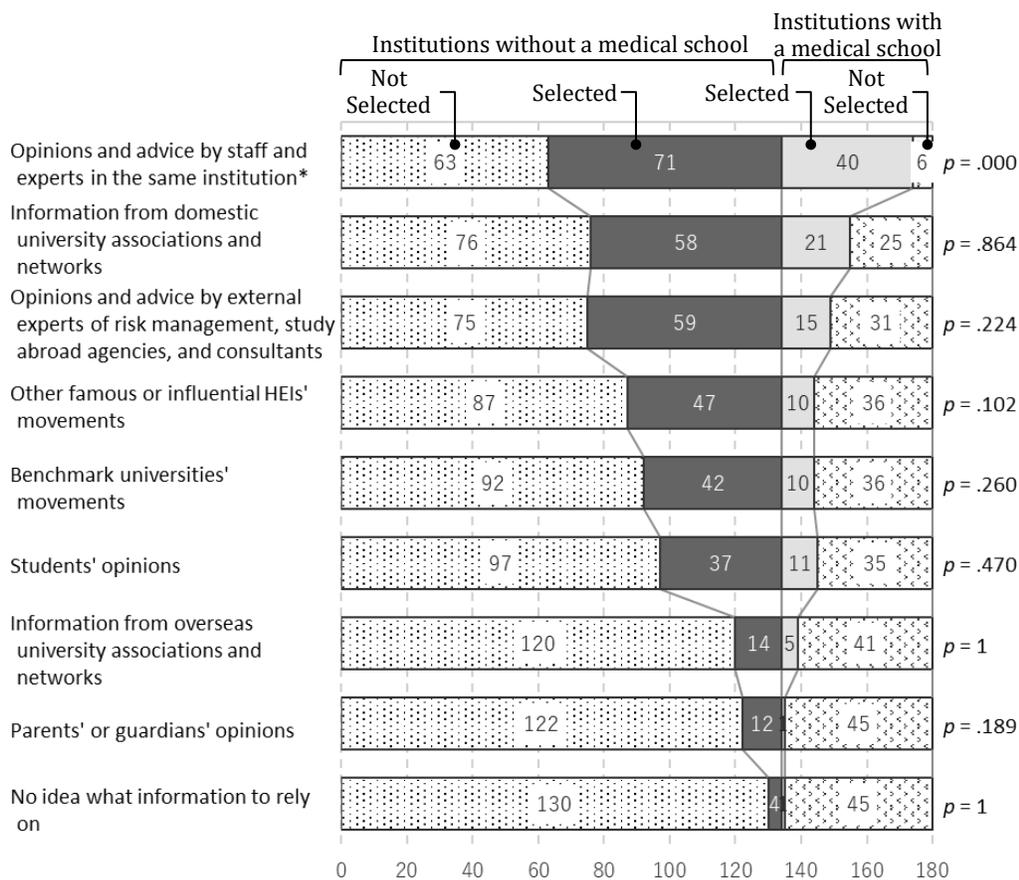
**Figure 4.** Information Sources on Which International Administrators Rely at Public and Private Universities



Note: \* p < .05.

Subquestion RQ2-2 investigated whether unique trends existed in information sources that international administrators would rely on between universities with and those without a medical school (Figure 5). The ratio of administrators who would rely on opinions and advice given by staff or experts at their institutions was significantly higher ( $p < .001$ ) among universities with a medical school ( $n = 40, 87%$ ) than among those without ( $n = 17, 53%$ ). This trend appears to be in line with the tendency that more universities without a medical school would refer to opinions by external experts ( $n = 59, 44%$ ) than would those with a medical school ( $n = 15, 33%$ ).

**Figure 5.** Information Sources International Administrators at Universities With and Without a Medical School Rely on



## Discussion

### Integration Into the Current Literature

This inquiry produced a glance into Japanese international administrators' ideas for making institutional policy decisions to resume their student exchange programmes in the recovery phase of COVID-19. Overall, Japanese universities expected a strong initiative taken by governing organisations and domestic HEI networks to pursue the common ground for the recovery discussion of international student exchange. Regarding information sources for their policy decisions to reopen their programmes, they would rely most heavily on experts in infection control and prevention at their institutions. Information and guidance given by national university associations and external agencies in risk management or study abroad would also play a key role in recovery decision-making. These results suggest that Japanese institutions are primarily concerned about domestic dynamics in their decision-making regarding the resumption of student exchange programmes. This pattern was also related to the relatively lower degree of reliance on international education organisations and agencies for drawing on necessary information.

Interestingly, the results indicated that Japanese universities expected transnational organisations in international education to stimulate changes in postpandemic student exchange practices but had little intention to seek information from them. This result appears contradictory, and further explanation is

necessary. In any case, this may result in a nationwide delay in the proactive reopening of international student exchange activities and in catching up with the new normal of postdisaster international education. Indeed, when many non-Japanese HEIs resumed welcoming international students, Japan disappointed many foreign visitors because of its conservative attitude in easing its border controls (Ishikura & Kondo, 2022). Nomizu (2004) described his experience in coping with SARS in Japan and reported that information concerning international dynamics was useful in developing the recovery policy of international exchange. Group lobbying actions by universities, students, and lawyers to government bodies were active in the United States to support inbound international students during COVID-19 (O'Shea et al., 2022). However, collective actions by HEIs appeared to be slow or at best inconspicuous in Japan.

Public universities' greater expectations of the government and university associations as leading stakeholders for the efficient recovery were consistent with the findings of O'Shea et al. (2022), who argued that public universities more clearly followed the central government's guidelines than did private universities. Although national universities in Japan became more autonomous entities following their transformation into independent agencies in 2004 (Goodman, 2010), the study observed seemingly varying degrees of reliance on top-down nationwide initiatives. Our findings also suggest that public universities are more likely to seek relevant information from in-house colleagues who have relevant expertise.

A distinctive pattern among the private universities was their greater expectation that international networking actors could lead a communal discussion of post-COVID-19 practices of student exchange. These results differ from those of Yonezawa et al. (2009), who reported that Japanese private universities were less aware of international dynamics, such as global rankings and scholarly presence. Accordingly, we initially assumed that private universities would be less attentive to global initiatives regarding student exchange. There appear to be several issues to consider concerning this result. First, the sample covers the entire pool of public universities in Japan; however, the low coverage rate of private universities could fail to illustrate the overall patterns of private universities. Private universities in Japan show extreme diversity in many respects, including their mission, scholarly presence, and financial bedrock (e.g., Breaden & Goodman, 2020; Yonezawa et al., 2009). Their motivations for pursuing international education may differ, and some private universities uninterested in international education may not have responded to our survey for this reason. Second, although national universities are generally more concerned with international rankings and presence (Yonezawa et al., 2009), their motivation for international education per se may be weaker. They may be interested in pursuing international publication or collaborating with their research counterparts (Breaden & Goodman, 2020) but less in encouraging students to participate in exchange programmes that do not significantly focus on research engagement.

Another distinctive feature of private universities was that they tended to solicit external expert consultation in risk management and study abroad to a greater extent than public universities. Relatively more Japanese public universities have broader disciplinary representation than private universities, although some private universities have much larger student bodies than the largest national universities. Owing to the relative limitations of disciplinary scopes, many private universities may be forced to consult with external experts for advice. More evidence is necessary to explain this result from the perspectives of diverse private university bodies, and future studies will contribute to the understanding of unique emergency management practices among them.

We found no clear difference in the degree of institutional reliance on students' voices between private and public universities. Private universities rely on students' tuition fees as revenue to a greater degree (Breaden & Goodman, 2010, 2020; Yonezawa et al., 2009). They are also more attentive to societal expectations and the interests of their students than public universities (Breaden & Goodman, 2010, 2020). Accordingly, we inferred that private universities would seek students' voices more in their decision-making. However, no apparent differences existed in the types of universities. McVeigh (2002) argued that some Japanese private

universities were more eager to put into practice the motivations of founders and staff than those of their students. Thus, large variations may exist concerning the degree to which private universities incorporate students' voices in their policy decision-making.

Our results also showed that institutional dependence on information sources might differ according to whether they had a medical school. It seemed necessary for universities without a medical school to consult with external experts, as they have fewer experts in fields relevant to public health. This finding is in line with the literature (e.g., Jones et al., 2021; Sullo & Brody, 2021; Weible et al., 2020) reporting expectations from universities with medical schools and personnel to offer their expertise and advice to society and institutional decision making on the uncertainty of healthcare disruption.

## Limitations

Our data represent the views of international administrators in Japan and, therefore, do not necessarily reflect the situation in other countries that have different educational systems, levels of emergency preparedness, and disease severity. Furthermore, despite its reasonable sample size, our study suffered from a low response rate among private universities (9%, 56 universities), whilst that of public universities was about 76%. These different ratios were due to the failure of assistance to distribute our survey advertisement from the state-wide private university associations. However, we did not extend the call for survey participants, as the situation and timing of the recovery phase were irreversible. In this regard, the timely introspective data were still insightful for future resilient HEIs and cooperating stakeholders.

## Implications for Theory and Practice

The main theoretical contribution of our study is that the institutional recovery processes from public health crises may vary according to institutional characteristics, such as whether they are public or private and whether they have a medical school or not. Our results indicated a lower motivation among public universities to seek information from transnational networks. Some policy incentives and support may be effective for enabling public universities to get on track in the global dynamics of international education recovery postcrisis. Furthermore, global infectious crises may require more support to institutions without a medical school. Considering that public universities can draw on advice from in-house experts per our findings, private institutions without a medical school may find it difficult to make decisions to support the recovery of international programmes. Government support should be attentive to the institutional variations to effectively encourage universities to catch up with the changing dynamics in the recovery of international education following a global emergency.

There are areas suggested for future research. The findings reflect Japanese HEIs' generally insular orientation. However, future comparative evidence would be necessary to corroborate these results and identify this trend as unique to the Japanese. In addition, the decision-making of coordination of exchange students invariably goes hand in hand with their international institutional counterparts. Their reciprocal decision-making processes in the recovery from global public health crises remain to be explored. Furthermore, the literature has documented distinctive institutional responses to COVID-19 owing to varying degrees of centralisation in the implementation of national and local policies in North America (O'Shea et al., 2022). Also, decision-making processes generally appeared smoother in private universities in other countries (e.g., Mehareen et al., 2021). Significant reliance on medical professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic appeared common internationally (Sullo & Brody, 2021). As demonstrated in our study, these institutional characteristics may affect what information was needed and upon whom the institutions rely to make difficult decisions in a challenging context. Although our study focused on Japan, some features that may affect institutional decision-making may be comparable in other national contexts too, although further empirical evidence is needed.

## Conclusion

Currently positioned just beyond the end of the COVID-19 pandemic in Japan, international education administrators have successfully overcome a time of great uncertainty and are now embarking on the new normal in student exchanges. For those responsible for student exchange programmes during the preceding 3 years, maintaining student learning opportunities posed immense difficulties. Our study attempted to disclose the administrators' needs and views for recovering international education programmes whilst facing the postpandemic era in Japan. In the event of such unforeseeable emergencies in the future, our study may assist local and international stakeholders, specifically those in positions of higher decision-making levels, to be equipped with the knowledge needed to work in collaboration with HEIs that have distinctive characteristics, such as whether they are state-funded or privately endowed or whether they have a medical school. Although the prospect of another multinational border closure due to COVID-19 appears unlikely, our efforts to document international education administrators' reflective views during this pivotal moment of disruption shall yield great value in times to come.

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