

Global Education in Practice: Disorienting Diversity in a Japanese University

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Abstract

This paper considers the challenges posed by EMI (English-medium instruction) programs, focusing on the authors' experiences at a Japanese university. Doshisha University's Global Education Module of the Center for Global Education and Japanese Studies brings together students from multiple nations, English-language abilities and academic disciplines. This paper, jointly authored by the Global Education Module's three current full-time instructors, details the structure of this module in the context of EMI development at Japanese universities. It then relates that information to broader questions about intercultural education praxis. We present this analysis to open room for frank dialogue on the difficulties EMI may pose for students and instructors. Those difficulties, however, are intertwined with the potentialities inherent in highly diverse classroom environments. Ultimately, we suggest that while the implementation of EMI programs is bound to produce some confusion, students' engagement in a disorienting environment can itself function pedagogically.

Introduction

Doshisha University's Center for Global Education, later modified to the Global Education Module (GEM) of the Center for Global Education and Japanese Studies, offers insight into an EMI program that productively utilizes highly diverse classroom environments. From 2016, the Center has held courses in which students of differing English-language abilities, academic disciplines, national backgrounds and academic years can learn together. Small class sizes allow for frequent interactions between students.

Such programs do, of course, present challenges. High course withdrawal rates, communication difficulties and expectation gaps continue to disorient students and instructors alike. That very disorientation, however, forms an invaluable starting point for engagement with the unfamiliar. This article will begin with an overview of EMI instruction in Japanese universities. It will then detail the establishment, structure and current conditions of GEM. We will conclude with a discussion of the pedagogical potential in EMI classrooms' inherently unfamiliar environments.

EMI in Japanese Universities

In recent years, universities in Japan have been rapidly expanding their provision of English-medium instruction (EMI). Over one third of Japan's universities currently offer some courses in English. Furthermore, in 2020, 86 universities offered full degree programs taught in English and the Ministry of Education set a target of increasing this number to 200 by 2033. This expansion is directly attributable to government policies enacted since 2000, specifically the 'Global 30' and the 'Top Global' schemes, which are designed to ensure that as many Japanese universities as possible can boast 'world-class' status. In the 21st Century it is unthinkable that any university could claim such a status without significant English language programs at undergraduate and graduate level. Such courses also attract a greater diversity of international students than those only offered in the medium of Japanese. Furthermore, the clear connection drawn between EMI provision and 'world class status' has encouraged institutions throughout the Japanese higher education sector to follow this trend and open their own courses taught in English.

In some cases, Japan's EMI programs have provided quality international experiences for students both domestic and foreign. However, in other cases there have been serious problems and shortcomings. Many of these problems stem from the short-term superficial planning that has all too often taken place in individual universities. As Bradford and Brown point out:

EMI is seen as a simple and cheap solution to the challenge of internationalization and the very real difficulties inherent in implementing EMI in a systematic and meaningful way are not always being given due consideration as universities rush to establish new programs. (Bradford and Brown 2018, 286–7.)

These points reflect a broader national shift toward English-medium instruction (EMI) as a key strategy for university internationalization in Japan. They also suggest that the issue was not a lack of interest in internationalization, but rather the need for a clearer and more ambitious framework for translating that interest into concrete institutional reform.

This paper examines the development and operation of an English-medium liberal arts program at Doshisha University, originally established as the Center for Global Education (CGE) and later continued as the Global Education Module (GEM). It first outlines the program's origins in the university's post-Top Global University (SGU) internationalization strategy, then describes the institutional structure of the center, the design of its curriculum, and trends in international student enrollment. It also analyzes data on course offerings in the 2025 academic year and, on this basis, discusses both the achievements and the continuing challenges of sustaining an effective co-learning environment for domestic and international students.

Background to the Establishment of CGE

In October 2014, Doshisha University failed to be selected for the 'Top Global University (SGU)' project, a government initiative designed to support university globalization. Internal analysis suggested the rejection stemmed from the university's modest numerical targets for international student enrollment and English-based curricula compared to the aggressive figures proposed by competitor universities.

Despite the denial of government subsidies, the university's leadership concluded that the core initiative—an English-based liberal arts curriculum—should be a cornerstone of the institution's long-term strategy and even its continued viability. They argued that halting the effort would leave Doshisha trailing behind peer institutions that were already moving in the same direction, creating a competitive gap that would be difficult to recover later. At the same time, they framed English-medium university education as an increasingly unavoidable requirement over the next 10 to 20 years, as English becomes a standard tool for scholarship and higher learning.

Leadership also emphasized the urgent educational need to build an environment where domestic and international students learn together through co-learning, enabling a higher level of liberal arts education suited to a rapidly changing society. Even though financial realities required adjustments—

such as scaling back the planned number of new full-time faculty—they decided it was better to use internal funds to “build something solid” than to abandon the concept. This commitment also aligned with the broader institutional vision for the upcoming 150th anniversary, in which the globalization of liberal arts education was already a central pillar. Accordingly, they maintained that the university's fundamental direction should remain unchanged and that the plan of establishing the global education center and advancing the co-learning environment should move forward.

The Structure of CGE

The Center for Global Education (CGE) was established in April 2016 as the operational hub for the university-wide English-based liberal arts curriculum. Its primary educational mission is to create a “co-learning” environment in which domestic and international students study together in the same classroom. This setting enables Japanese students to gain a “pseudo-study abroad” experience while allowing international students to deepen their understanding of Japanese society and culture through English. In addition, CGE serves as the home department for international exchange students who wish to concentrate on these English-taught subjects, thereby distinguishing them from exchange students enrolled mainly for Japanese language training at the Center for Japanese Language and Culture (CJLC).¹

¹ International exchange students in the CJLC are also allowed to take CGE courses.

Note that the two organizations, CGE and CJLC, merged in spring 2024 to establish the Center for Global Education and Japanese Studies (CGJ). However, the educational programs of both organizations were retained within the new structure and the program previously offered by CGE continued in essentially the same format under the name Global Education Module (GEM).

Regarding its faculty structure, CGE was launched with three full-time faculty members, fewer than the seven originally planned, due to the lack of external government funding. These faculty members were appointed in the fields of the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences, in order to support a broad range of liberal arts subjects within the program. In 2025, these three full-time faculty members, together with 13 adjunct faculty members, offered 37 subjects across 71 classes.²

Course Offerings

The courses offered by the CGE were designed around a class structure and

language framework intended to make “co-learning” between Doshisha’s full-time students and the international exchange students effective. Class sizes are generally kept small, typically with a maximum of 20 students³ (15 full-time students and 5 international exchange students), to encourage close interaction.⁴

To accommodate differences in English proficiency and participation styles, the curriculum was initially organized into two instructional levels, L1 and L2. L1 courses were primarily lecture-based and emphasized listening and comprehension, making them suitable for students with limited English-language abilities. L2 courses, by contrast, placed greater emphasis on discussion, presentations, and debate, and were intended for students with a higher level of English proficiency. In general, classes were taught at a level roughly equivalent to a TOEFL ITP score of 500. However, students were not required to submit test scores at registration; instead, the expected proficiency level was indicated in the syllabus. Students below this benchmark were encouraged to begin with L1, while those above it were free to choose either level.

² List of courses is provided in Appendix 1.

³ Doshisha’s full-time students taking CGE classes are mostly Japanese students, although some may be international students. Additionally, it should be noted that some international exchange students hold Japanese nationality.

⁴ To support meaningful interaction even in classes with few or no international students enrolled, the program employed International Student Assistants (SAs), many of whom were recruited from exchange programs at Doshisha. These assistants helped facilitate discussions and served as conversation partners, ensuring that Japanese students were consistently exposed to international perspectives and had regular opportunities to practice speaking English.

However, the distinction between L1 and L2 did not fully reflect actual student needs and proficiency levels, and therefore the language level was revised in later years. By 2025, the course categories had been reorganized into four levels: L0, L1, L2, and L3. These corresponded respectively to introductory, beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels (Appendix 1). Additionally, in response to growing enrollment, the maximum class size for L0 courses was increased to 57 students, while that for L1 through L3 courses was raised to 27 students. In L0 courses, the standard composition is 45 Japanese students and 12 international exchange students. In L1 through L3 courses, the standard composition is 15 Japanese students and 12 international exchange students.⁵

Enrollment of International Exchange Students

Because the CGE program is founded on the principle of “co-learning” between full-time and international exchange students, the admission of international exchange students is central to the program. CGE receives new exchange students every six months, although some remain for a full year, most study at the Center for one semester. Figure 1 shows changes in the number of international exchange students from 2016 to 2026, with separate data for the spring and fall semesters. The first cohort was admitted in Fall 2016, and student numbers increased steadily until peaking

around 2019. Enrollment then dropped sharply during the COVID-19 pandemic, remaining at very low levels in both semesters from 2020 to 2022, a period during which the program’s intended “co-learning” environment could not be fully realized. From 2023 onward, however, the number of exchange students rebounded quickly and reached its highest point by 2026.

Before its merger with CJLC in April 2024, the CGE program admitted a total of 336 international exchange students from a wide range of countries. Figure 2 illustrates their countries of origin on a world map, where darker shades represent higher numbers of students from each country. The United States is the largest sending country, with comparatively large numbers of students also coming from parts of Europe, East Asia, and Australia.

Analysis of Program Offerings for the Academic Year 2025

This section examines course offerings in the most recent academic year, 2025. Following the program’s renaming in April 2024, the former CGE program is referred to here as the GEM program. In 2025, the GEM program offered 37 subjects across 71 classes, with a cumulative total of 1,236 course enrollments. Of these, 672 were recorded in the spring semester, including 327 full-time students and 345 international students, while 564 were recorded in the fall semester, including 275 full-time students and 289 international students. Appendix 3 provides

⁵ This change was made in 2018, two years after the establishment of CGE.

a further breakdown of full-time students by faculty and year level.

Figure 3 shows the distribution of class sizes in the GEM program in 2025 by course category: regular courses (L1 and L2), introductory courses (L0), and seminar courses (L3). Regular courses, which have a maximum enrollment capacity of 27 students, accounted for the majority of offerings and most of these classes fell within the 11–20 and 21–30 student ranges. Seminar courses tended to have the smallest enrollments, while the largest classes were limited to introductory courses, which have a maximum capacity of 57 students.⁶ These figures suggest that the program was structured mainly around small to medium-sized classes, while retaining a limited number of larger introductory offerings.

Figures 4a and 4b illustrate the distribution of class sizes by academic field in the GEM program. Figure 4a shows the number of courses in each class-size category for the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences, whereas Figure 4b presents the proportion of courses in each category within each field. The figures show clear differences in class-size composition across the three academic fields. Humanities courses tend to have relatively larger enrollments, with the largest share concentrated in the 21–30 student range, representing 50% of all humanities courses. In contrast, natural science courses tend to be smaller, with 77% enrolling fewer than 20

students. The figures suggest that class-size patterns in the GEM program differ systematically by academic field.

The relatively high demand for humanities courses is also evident in the number of classes in which applications exceeded capacity (Table 1). Because GEM courses have fixed enrollment limits, students are selected by lottery when applications surpass the number of available places. As shown in Table 1, this occurred particularly often in humanities courses. In 2025, lottery-based selection was required in 12 of the 26 humanities courses (46%) for full-time students and in 14 courses (54%) for international exchange students. In contrast, in the natural sciences, the same procedure was required in only 1 of the 13 courses (8%) for full-time students and in 4 courses (31%) for international exchange students.

Percentage of International Students in GEM Classes

Because one of the central goals of the GEM program was to create a shared learning environment for regular and international students, this section examines the proportion of international students in each class. Figures 5a and 5b show the distribution of the proportion of international exchange students in GEM classes. Figure 5a presents the overall distribution and indicates a clear concentration in the 41–60% range; notably,

⁶ Appendix 4 shows the distribution of class sizes across 62 classes by campus, Kyotanabe and Imadegawa campuses.

47 of the 66 courses had an international student proportion above 40%. This suggests that a co-learning environment was achieved in most classes and that full-time students were frequently able to experience the intended “pseudo-study abroad” learning setting. Figure 5b breaks the same distribution down by course category (introductory, seminar, Regular L1, and Regular L2). The figure shows that as language expectations increase from L0 to L3, the proportion of international exchange students also tends to increase, indicating that higher-level courses are more internationalized in their class composition.

Course Withdrawal in GEM Classes

Although a collaborative learning environment can offer significant educational benefits, it may also pose challenges for students who are not accustomed to this style of learning. In some cases, such difficulties may lead to course withdrawal. Figure 6 shows that the largest concentration of withdrawal rates falls in the 21–30% range, suggesting that relatively high rates of withdrawal were not uncommon. In addition, although the number of such cases is relatively small, some courses recorded withdrawal rates of more than 30%. This pattern may indicate a gap between students’ expectations and the actual demands of collaborative, English-medium classes.

Figure 7a plots the percentage of international students in each course before and after the withdrawal period. Points on the 1:1 line indicate no change, whereas points above the line indicate that the

percentage of international students increased after the withdrawal period. Figure 7b presents the residual from the 1:1 line against the initial percentage of international students, thereby showing the extent of this change more directly. In most courses, the residual values are positive, suggesting that withdrawals were more common among full-time students than among international students.

One possible interpretation is that full-time students may have been more likely to withdraw from courses with a relatively high proportion of international students because they were less familiar with the co-learning environment. However, Figure 7b shows no clear relationship between the initial percentage of international students and the residual values, indicating that this interpretation is not supported by the data.

Table 2 shows the average residual by course level and academic field. Although the number of cases in some categories is limited and no formal statistical analysis was conducted, a consistent pattern can still be observed: across all three academic fields, L2 courses show the largest average residuals. This suggests that relatively more full-time students withdrew from L2 courses than from L0 or L1 courses, possibly reflecting the greater demands of higher-level collaborative, English-medium classes.

Discussion

There are many obstacles standing in the way of successful implementation of large-scale EMI programs in Japan’s higher

education sector. One important source of institutional resistance to EMI derives from the mission most Japanese universities take upon themselves to preserve and defend Japanese national identity. Bradford and Brown go on to point out that “[t]he deep and possibly identity-threatening changes to institutional culture, administrative structures and approaches to pedagogy necessary to make EMI a central part of the Japanese higher education sector are slow to be adopted” (Bradford and Brown 2018, 286–7). When Japanese students opt for programs to develop their skills as ‘global *jinzai*’ they are encouraged to be outward-looking, “but not *too* outward looking” (Bradford and Brown 2018, 286–7; emphasis in original). In his study of ‘monolingual Japan,’ linguist Patrick Heinrich argues that for the Japanese government “policies aimed at internationalization reproduce ideas of projecting diversity on the outside while assuming or inferring homogeneity within Japan” (Heinrich 2012, 177). In Heinrich’s words, “linguistic homogeneity is the objective of language ideology and not, as it is claimed, the basis from which it departs” (Heinrich 2012, 178).

Another problem is the lack of personnel qualified to teach EMI classes. Teachers need to be fluent in English and also experts in academic fields unrelated to language teaching. Many universities lack the funds to hire completely new staff and so try to

improvise by getting existing members of faculty to teach new courses with unsatisfactory results. Doshisha was able to avoid this problem by hiring new faculty who were recruited with the express purpose of starting a new EMI program.

Language

The most important obstacle to the successful implementation of internationalization programs is language. A major challenge facing policy-makers in charge of English language medium education is the difficulty of the language (from the point of view of Japanese learners). Post-war education reforms used the United States education system as a model. For school subjects like mathematics this was unproblematic, but in the case of foreign language education a serious problem occurred. In the 1940s the foreign languages most commonly taught in American schools were French and Spanish. According to the United States Foreign Service Institute these languages are classified as ‘category one’ for an English-speaking person to learn, which means that they require between 575 and 600 hours of class time to learn. It is possible to achieve this in the six years of secondary schooling. Japanese, however, is classified as ‘category four’—the most difficult category—which requires far more time: 2,200 class hours⁷ (Aspinall 2013, 6). The

⁷ Another way to do this calculation would be to look at the number of hours of study recommended for students taking the JLPT (Japanese Language Proficiency Test) Level 1, which is the level required for foreign students who wish to study at a Japanese university as an undergraduate (in the medium of Japanese). Estimates vary from 2,500 hours to 3,800 hours of study for students who are not already familiar with kanji.

same applies in reverse, i.e. to Japanese learners of English. Japanese students, however, receive only 180 hours of English class time in Junior High School (JHS), and between 470 and 650 hours in Senior High School. This is well short of the minimum number of hours required.

As a result of the above problems (and more), vanishingly few eighteen-year-old students in Japan have achieved mastery of all four skills of the English language at an advanced level. Any teacher who has taught an EMI course at a Japanese university is familiar with the sight of keen new students who come into the classroom on the first day only to find themselves completely out of their depth when the teacher and the better-prepared students begin a discussion at what is considered a normal level of discourse for a university course in an English-speaking university.

Sometimes the mismatch between the needs of a genuine EMI curriculum and the actual linguistic abilities of most Japanese students can have seriously harmful consequences. Glenn Toh (2016) describes the introduction of an EMI program that failed because the new university department accepted students whose level of English was well below the standard required to do an EMI course. A number of foreign professors were recruited from abroad to come and teach Japanese students in a new EMI liberal arts department at a private university in Tokyo. They were promised that the newly founded institution “would function like a typical American liberal arts college” (Toh 2016, 161). Unfortunately, only a handful of students (mostly returnees) had the

minimum level of English required for such courses. After a period of chaos and confusion the dean of the faculty was forced to quit. Many foreign professors also resigned. The ‘content’ courses reverted to using Japanese as the medium of instruction, and those foreign professors who stayed were gradually moved into teaching EFL courses.

In conclusion, it can be seen that the rapid spread of EMI programs in Japanese universities has had mixed results. Without far-reaching reforms to the secondary English language curriculum, the vast majority of university students will be poorly prepared for genuine EMI courses. GEM has attempted to work through these issues in numerous ways: course offerings at varying language abilities, with levels clearly indicated on the syllabus (see Appendix 1); short on-demand videos available before the registration period, allowing students to hear the instructor’s speech patterns; and information on language levels provided before registration. Nevertheless, withdrawal rates are high. Students (as well as instructors) often enter the classroom with wildly differing expectations, and even communicating those expectations can be difficult. Confusion is common. We would like to propose, however, that this confusion may be repositioned as a necessary and valuable element of intercultural pedagogy.

Teaching with Diversity

While the aforementioned challenges persist in the GEM program, our goal is to

transform them into a productive experiential pedagogy. Our classes welcome students from differing disciplines, nationalities, linguistic abilities, and academic years. They are, in a word, diverse. But that is no easy word to use, as it is hard to speak about classroom diversity without repeating dull clichés. Diversity makes room for innovation, cultivates constructive dialogue, expands our ability to understand different points of view, etc. These institutional talking points (however true) call to mind a certain kind of diversity: a diversity of background, in which students' varying identity-based experiences create a multiplicity of perspectives. They speak less to the diversity of language, expectation, and educational purpose that is often foregrounded in the GEM classroom.

GEM courses operate without a shared basis of knowledge, whereas education is typically based on assumptions of what is known. This is why students progress through years and programs, why universities have standardized entrance exams, why majors and departments exist. When linguistic comprehension cannot be taken for granted, nor indeed anything else about the students' social or educational lives apart from their enrollment at a university, many tools available to the educator prove useless. Even scholarship on intercultural pedagogy often refers to a majority or dominant culture, with the implicit assumption that many class members and the instructor will share immersion (if not belonging) in that culture; minorities are in many cases figured as those who need to be consciously included (Conti 2025; Elias and Mansouri 2023; Gay 2015;

Gorski 2008). When cultural diversity is incorporated in this way, it may conversely suggest a shared majority culture: "The appreciation and knowledge of *other* cultures, or the inclusion of cultural diversity in the curriculum is manifested as an absolute or relative difference against an invisible Eurocentric frame of reference" (Sharma 2006, 204; emphasis in original).

Such figurations of inclusion seem almost nonsensical in classrooms where many students have arrived only weeks ago from an array of locales, where the instructor may be an immigrant, where students who have lived in Japan their whole lives enter the classroom in hopes of a "foreign" experience. Who is being included and who is able to include? Generally, the answers to those questions shift depending on the course, the day, and the dynamics of each small discussion group. Students use online platforms their classmates do not know; labels like "conservative" or "progressive" mean very different things to each student; students' internal catalog of currently popular celebrities, films and music are drastically divergent. In the diversity of GEM classrooms, no assumptions about culture or society can be made.

While this is undeniably an excellent springboard for dialogue, it also poses challenges beyond the usual concerns of intercultural education. Critiques of intercultural education have noted that "othered" students may be approached with a deficit model in mind (Holliday and MacDonald 2020; Ippolito 2007; Trahar and Hyland 2011). In the GEM classroom, the cultural positionality of students changes

regularly, and thus so too must everyone's negotiations with the environment. As any discussion proceeds, students understandably center those closest to it. Critical distinctions between statements grow muddled in differing English levels—half the class may understand the conversation to be about what *x* is while the other half understands it to be about what *x* is *not*, with the gap causing mutual incomprehension. Deeply controversial remarks are sometimes made apparently without awareness of their controversy. (This is far removed from a student making a controversial statement to share their beliefs and/or to shock their classmates, because these are entrances into a shared societal discussion. When such remarks are made as if stating a banal fact, it is rather a matter of being immersed in different societal discussions.) It means too that there are no unspoken expectations regarding classroom behavior. How to speak with the teacher, how proactive to be regarding the coursework, or even whether it is appropriate to use the classroom adapter plugs to charge laptops are all matters approached in differing ways.

Dialogue Beyond the Promotional

The linguistic and behavioral divergence of these culturally diverse classrooms comes attendant with a surprising convergence—albeit one that may limit cross-cultural interactions in the long run. This is the issue of purpose, namely the belief that such classrooms exist to cultivate cultural ambassadors. Students repeatedly speak to their classmates as national representatives,

frequently in homogenizing or essentialist terms. When speaking about Japan, this often replicates *nihonjinron* discourses, positioning international education as a method of reinforcing a stringent national identity (Hashimoto 2000; Kubota 2004). While students are consciously aware that people in their country do in fact differ widely, and even when that difference is the main theme of the course, students regularly describe how things are done in “*my*” country. Time and time again, students ask each other the gently curious but invariably Othering question: “How is it in *your* country?”

Many students embrace the opportunity to act as cultural ambassador. Some even directly claim this to be their reason for taking the course. Students nod along when reminded of the differences within cultures, but rarely does that awareness have the emotional pull of being able to ask the person sitting next to you to explain how it “really” is in another country. In a world packed with essentialist discourses from longstanding scholarly traditions and catchy social media explainers alike, those discourses often form our sense of what intercultural interaction means—and at the very least, they are the easiest to articulate in 20-minute discussions in a language one is not fully comfortable speaking. Directly countering these views casts a cloud over the classroom environment, for it contradicts powerful beliefs and also a basic sense of why the course exists. This calls to a fundamental issue in teaching against ideas critical to our personal ordering of the world, as “critique of mainstream taken-for-granted notions of culture and identity

might appear not only as difficult to grasp but also as normative, patronizing and dismissive of students' previous knowledge and language available to them to explain the world" (Sommier, Lahti, and Roiha 2021, 3). The attempt to foster inclusivity can backfire, coming across instead as antagonistic.

While perhaps it is necessary to make do with culture's accessible articulation in essentialism, further issues arise with its accessible presentation in commercialism. In projects, presentations and discussions, students introduce cultural artefacts in the praising style of advertisers. These promotions recall Melissa Aronczyk's discussion of nation branding's communicative ask to citizens: "Nation branding is, at its core, a concerted and comprehensive strategy by national citizens of all strata of society to assimilate and communicate this new national identity on an ongoing basis" (Aronczyk 2008, 54). Students may resist or subvert the call to communicate the nation brand, but they may also take part in that communication.

As with the essentialist impulse, the promotional impulse is challenging to refute without seeming negative. This grows particularly thorny when there are ethical considerations at play, such as when praise is centered on a particular company, shop or product. A student may seek to explain "Japanese culture" through glowing recommendations of a particular tea or clothing brand. While the teacher and/or some students may understand intercultural classrooms as spaces to cultivate awareness without promoting

products, these distinctions grow blurry in an age of brand ambassadors. In this sense, even if everyone present in the classroom expects an intercultural experience, the expected purpose and shape of that experience may differ sharply.

Making Unfamiliarity Meaningful

The goal of the GEM classroom might therefore be seen as twofold: to promote dialogue in diverse settings, and to push that dialogue into something more than the promotional. This is not an easy task, for the reasons described above. But it is a task deeply relevant not only to a productive classroom. Even in less obviously "diverse" settings, the most critical issues that face us are those that involve working through unfamiliarity, in the spaces that are as yet unfilled with satisfactory answers. These are spaces of disorientation, constructed ultimately by our latent impulses because no codes of conduct can keep up.

AI is the most obvious example here. If any of us manage to navigate the emerging AI world well, it will be those who can imagine through the unfamiliar. The same can be said of the designs we must make for a sustainable and inclusive future, or the ever-increasing numbers and functions of social media platforms, or our rapidly changing global political realities. As teachers from an earlier generation, we are woefully unprepared to usher students into such a dynamic world, but we can promote the constructive use of unfamiliarity. In that sense, we might think of the unfamiliar classroom environment as its own

pedagogy. It develops the possibility for encounters “premised on the absence of a knowledge that would allow one to control the encounter, or to predict its outcome” (Ahmed 2000, 8). Without the comfort of a shared foundation of common knowledge, we may also find the tools for navigating tomorrow.

This is not to romanticize the process of teaching in such a diverse environment. Less inspiring terms could be aptly applied: incoherent, talking at cross-purposes, going nowhere. Sheer frustration is an emotion no doubt shared by students and instructors. But for a diverse classroom to not result in sheer frustration would perhaps be a cheapening of the experience. It would require the totality of one view that allows its others to fade away, or the simplifying of all points to a level that avoids challenge. Meaningful dialogue must, if sustained, at times devolve into the sheer frustration of its participants.

To conclude, we would like to introduce two practices that have in some cases proved helpful in the project of working through unfamiliarity. They are not always successful. Importantly, they are always introduced with language that purposefully avoids mention of nationality or cultural perspective. These practices would be inconsistent with requests for students to talk about their experiences “as an” anything, while recognizing that some students offer such perspectives voluntarily. In some cases, instructors may explicitly forefront their own lack of knowledge, for example in some variation of the phrasing, “I don’t know what country or countries

you’re from, unless you’ve told me previously; we’re not given that information about our students, and I don’t presume to know. You are welcome to use whatever knowledge and experiences you have to answer these questions, whether that’s from here or another place you’re familiar with, or just something you saw on the news.” This is to head off the impulse to see speaking as a national representative as the assignment at hand (and to remind everyone, the instructor included, that any given student’s national identity should not be assumed).

1) Speaking in abstractions

Teaching works best, we are often told, by moving from the familiar to the unfamiliar. This advice assumes a classroom homogeneous enough that the teacher can make a reasonable guess as to what students find familiar. In a deeply diverse classroom, examples that are familiar to some are invariably unfamiliar to others, and any attempt to select for familiarity necessarily biases the environment. It positions those who are familiar with the example as those the instructor is speaking “with,” or even as more welcomed to take part in the discussion.

Concrete examples are productive when they have a roughly equal level of familiarity to everyone. They are excellent when used for history lessons, in which all students may meet them unknown or barely remembered from a textbook. They are better still when you have the shared cultural basis and/or linguistic capability necessary to discuss a single example at

length, as when studying a novel or film. If an example is familiar—or at least comprehensible—to some but alien to others, it is unproductive.

Abstractions open up the limits of the instructor's knowledge basis. When lecturing, the instructor might present only a theoretical overview of an issue, or illustrate a theory through a single, briefly explained image. Small-group discussions then expand the theory, as students are asked to come up with their own examples that they think might apply to the topic at hand. Often students describe things they recall from their home countries, sometimes they describe things they have experienced in other countries, and occasionally they will bring up things they learned in other contexts. Reporting back from the small groups then brings a well of usable answers into the classroom, described either first- or second-hand from those who know and care about them. A question about media censorship can bring into the same space—and in direct sequence—contemporary Chinese regulations on video games, nudity policies on major social media platforms, the Allied Occupation of Japan, the Hays Code in the USA, and an individual student's experience at a strict private school. This is disorienting, certainly, and there is potential for misrepresentation (students' statements cannot be factchecked without disrupting the dialogue). Nevertheless, it elicits connections that otherwise might not be made, which can be explored through everyone's experiences. It allows students to approach the material at whatever level they are able and willing. It is a productive disorientation.

2) Filming through unfamiliarity

Project-based learning models are particularly critical methods of teaching through unfamiliarity. If students must work across cultural and linguistic boundaries to plan, manage and realize a project, they know unfamiliarity. (They likely know sheer frustration, too.)

In one course, students work in teams to create a video showing something of Japanese culture or society not discussed during the course. It is a project designed to expand their thinking, and to indicate that the point of the course was not simply to learn things about Japan but to learn that there is always more to Japan than what the teacher was able to teach. Students are asked to film the world around them, the things they have noticed but not studied. They are to use their own insights instead of expert opinions. Many students think little of assignments that do not use expert opinions, and some reject the premise or try to find workarounds. The created works, however, often convey beauty and hilarity: recorded group fieldtrips, acted scenes from daily life, ad-hoc cooking courses, narrated reflections on past and present experiences, and dissections of any number of contemporary trends.

There are two recurring issues with this assignment. One is that its structure, in refusing expert opinion and encouraging the use of personal experience, may seem more dubious to students familiar only with the Japanese educational system than to students with international backgrounds.

This assignment may betray the instructor's cultural bias, but learning to work with disorienting expectations is also part of a highly diverse classroom. The assignment itself becomes an artefact to be discussed amongst the students, tossed around and compared to past projects in the students' varying home universities. It is not only a student-led project but a deadline-enforced test of producing in unfamiliarity.

The second issue is, again, the promotional impulse. If asked to portray something of Japan, there is a tendency to proffer heavy-handed praise to the majority culture. This praise may appear in essentialist terms reminiscent of a nationalist politician or tourism influencer. It can be hard to balance respect for the students' perspectives with respect for the minority and/or foreign cultures that may be portrayed as lesser-than in the created work. To attempt that balance, students are required to show an alternative or counterexample to their main point. The assignment thus illustrates, even if only by a single shot, the multiplicity of cultural realities.

The above practices are not introduced here to encourage any of these haphazard methods. They instead are used to suggest that disorientation can be the foundation of a classroom environment, and it can be instructive in and of itself. "Instructive" in this context implies a mentality: it can make us aware of the assumptions in which we are far too secure and provide us with the tools needed to productively engage with incomprehensible situations. The world we take for granted now may not exist tomorrow, and there is no classroom that

can prepare us for this possibility. But classrooms can prepare us at least to recognize the smallness and specificity of all we take for granted.

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Tables and figures

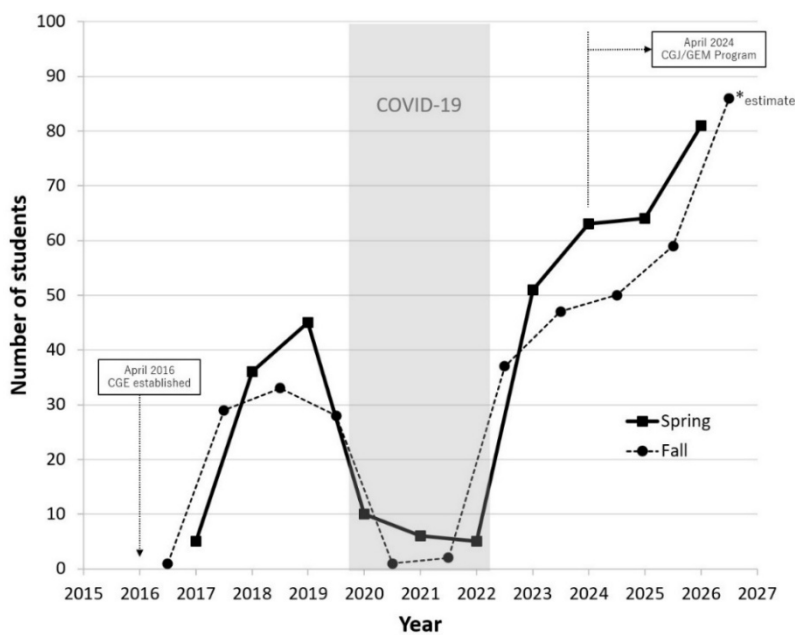
Table 1. Number of classes that required lottery-based selection. Lottery-based selection is conducted separately for full-time students and international exchange students.

	Total (n = 62)	Humanities (n = 26)	Social sciences (n = 23)	Natural sciences (n = 13)
Full-time students	20	12	7	1
International exchange students*	27 (12)	14 (4)	9 (7)	4 (1)

* In the case of international exchange students, course registration takes place in two stages. The first is the regular application period. When the number of applicants exceeds course capacity, a lottery is conducted. Students who are unsuccessful in this first round may then apply for courses that still have available places. If applications for those remaining places again exceed capacity, a second lottery is held. The numbers in parentheses in the row for international exchange students indicate the number of classes that went through this second round of lottery-based selection.

Table 2. Average residual (=change in the percentage of international students after the withdrawal period) by course level and academic field. (*Of the 71 classes offered, four cancelled classes, one field course, and four seminar courses were excluded (no seminar classes at Kyotanabe campus). Additional four courses that had no international exchange students were also omitted, leaving 58 classes for the table.)

Average residual	L0	L1	L2	Total
Humanities	-0.18 (n = 3)	0.22 (n = 12)	7.44 (n = 9)	2.88 (n = 24)
Social sciences	-0.24 (n = 3)	4.61 (n = 2)	4.70 (n = 17)	4.02 (n = 22)
Natural sciences	2.24 (n = 4)	2.34 (n = 2)	5.24 (n = 6)	3.75 (n = 12)
Total	0.77 (n = 10)	1.04 (n = 16)	5.57 (n = 32)	3.49 (n = 58)



The 2026 figures are estimates as of March 1, 2026.

Figure 1. Changes in the number of international exchange students, 2016–2026. There is no value for spring 2016 because the first cohort of exchange students entered the program in Fall 2016. In April 2024, CGE merged with the Center for Japanese Language and Culture (CJLC) to form the Center for Global Education and Japanese Studies (CGJ), and the program was subsequently renamed the Global Education Module (GEM).

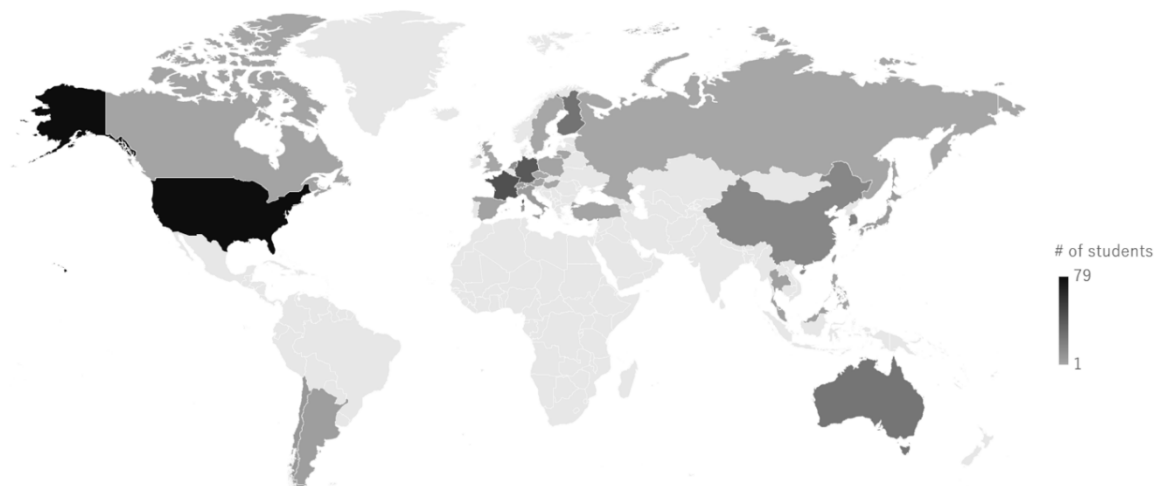


Figure 2. Countries of origin of international exchange students admitted to CGE (2016–2023). Detailed figures by country are provided in Appendix 2. (Note: the numbers are based on data prior to its merger with CJLC in April 2024.)

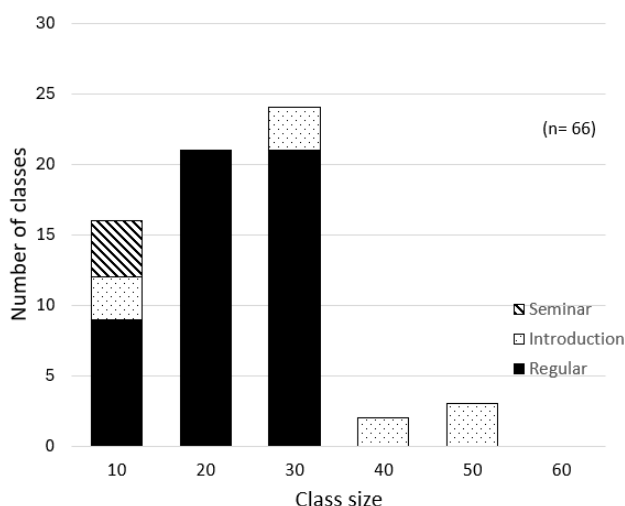


Figure 3. Distribution of class sizes by course category. (*Of the 71 classes offered, four had no student enrollment. These four classes, and one fieldwork course, were excluded from the figure.)

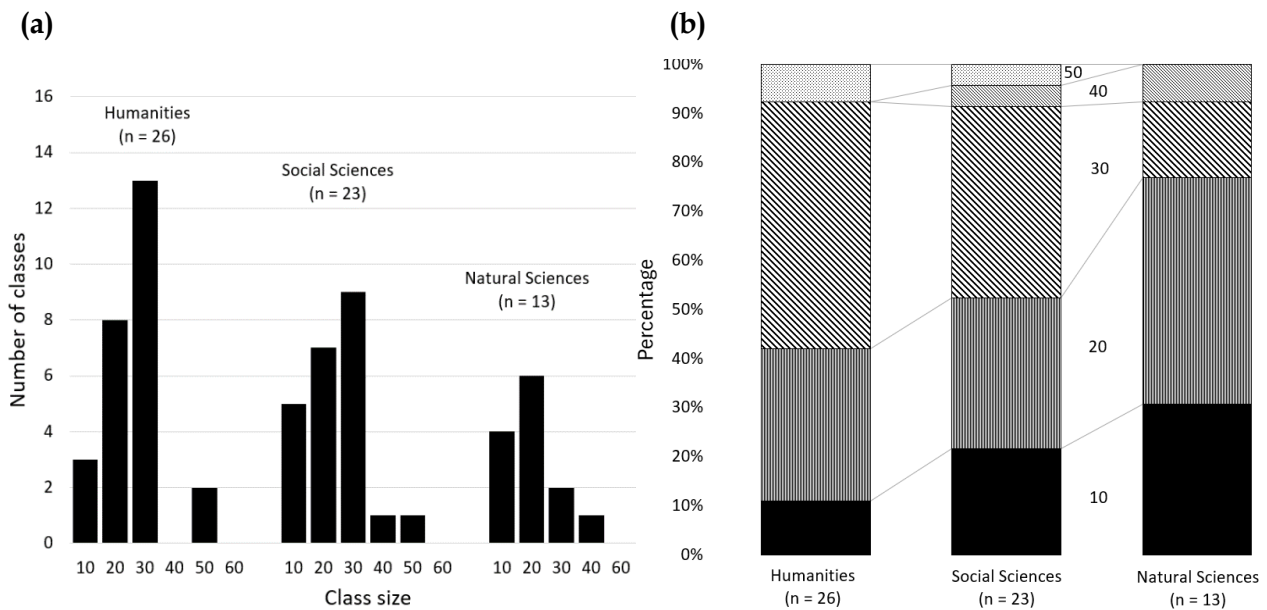


Figure 4. (a) Distribution of class sizes across academic fields in the GEM program. **(b)** Proportional distribution of class sizes across academic fields in the GEM program. (*Of the 71 classes offered, four cancelled classes, one field course, and four seminar courses were excluded (no seminar classes at Kyotanabe campus), leaving 62 classes for analysis.)

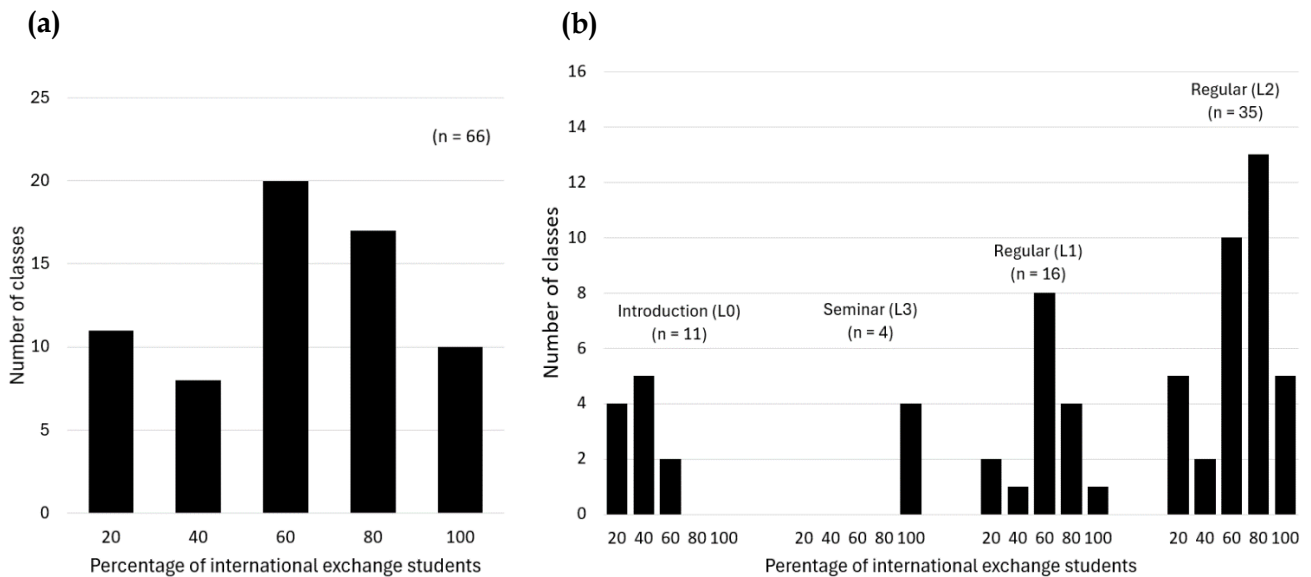


Figure 5. (a) Distribution of the percentage of international students in GEM classes. **(b)** Distribution of the percentage of international students by course category. (*Of the 71 classes offered, four had no student enrollment. These four classes, along with one field course, were excluded from the figure, leaving 66 classes for analysis.)

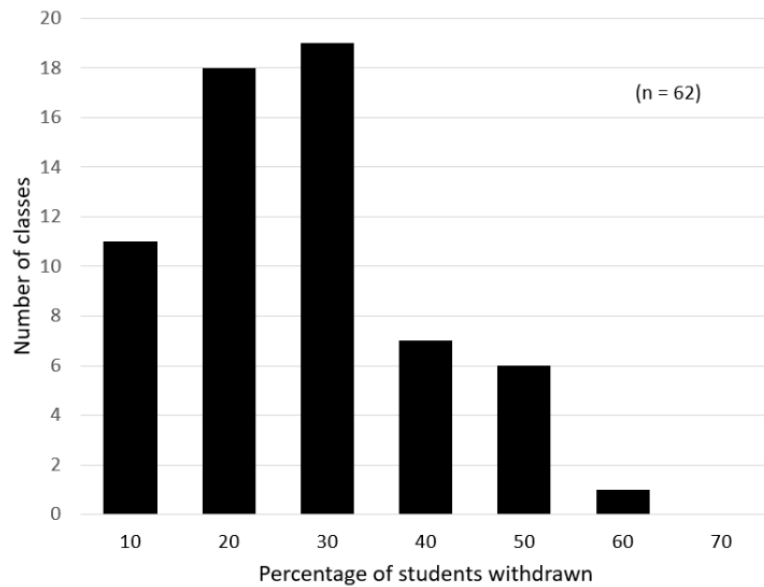


Figure 6. Distribution of the percentage of students withdrawing from a course. (*Of the 71 classes offered, four cancelled classes, one field course, and four seminar courses were excluded (no seminar classes at Kyotanabe campus), leaving 62 classes for the figure.)

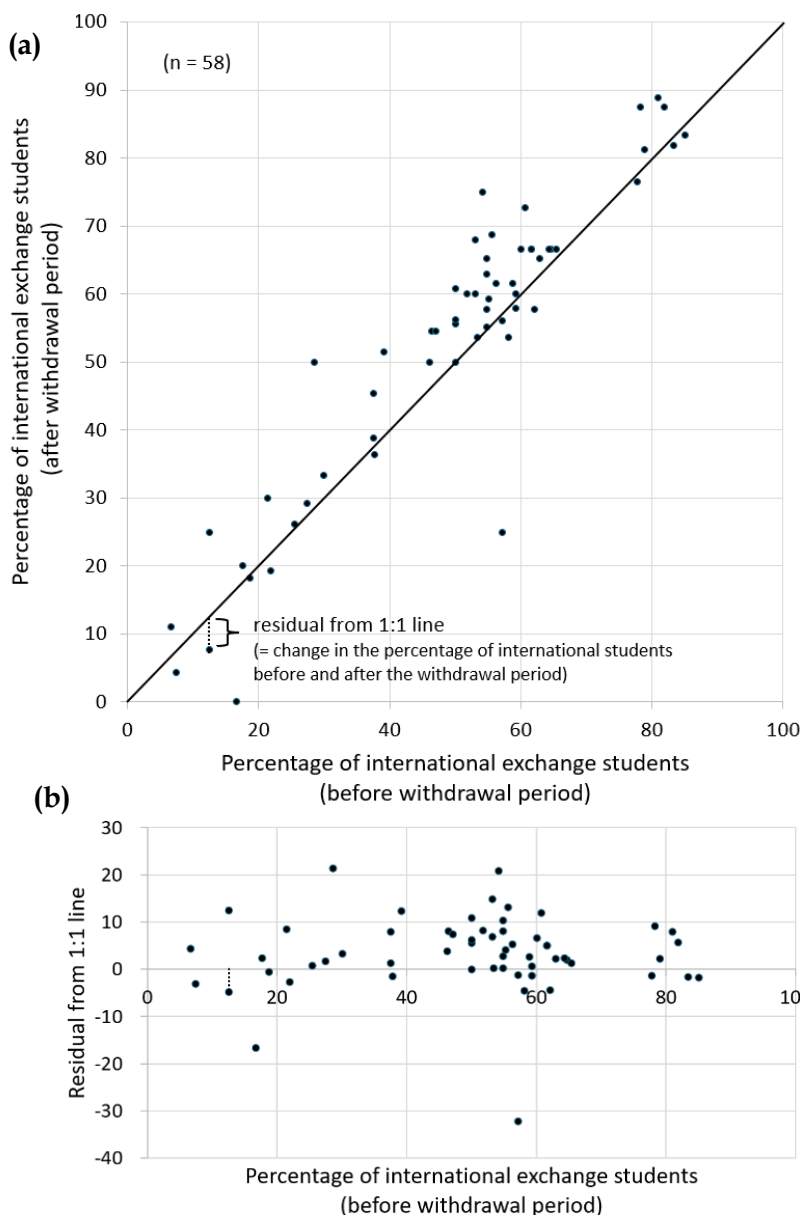


Figure 7 (a) Scatter plot of the percentage of international students in each course before and after the withdrawal period. **(b)** Residual from the 1:1 line (= change in the percentage of international students before and after the withdrawal period) plotted against the initial percentage of international students. (*Of the 71 classes offered, four cancelled classes, one field course, and four seminar courses were excluded (no seminar classes at Kyotanabe campus). Additional four courses that had no international exchange students were also omitted, leaving 58 classes for analysis.)

Appendix 1. Courses offered by CGE (CGJ/GEM) program, by academic field and language level.

Course Title	Field	Language level		
		2016	2025	
Introduction to Japanese Culture in the Global Context	H	N.D.	L0	
Japanese Thought and Religion 1	H	L1	L1	
Japanese Thought and Religion 2	H	L1	L1	
Tradition and Art in Japan 1	H	L1	L1	
Tradition and Art in Japan 2	H	L1	L1	
Japan Today 1	H	L1	L1	
Japan Today 2	H	L1	L1	
Humanities and Global Issues	H	L2	L2	
Japan in Modern World History	H	L2	L2	
International Relations in the Postwar Era	H	L2	L2	
Issues in Japanese Culture	H	L2	L2	
Introduction to Japanese Society in the Global Context	SS	N.D.	L0	
Issues in Intercultural Communication	SS	L1	L1	
Critical Social Issues in Contemporary Japan 1	SS	L1	L2	
Critical Social Issues in Contemporary Japan 2	SS	L1	L2	
Social Sciences and Global Issues	SS	L2	L2	
Democracy and Politics : A Comparative Perspective	SS	L2	L2	
Education in the Age of Globalization	SS	L2	L2	
Economy and Business in the Global Context 1	SS	L2	L2	
Economy and Business in the Global Context 2	SS	L2	L2	
What Makes Humans Human?	SS	L2	N/A	Taken off the program in 2016
The Divisions of Identity in Society	SS	L2	L2	
Principles of Economics	SS	N/A	L2	Added to the program in April 2018
Environmental Economics and Sustainability	SS	N/A	L2	Added to the program in April 2018
Introduction to the Nature of Japan and Asia in the Global Context	NS	N.D.	L0	
Introduction to Computer Science and Information Technology	NS	L1	L1	
Mathematics and its History	NS	L1	L1	
Science of Natural Disasters	NS	L1	L2	
Natural Sciences and Global Issues	NS	L2	L2	
Statistics for the Social Sciences and Humanities	NS	L2	L2	
Human Science in the Global Age	NS	L2	L2	
Introduction to Quantitative Data Analysis	NS	L2	L2	
Conservation of Japanese Nature and Environment	NS	L2	L2	
Advanced Seminar 1	Seminar	N/A	L3	Added to the program in April 2018
Advanced Seminar 2	Seminar	N/A	L3	Added to the program in April 2018
Advanced Seminar 3	Seminar	N/A	L3	Added to the program in April 2018
Mid-college "Be Strong" Program	Fieldwork	N.D.	N.D.	
Freshman "Go Global" Program	Fieldwork	N.D.	N.D.	

N.D. (Not determined) - Recommended language levels not assigned

N/A (Not available) - Courses not offered

Academic field - H: Humanities, SS: Social Sciences, NS: Natural Sciences.

Language levels (for 2016)

Classes taught at a level roughly equivalent to a TOEFL ITP score of 500.

L1 courses: primarily lecture-based and emphasized listening and comprehension

L2 courses: greater emphasis on discussion, presentations, and debate, and were intended for students with a higher level of English proficiency.

Language levels (for 2025)

L0 (Introductory) Class size: 60 Recommended: TOEFL ITP score of 500 or equivalent

Description in syllabus

This course is conducted entirely in English and is offered to students who have a minimum English language proficiency. Language requirements are indicated below, however, submission of proof of your score is not required at the time of registration. This course requires active participation by students in English discussions. If you have never taken an advanced English conversation class, we strongly recommend you to do so before selecting this course. Recommended English language requirement: CEFR B1 or equivalent (TOEFL ITP 500, TOEFL iBT 61, TOEIC 630, IELTS 5, or CASEC 660). Note: This is an introductory course. Students who do not meet the standards above, but still have the enthusiasm and the willingness to make an effort, are encouraged to register for this course.

L1 (Beginner) Class size: 30 Recommended: TOEFL ITP score of 500 or equivalent

Description in syllabus

This course is conducted entirely in English and is offered to students who have a minimum English language proficiency. Language requirements are indicated below, however, submission of proof of your score is not required at the time of registration. This course will be conducted in a small class size and require active participation by students in English discussions. If you have never taken an advanced English conversation or discussion class, we urge you to do so before selecting this course. Recommended English language requirement: CEFR B1–B2 or equivalent (TOEFL ITP 500, TOEFL iBT 61, TOEIC 630, IELTS 5, or CASEC 660).

L2 (Intermediate) Class size: 30 Minimum: TOEFL ITP score of 500 or equivalent

Description in syllabus

This course is conducted entirely in English and is offered to students who have a minimum English language proficiency. Language requirements are indicated below, however, submission of proof of your score is not required at the time of registration. This course will be conducted in a small class size and require active participation by students in English discussions. If you have never taken an advanced English conversation or discussion class, we strongly urge you to do so before selecting this course. Minimum English language requirement: CEFR B2 or equivalent (TOEFL ITP 500, TOEFL iBT 61, TOEIC 630, IELTS 5, or CASEC 660).

L3 (Advanced) Class size: 30 Recommended: TOEFL ITP score of 550 or equivalent

No description in the syllabus

Appendix 2. Countries of origin of international exchange students admitted to CGE (2016–2023)

Country	Cumulative number of students (2016–2023)
United States	79
France	45
Germany	40
Finland	27
Australia	26
South Korea	20
China	17
Netherlands	13
Chile	8
Taiwan	7
Switzerland	7
Italy	7
Japan	6
Argentina	5
Thailand	4
Malaysia	4
Spain	3
Austria	3
Turkey	2
Poland	2
Philippines	2
Lithuania	2
Canada	2
United Kingdom	1
Sweden	1
Russia	1
Hungary	1
Czech Republic	1

Appendix 3. Total number of full-time students enrolled in the GEM courses in academic year 2025, by faculty and by academic year.

Faculty	Spring	Fall	Total	Total (percentage)
School of Theology	1	5	6	1
Faculty of Letters	24	45	69	11
Faculty of Social Studies	9	22	31	5
Faculty of Law	22	23	45	7
Faculty of Economics	52	51	103	17
Faculty of Commerce	26	14	4	7
Faculty of Policy Studies	24	13	37	6
Faculty of Culture and Information Science	26	13	39	6
Faculty of Science and Engineering	11	4	15	2
Faculty of Life and Medical Sciences	5	1	6	1
Faculty of Health and Sports Science	4	4	8	1
Faculty of Psychology	16	5	21	3
Faculty of Global Communications	37	34	71	12
Faculty of Global and Regional Studies	69	41	110	18
Total	326	275	601	

Year	Spring	Fall	Total	Total (percentage)
First year	78	70	148	25
Second year	89	63	152	25
Third year	62	65	127	21
Fourth year	59	46	105	17
Fifth year and above	38	31	69	11
Total	326	275	601	

Appendix 4. Distribution of class sizes by campus. (*Of the 71 classes offered, four cancelled classes, one field course, and four seminar courses were excluded (no seminar classes at Kyotanabe campus), leaving 62 classes for the figure).

