Research Report

From Real to Virtual:

International Student Adaptation to Japanese Online Classes During Covid-19

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Certification Page

I, <u>FERAY BEAUMONT, Philippe Manuel</u> (Student ID 51120601) hereby declare that the contents of this Research Report are original and true and have not been submitted at any other university or educational institution for the award of degree or diploma.

All the information derived from other published or unpublished sources has been cited and acknowledged appropriately.

FERAY BEAUMONT, Philippe Manuel

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I began this adventure two years and a half ago, coming to a foreign country for a lengthy period of time for my first experience of a life abroad. This journey turned out to be the best moments of my life, but not without the support of many along the way.

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Abstract

The number of students worldwide traveling to receive higher education overseas was steadily rising pre-Covid 19. The pandemic halted this growth, but international students and universities adapted to a lockdown world by transitioning their academic classes from face-to-face to an online setting.

International students who were either freshman or long-term exchange students enrolled in the Japanese university Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (Ritsumeikan APU) in this context. These students studied for one semester (six months) in Fall 2020 and Fall 2021 in a fully online Japanese academic environment. The aim of this research is to discover and understand international students' psychological and sociocultural experiences during their acculturative and transitioning process in their academic and daily life during their semester online.

This study uses the affective, behavioral, and cognitive (ABC) framework created by Ward, Bochner & Furnham to analyze the experiences felt by the students during their adaptation process. In-depth qualitative research methods were used to look into the students' affective feelings of adaptation to their new environment through the semester, their behavioral experiences of creating new friendships and social interactions, and cognitive thoughts about their capacity to adapt and prosper in a new academic setting.

Analytical results from qualitative semi-structured interviews determined that international students had difficulties adapting to their new Japanese academic environment. A lack of social interactions, a feeling of disconnection with the host culture, and a significant timezone difference between their home countries and Japan impacted their well-being during their online experiences.

1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic brought unprecedented changes to the entirety of higher education around the world (Teräs et al., 2020). Universities had to switch their traditional, face-to-face teaching methods to online teaching made with a sense of urgency (Marinoni et al., 2020). Faculty and staff members had to quickly comply with online teaching-style classes via platforms such as Zoom to ensure the continuity of higher education. As a result, this new, quickly implemented system heavily burdened the students and teachers, leading to difficulties in adaptation to online forms of teaching (Koris et al., 2021).

As Covid-19 continued spreading, the Japanese government took action resulting in the closure of its borders. This decision directly impacted the lives of international students registered in Japanese universities, whether living on Japanese soil or overseas. The university campuses closed, leading the students to pursue their education at home due to lockdowns, and needed the support of their universities, friends, teachers, and new acquaintances to endure this difficult situation (Koris et al., 2021).

In this unexpected situation, international students starting their courses or exchange program in a Japanese university were in a peculiar situation. They had to decide between two possibilities: postponing their studies or deciding to adapt and follow online classes (Koris et al., 2021). The adaptation process of international students who choose to follow online classes gave them numerous challenges, as they had to adjust to a new, unfamiliar Japanese environment through a fully virtual experience.

1.1 Research Objectives

This study is aiming to examine, understand and interpret the psychological and sociocultural adaptation process felt by international university students during their transition from a real to a virtual education experience in a Japanese setting. The research question and methodology follow the model studies of Burn (2017) on the acculturation process of Chinese students in an Italian university and Koris et al. (2021) on Erasmus students' transition from face-to-face to online classes during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Therefore the international students' experiences realized during the lockdown as well as the students' adaptative responses to their new study environment and learning processes during the pandemic will be deeply studied. The acculturation process of international students pre-pandemic is a subject well-studied (Zhou et al., 2008; Hernandez-Nanclares, 2016; Leask & Carroll, 2011), but little literature has been written on international students' adaptation to a new environment through a fully-online setting (Koris et al., 2021). Studying how international students overcome the Japanese cultural difference gap in a period of virtual classes can facilitate the comprehension of similar situations in the future and assist reforms focused on the adaptation of international students to new environments worldwide.

1.2 Research Question

This study aims to address the ensuing question conforming to the ABC framework over the course of the international students' six-month transition process from face-to-face to online classes in a Japanese environment:

What were the affective, behavioral, and cognitive changes experienced by international students during their academic transition from real to online classes in a Japanese environment?

1.3 Research methodology

The theory used to frame this study is the affective, behavioral, and cognitive (ABC) model of acculturation created by Ward, Bochner, and Furnham (2001). The ABC model is used to describe how sojourners experience psychological and sociocultural adjustment periods of stress and coping mechanisms, cultural learning, and sociocultural identification during their adaptative process (Burn, 2017). The *Psychology of Culture Shock* (2001), a book written by the same researchers, explains their theory in detail and states that the ABC model provides a basis for research on sojourners. Previous works on the adaptative process of international students used the ABC model as a framework to get a comprehensive insight into the transition and adaptation of traveling students in a new cultural environment (Lombard, 2014; Zhou et al., 2008; Jindal-Snape & Rienties, 2016).

This study will use a qualitative approach in order to discern the personal experiences felt by international students during their transition process. The qualitative approach is more suited in this context compared to the quantitative one due to a better appreciation of the lived experiences of the students through the interview process (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Research data is gathered from international students registered at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (Ritsumeikan APU) during face-to-face and online interviews during their stay in Japan. Interviews are recorded, transcripted, and

analyzed by the researcher with the consent of the Ritsumeikan APU students who participated in the data collection process.

The interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) will be used to analyze the data collected from the interviews. The IPA approach focuses on the examination of the replies of individuals trying to make sense of their personal experiences and situations (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). In the book *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method, and Research* (2009), Smith et al. describe that IPA is a framework adapted for researchers studying in detail how sojourners perceived a major transition process in their lives (Smith et al., 2009). Accordingly, IPA and the ABC theory fit well with the research question developed in this study.

1.4 Significance of the study

This study will be of significance for future international students planning to study abroad in a Japanese environment as well as students experiencing online classes as part of a transition process from a traditional learning environment. Staff working on the Japanese universities' international relations offices could be interested by the results of this study. As Ritsumeikan APU has the particular status of being the only Japanese university welcoming half of its students from overseas, knowledge about the integration process of the new international students can help Ritsumeikan APU staff members to support their adjustment process. Knowing how international students try to integrate into a new Japanese environment through online content could push Ritsumeikan APU and other Japanese universities to create policies adapted to their needs during similar situations in the future. This thesis will also contribute to the academic field due to the

use of a well-developed framework for a new purpose of analyzing online academic interactions and thoughts of international students in a foreign environment.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Background

2.1.1 Role of Education

"Education is an essential human virtue, a necessity of society, basis of good life and sign of freedom". By these words, Bhardwaj (2016, p.24) meant that education is the vehicle for knowledge, makes men better citizens and ensures us a bright future and character building. Education bind individuals together, creating a list of moral values such as kindness, honesty, hard work, respect for others, cooperation, compassion, and forgiveness (Aneja, 2014). Pushing for worldwide education at every level (local schools, simple classrooms, universities, etc.) is one of mankind's objective in today's interconnected world. Education has been seen as the provider for knowledge and motivation to achieve economic and social development, leading to a series of programs funded by governments, NGOs, and financial entities such as the World Bank to help developing countries' efforts for a better equality and awareness of issues such as health, agriculture and engineering (Psacharopoulos & Woodhall, 1985).

Furthermore, education coupled to globalization is perceived as a basis for collaboration and idea-sharing, leading to innovation (Gaubinger et al., 2015) and a notion of global citizenship built on cosmopolitanism (Dower, 2003). To acquire this feeling of global citizenship through educational means, one of the possibilities is experiencing exchanges of people, either through migration processes or study-abroad programs, leading to a promotion of global culture (Appadurai, 1990).

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2.1 2 Overseas Education

Overseas education and study-abroad programs are an important part of educational trends nowadays. The Migration Data Portal (2020) defines an internationally mobile student as "an individual who has physically crossed an international border between two countries with the objective to participate in educational activities in a destination country, where the destination country is different from his or her country of origin". The notion of travelling overseas for the goal of studying in another country not linked to the student's origin is noticeable, making a distinction between students already accustomed to specific destinations due to family or relatives roots and students travelling in search of new cultures, thus expanding their horizons.

Every year, more students are willing to enroll abroad. In 2015, around 4.6 million students were registered in study abroad programs, stagnating after the exponential growth seen between years 1970 and 2010. However, OECD projected the number of students to gradually augment again due to better economic flows in emerging countries and a demand for higher education mostly proposed in English, a well-spread language (OECD, 2017). OECD's predictions were revealed to be true when, in 2017, over 5.6 million students were going abroad for studies (Project Atlas by Institute of International Education, 2020). A decreasing trend is nevertheless ongoing for the next years due to the Covid-19 pandemic, even if surveys shows that international students are holding on to aspirations of starting their studies on-campus soon (IDP Connect, 2020).

2.1 3 Internationalization of education in Japan

Noticing the importance of overseas education later than European countries and its Chinese neighbor, Japanese authorities' efforts to close the gap started to be more effective during the mid-1990s.

Policies promoted by the Association of International Education for Japan (tanki ryugaku suishin seido) offered to pay fares and give scholarships and bonuses for successful applicants. Starting in 2004, short-term international promotion for Japan has been administered by the Japanese Student-Services Association (JASSO), supporting since an important number of students going overseas (Tsuneyori, 2005). After noticing a decrease in students due to the financial crisis and demography problems during the 2000s (West, 2015), government officials launched several programs to push Japanese students to study abroad. Japan's cabinet decided to adopt the "Japanese Revitalization Strategy – Japan is Back" in 2013 with its main feature, the "Tobitate! Ryugaku Japan" (Leap for Tomorrow – Study Abroad Japan). This program aimed to double the number of Japanese students studying abroad by 2020 and created the Young Ambassador Program in 2014 to send an additional 10,000 high school and university students selected with the criteria of curiosity, passion, and originality (not considering GPA and language ability). This initiative had generous financial support from the government compared to other possibilities (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan, n.d.). Other programs funded by the MEXT included the Go Global Japan Project from 2012 to 2016 and the Top Global University Program from 2014 to 2023 (Shinmi & Ota, 2018). A speech given by then Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2014 in London after visiting several English universities shows the determination of the government to work

along with Japanese universities to improve the success of Japanese higher education (QS, 2014).

Following efforts from the government, Japanese universities are trying to improve their competitiveness by introducing international policies. This quote by Palaiologou & Dietz (2012, p.1) represents a good indication of education worldwide and specifically in Japan:

> "Educational systems worldwide are still very strongly shaped by their roots in nation-states and national arrangements. Despite international shifts towards common standards […], school structures, structures, curricula, classroom strategies and interactions as well as evaluation cultures are an integral part of the nation states domain of educational policies."

Following Yonezawa, Akiba & Hirouchi's analysis of questionnaire replies (2009), around 40% of Japanese national universities are aiming to achieve "top-level" status worldwide, and 90% of all Japanese universities have set internationalization as at least one of their top priorities.

To promote globalization, universities came up with new requirements and policies, such as the creation of graduate schools teaching all their cursus in both English and Japanese (Nagoya, Kobe, Hiroshima universities) (Yonezawa, 2014), mandatory study abroad stays in order to validate undergraduate and graduate diplomas (Chiba and AIU

universities) (Study International, 2019) and attraction of international students in order to diversify the population of students in-campus (Yonezawa & Shinmi, 2015).

The Covid-19 pandemic, however, had harsh effects on the recruitment of international students for both Japanese and worldwide universities. Higher educational institutions had to transition abruptly from a face-to-face, traditional setting to an online one, leading to difficulties in adaptation from both universities, teachers and students.

2.2 Higher education during COVID-19 pandemic

2.2.1 The forced transition from face-to-face to remote teaching

One of the major results of the quick propagation of Covid-19 has been a worldwide change in the prevalent ways of social life and communication. Due to the restrictions and limitations created by the pandemic, business, cultural events, administration, and education all moved online (Sulkowski, 2020). This shift is happening at a fast pace due to an amelioration in technologies and the users' everyday habit shaped around social communication patterns, such as the use of online message applications. This transition to an online setting is pronounced in the domain of education (Leonardi, 2020). During the pandemic, universities around the world went into 'emergency mode', completely changing their education policy with a full-online switch, leading them to reform their platforms used for e-learning (Hodges et al., 2020). Many universities, not prepared for this approach and thus reluctant to change their traditional ways of teaching, had to forcibly undertake a reform of their methods to undergo their transition to online teaching and learning (Dhawan, 2020). The consequence of the pandemic on education worldwide was the forced transition to e-learning, bringing issues for faculty members, the administration of universities, and students.

E-learning is defined as the learning process supported by digital electronic tools and media (Basak et al. 2018), or as the delivery of a learning, training, or education program by electronic means (Sangra et al. 2012). E-learning is based on teaching using technological means while using traditional methods of providing knowledge to the students (Wheeler, 2012). During the Covid-19 pandemic, e-learning and e-teaching were the norm imposed on both students and teachers, creating variations in the usual student-professor relationship. Since this new type of e-learning became the educational norm whether it was accepted or not, scholars (Kulikowski, Przytula & Sulkowski, 2021; Hodges et al., 2020) defined this new type of e-learning as 'forced e-learning'. This definition put an emphasis on the urgency and unpredictability necessity for all universities to trade a face-to-face environment for computer-mediated communication and means of different information technology platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams.

The sudden changes brought by the Covid-19 pandemic in the form of long-time campus closures prompted a chaotic scramble during the beginning of 2020, leading to a 'do-or-die' strategy between both the students and the professors in making the adjustments for online classes to work somehow (Kulikowski, Przytula & Sulkowski, 2021). This period of forced e-learning enabled the contact between teachers and students to be maintained while creating unanticipated and undesirable changes, leading to academic content transformation and loss of motivation to teach and to learn from all parties involved.

Recent literature from the past two years has focused on how institutions and university programs have adapted themselves to the forced e-learning and e-teaching

system (Bao, 2020; Flores & Gago, 2020, Yang, 2020) and the adaptation of students to this kind of environment (Demuyakor, 2020). A few examples coming from all parts of the world will be reviewed, identifying a debate on the results of the adjustment of the students to e-learning.

2.2.2 First experiences with online education

In a study based in Ireland, Hill & Fitzgerald (2020) explained that online experience brought many challenges to students, resulting in a drop in engagement and motivation to work outside classes, thus disrupting their learning opportunities. However, positive aspects of online learning were found. An online setting could bring to the students a more relaxed pace due to rewatchable classes while giving the possibility to learn in locations where the students felt more at ease and were convenient for them. Hill & Fitzgerald (2020) suggested a possibility of a positive approach to e-learning and hybrid classes could be found soon when the university staff and students become more accustomed to online interactions.

Building on Hill & Fitzgerald's study (2020), Chen et al. (2020) analyzed the reception of online classes in an American dental school. Their findings brought to light the preference of the students for synchronous recorded live lectures and asynchronous pre-recorded lectures with synchronous follow-up sessions compared to nonrecorded live lectures. The use of recording technology and the flipped classrooms class format has benefitted the students during the pandemic, allowing them to enhance their virtual learning.

The students' adaptation to online classes is also correlated to their readiness for digital learning. According to Handel et al. (2020), German students who claimed to be ready for the digital transition felt less stressed, more enthusiastic, less prone to negative emotions, and more aware of their workload compared to students caught up unprepared during the pandemic and adapting themselves with a sense of precipitation due to the forced e-learning.

However, students' stress and anxiety levels increased as a whole during the pandemic, whether they were prepared or not for the e-learning transition. Wang et al. (2020), while conducting a survey data collection in a large American university, discovered that nearly all students were preoccupied with concerns about their loved ones' health and difficulties in concentrating on their online classes. The disruption in their lives and sleeping patterns and the decreased social interactions lead most of them to have concerns over their academic experiences and grades. The transition to e-learning for these students was perceived as an overwhelming, negative event greatly disrupting not only their academic future but their overall lives.

Notwithstanding all the challenges posed by the forced quick adaptation of remote education for students, a study carried out in China by Wang et al. (2020) assessed that prior experience of e-learning was associated with a positive evaluation and perception of the current online-style learning during the pandemic. Prior experience with online classes allowed the students to create a smoother transition from a hybrid-style education to a full-online one.

Acceptance of the durability of the pandemic situation played a part in how universities located in different parts of the world transitioned to e-learning. For example, studies realized in Saudi Arabia (Rajab et al., 2020) and Oman (Osman, 2020) analyzed the satisfaction and adaptation of students registered in their universities to online learning during the pandemic. While Rajab et al. (2020) pointed out positive aspects, such as the faculty and students' acceptance of the situation, and negative aspects due to the misuse of technological tools, Osman (2020) found out that many of the students registered at the Sultan Qaboos University of the Sultanate of Oman were pleased with their transition to online classes. For this group of students, their online interactions with teachers, the quality of the classes and recorded lectures, and their available online materials gave them a feeling of achievement in their curriculum, leading to an overall positive experience.

Acknowledging Osman's (2020) results, Gonzalez et al. (2020)'s findings in Spain showed the same positive results of e-learning during the pandemic. Spanish students were more performant during the online classes due to an increase in assessment activities while not modifying the student workload. Better interactions with the professor due to the differences between face-to-face and online classes and the creation of breakout rooms changed the students' learning strategies and adaptation to their universities.

Large-scale studies such as Aristovnik et al. (2020)'s concluded that most students were satisfied by their universities and staff's support. However, while interrogated, students pointed out difficulties such as the lack of technological skills hindering them to perceive their performances compared to face-to-face classes. Difficulties related to their path-seeking careers were also to be noted, with fewer interactions with the offices in

charge of helping the students find job openings and career counseling reported. Aristovnik et al. (2020) also constated those sociodemographic factors played a role in the positive or negative reception of online classes, namely female, full-time student, second-level studying, social sciences subjects, scholarship granting, without financial issues and not restrained by part-time job losses. Depending on these aforementioned criteria, the reception of online classes could vary from a spectrum of an overly negative to a positive experience, leading some students to be more satisfied compared to others.

On the sole criteria of gender, Bisht et al. (2020) noticed that gender is an important factor while adapting to online education. While male students assessed their own computer skills higher than their female counterparts, female students created study schedules and assignment patterns better than male ones. Alves et al. (2020) observed that, in Portuguese universities, female students were more aware of the preventive online steps to take to ensure a good online learning environment, showing a higher level of knowledge than male students. In Malaysia, Shahzad et al. (2020) noticed a different use of e-learning portals depending on the gender of the student, with female students being the majority of the users of Malaysian universities' e-documents and online resources.

2.2.3 Japan's response to the Covid-19 pandemic

Japan, like the rest of the world, is facing the challenges created by the Covid-19 pandemic since January 2020. During the beginning of the pandemic, the Japanese government issued a nationwide state of emergency on April 16, 2020. This state of emergency pushed educational institutions to cancel events, such as entrance, graduation ceremonies, and club activities. Foreseeing that the pandemic will be a long-term issue, the Japanese government also adopted strategies to help universities and students to share

equal access to higher education (MIC, 2020). For example, the MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan) decided to allocate to the universities a supplementary budget of 93 million US dollars to ensure an adaptation of the learning environment during the pandemic for their students in 2020 (Huang, 2021). Also, every Japanese university was subsidized by the government if they were reducing the amount of tuition fees or increasing the possible student exemptions by being more flexible to allocate scholarships to international students. To support the large number of international students who were living in Japan and doing part-time jobs to finance their tuition fees and accommodation, the MEXT allocated additional financial help for approximately 430,000 students enrolled in Japanese higher education, including inbound international students (Huang, 2021). For example, all new international students arriving in Japan were granted 950 US dollars in their Japanese account as part of a larger subsidy given by the Japanese government if the students registered for it. During November and December 2020, the MEXT granted another round of financial help in the form of 1900 US dollars to international students if their grade point average (GPA) was superior or equal to 2.30 out of 4 (Huang, 2021). University and government scholarships were also given to international students if they encountered difficulties coming from their home countries to their Japanese universities, leading to the arrival of students during the month of November 2020 sponsored by the JASSO scholarship and coming from developing countries.

Japanese universities made efforts to receive and welcome their new students in Japan, creating initiatives on their own. During the temporary relaxation of immigration restrictions of November 2020, universities such as Tokyo, Kyoto, Ritsumeikan, Keio and Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (APU) secured accommodations around Tokyo-

Haneda airport for the students to spend their 14-day isolation period, helping the newcomers to pay for their stay and providing the necessary food and items for the students to check on their health during this period (Ritsumeikan APU, 2022). During the pandemic, nearly all universities sent to their students risk-management guidelines such as the necessary steps to do if Covid-19 started to spread around joined sharehouses, information about the vaccination procedure, and rules on the restricted use of facilities on the campuses. This kind of information, along with the creation of special committees in charge of managing the different campuses' life during the Covid-19 pandemic, has been the result of the adaptation of Japanese universities to the pandemic.

No special strategy was carried out concerning the international faculty members in Japanese universities compared to the measures taken to help international students during the pandemic. International travelers coming to Japan to do academic fieldwork had to follow the same restrictions as everyone else, namely the two-week quarantine if there was a possibility to come. The Covid-19 pandemic affected the issuance of Japanese visas to international scholars, leading most of them to either cancel or postpone their research for an indefinite period of time (Kakuchi, 2020). Moreover, international faculty members and students were not allowed to leave Japan without an urgent motive, and if they could, they faced the possibility of staying blocked outside the country with the uncertain possibility of coming back (Huang, 2021). These travel restrictions largely affected higher education in Japan, troubling the local partnerships with universities located all over the world (Kakuchi, 2020). The travel restrictions, coupled with the cities' long-time state of emergency and the restricted access to campuses significantly altered the academic life of students and professors.

2.2.4 Examples of Japanese curriculum changes due to the Covid-19 pandemic

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, most of the classes in universities in Japan were forced to switch several times between face-to-face and online classes (The Japan Times, 2020), causing sudden shifts in the teaching approach (The Japan Times, 2021). Most of the Japanese universities were not prepared to provide classes on a full-online scale, resulting in adjustments in curriculums. Altering the curriculums to adapt to the pandemic whilst keeping the same quality of a face-to-face class is an extremely challenging matter studied by Miller (2022) and Hayashi, Saiki, Kanter & Ho (2022).

In his study, Miller (2022) focuses on the adaptation of two senior educators in universities in Aichi prefecture to curriculum changes brought by the Covid-19 pandemic. As the curriculum changes were made with a sense of urgency, dialogue between the different stakeholders (administrations, professors, representatives) was hindered, thus reducing the idea-sharing that could have made the adjustments more comfortable for all parties involved. As Kliebard (1988, p.21) stated:

> "A change of curriculum is more than it appears. It involves not simply the substitution of one element of a course of study for another; that new element frequently requires for its survival a compatible organizational structure."

Simply shifting the classes from face-to-face to online did not resolve the issues related to the digitalization of materials on an online platform accessible for everyone, or the activities such as classroom organization in groupwork to make the classes productive and understandable. Miller (2022) explains that countless alterations were needed for the online environment to be efficient, and creativity and flexibility were the most important

factors for teachers to adapt themselves to online teaching. For example, friendly cooperation through workshops between the different groups of teachers and part-timers helped familiarize every person with online teaching by sharing expertise, leading the teachers with more experience to familiarize others without any help from their administration.

Also, encouraging cooperation between teachers isn't the only possibility given to faculty members to adjust themselves to online teaching. As time passed, both teachers recognized the merits of adapting to technologies to access absenteeism during classes, and the possibility of collecting crucial data from the students instantly (Miller, 2022).

The theme of flexibility and cooperation can also be found in a larger, multi-university approach. In their study, Hayashi, Saiki, Kanter & Ho (2022) examined the response to the Covid-19 pandemic coming from the leaders of 48 medical colleges in Japan and their decisions while adapting to the pandemic during the last two years. They reported that the Japanese deans used the trial-and-error approach to tackle several issues resulting from a full-online class environment. Cooperation in the form of adoption of other universities' policy changes and referenced discussions from the Association of Departments of Medical Education helped all universities to share proven ideas with each individual university. Also, medical students' parents were involved in the policy changes, as medical students were asked to work as volunteers in Covid-19 test centers. The involvement of all stakeholders shows how the Japanese university deans tried to adapt their universities during the pandemic, and how their actions are reflective of the Japanese culture based on in-depth introspection and collaboration with diverse stakeholders (Hayashi, Saiki, Kanter & Ho, 2022).

2.3 Searching the research study model

The COVID-19 pandemic obliged international students freshly registered in Japanese universities to take quick decisions on the pursuit of their studies due to the lockdown on the Japanese borders. The international students who decided to pursue their studies underwent a sociocultural transition process from in person to online classes in a new foreign environment. By settling this research in such a specific context, the author understood that it would be possible to constitute a field study through the practical application of a questionnaire/open interview designed to evaluate the impact on this target population.

As all practice must be supported, this research started aiming to find out in which way published work could initiate a very concrete approach to the object of this study. In fact, as seen in the previous section, there is no lack of studies, reports and recent analysis that are full of interest, meaning and relevance, and a multiplicity of models that could potentially be applied in the treatment of the collected information. Some extended reviews of such methods are reported in Zhou et al., 2008; Zhang & Goodson, 2011; Sarmiento et al.,2019.

In order to achieve a consistent approach, even though this could never be done in a totally exhaustive way, three aspects seem incontrovertible: studying the impact of the restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic on foreign students enrolled in Japanese universities from an affective, behavioral and cognitive point of view.

It was in this context that a framework defined by Ward, Bochner & Furnham in 2001 was adopted. It is known as the ABC (affective, behavioral and cognitive) model of acculturation.

The ABC model "defines in great detail the psychological processes that allows appropriate human responses to environmental changes" (Sarmiento et al.,2019, p.21). This model was created to evaluate how people (students, businessmen, migrants, refugees, travelers, etc.) face cultural differences while being immersed in a distinct sociocultural environment from their native one.

The model was described by Zhou et al. (2008, p.69) to be *"quite efficient in explaining the acculturation process"* of international students while studying abroad. This framework was further used by Koris, Mato-Diaz & Hernandez-Nanclares (2021) to examine how European Erasmus students reacted to the forced transition to online learning and their acculturation while adjusting to a new social environment. Besides previous research on the acculturation process of international students used the ABC model as a framework to get a comprehensive insight into the transition and adaptation of traveling students in a new cultural environment (Lombard, 2014, Jindal-Snape & Rienties, 2016).

Therefore this framework appears quite relevant to understand and perceive how foreign students in Japan adapted to the transition process during the Covid-19 pandemic. As it is a known and widely applied model, it seemed quite adequate, since the objective of this study was to specifically clarify from the testimonies of the interviewees how the necessary adaptation to a new paradigm affected them.

In reality, the factors that contribute to the definition of this new paradigm vary. We can consider, among the most relevant ones, the following:

• acculturation: adapting to a different culture, forcibly in circumstances that are unexpected and very different from those experienced up to 2020, regardless of any specific context.

• interrelationship: consistency of the relationships established not only between the student and the university institution to which he/she is linked, but also between the student and his/her colleagues and between the student and the community he/she becomes part of (e.g. the city).

• learning: effectiveness of the implementation of uncommon methodologies and practices, despite the fact that e-learning has been around for decades, and is an effective trend, recommended in various contexts, with perfectly validated results.

2.4 The ABC framework

In the ABC model, to overlap the cross-cultural transition, people undergo a bi-dimensional adaptation process consisting of sociocultural and psychological adjustment phases of "stress and coping, cultural learning and sociocultural identification" (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001, p.38). While the sociocultural adaptation concerns the capacity to connect and interact successfully with the new cultural environment, the psychological adaptation deals with the emotional fulfillment associated with the effective integration into this new environment (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001; Sarmiento et al, 2019).

By observing the sojourners' feelings, thoughts, and behaviors while transitioning to a different sociocultural or technological environment, this theory explains the

accommodation to another culture as a life-transforming event (Bochner, 2003). In this case, while trying to adjust to this new environment, students will experience emotional periods of stress and confusion. After achieving this adjustment, they will need to create coping skills and strategies to follow up and decrease their psychological state of confusion as they find ways to adapt to their situation. These coping strategies will affect them deeply, as they will think of cognitive possibilities to relate to a particular cultural group to shape their new personal cultural identity (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001 in Burn, 2017).

An appealing explanation of this ABC acculturation process was graphically presented by Ward et al. (2001) and recovered by Zhou et al. (2008). An adaptation of such graphical representation is shown in Figure 1.

"The model conceptualizes cross-cultural transition as a significant life-event involving unaccustomed changes and new forms of intercultural contact" (Ward et al. 2001, p.43).
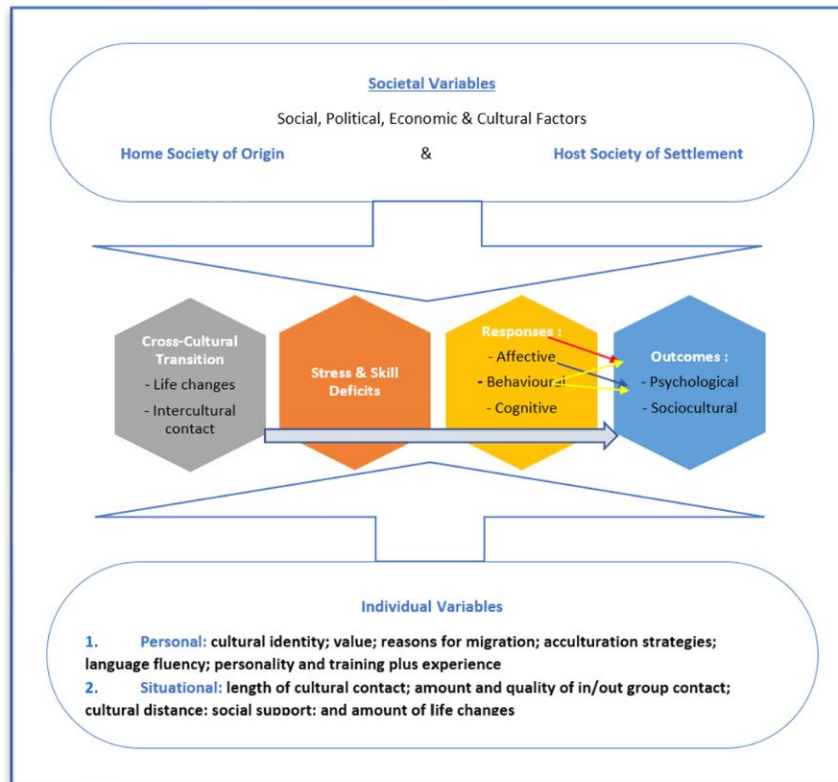
Figure 1 : The Acculturation Process (adapted from Ward et al.,2001)

These experiences are represented in the medium line of the schema. While they may be stimulating, challenging, confusing or disorientating, individuals can barely cope with all new requiring situations and unfamiliar patterns of social integration, at least at the beginning of the transition. This situation may be described either as a social skills deficit or an incapacitating stress. The evaluation of personal and situational factors is thus necessary for an efficient response to these problems and actions including affective, behavioral and cognitive responses must be taken to either acquire the missing culture specific skills or manage stress. As indicate by the arrows in this scheme, all these responses and their psychological and sociocultural outcomes are influenced by both societal and individual variables which are schematized in the upper and lower part of the figure. Social variables are represented in the upper part, and they are of two types equally important: those concerning the home society of origin and those related to the host society of settlement. Both of them include social, political, economic and cultural factors.

The individual level variables in the acculturation process regarding characteristics of both the person and the situation are represented on the lower part of the figure. The first may involve factors such as cultural identity, reasons for migration, acculturation strategies, language competence, training, and personality. Characteristics of the situation may include cultural distance and length, intergroup relations, social support, or life changes quantity.

> "Ward and colleagues (2001) [….] identified three main dimensions linked to human life and susceptible to change during the acculturation process: the affect, the behaviors and the cognitions. The affective element refers to the feelings and emotions an individual will experience while coping with acculturative stress. The behavioral aspect relates to the skills an individual will acquire and learn to adapt to a new environment. Finally, the cognitive element focuses on the psychological mechanisms involving both self-perception and other-perception." (Langlois, 2019, p. 26).
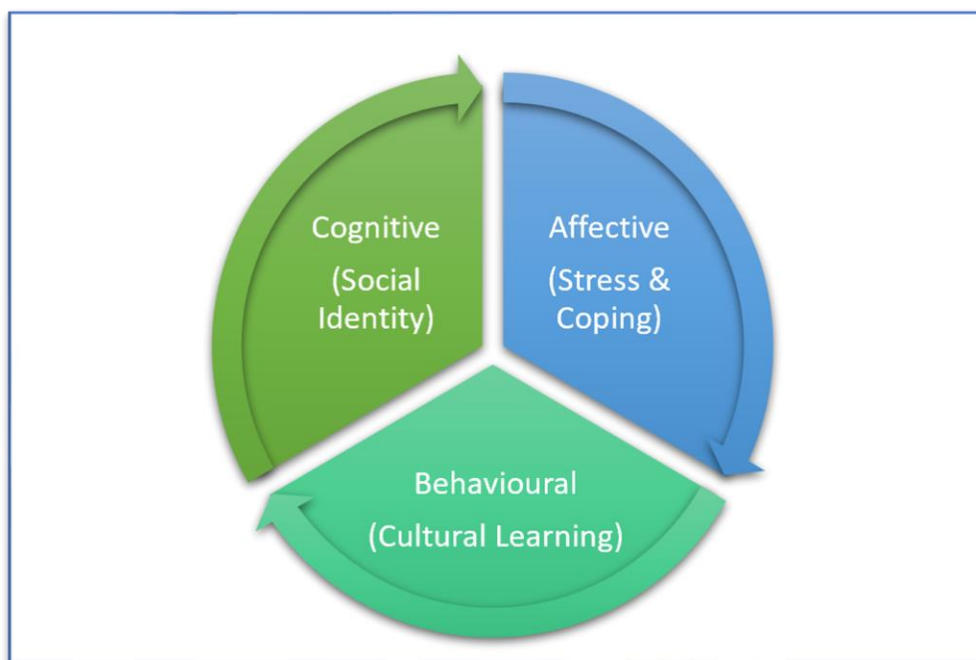

Figure 2 : ABCs of acculturation

Each one of these acculturation domains is linked to a specific acculturative change, respectively, the stress and coping approach, the culture learning approach and the social identification approach.

The stress and coping approach focuses on the sojourner's psychological wellbeing and satisfaction. Herein the stress is caused by sojourner's life changes occurring during the cross-cultural transitions and so only he/her can cope with it by eventually developing efficient strategies (Zhou et al., 2008). Nevertheless, Ward et al. (2001) state that it is possible to train people to developpe stress-management skills. This stress and coping approach is supported by Lazarus and Folkman's stress, appraisal and coping theory as well as Holme's and Rahe's life events concepts (Yun & Le, 2012).

The cultural learning theory, defended by Furnham and Bochner (1982), considers that social interaction is an organized and skilled behavior performance. Furthermore, it also states that it is the sojourner's lack of social skills of the new society that causes all stressful situations arising during intercultural contact (Argyle & Kendon, 1967). Therefore, the sojourner must master home and host communication of all types: codes, conventions, rules, patterns to be able to express emotions and know how to send and receive information, non-verbal communication, etc. This demands a great cultural knowledge that can be improved by practical guidelines.

The social identification approach concerns both the social and the cultural identity issues that the sojourner encounters during the cross-cultural exchange. As he/her lives and interacts permanently with people from the host society, her/his social and cultural identity will be continuously challenged.

"The concept is originally based on theories of social cognition and social identity which focuses on examining the ways in which people ethnically and culturally identify themselves, including how they perceive themselves and others as well as how they establish relations with their own ethnic groups (in-groups) and other ethnic groups (out-groups)." (Yun & Le, 2012, p.138).

The social identity theory was proposed by Tajfel & Turner in 1981 (Burn, 2017) and it studies how group membership affects individual identity by considering the relationship between self-esteem coupled with social categorization and social comparison (Yun & Le, 2012). Group membership, which is defined by all the members of the group and the individual, is recognized as favorable to self-esteem.

The acculturation identity theory was proposed by Berry (1997) and greatly influenced the ABC model (Ward et al, 2001; Burn, 2017). Figure 3 represents Berry's acculturation model. In this theory the sojourner's positioning is determined by both the level of involvement in his/her host society and the level of attachment shown to his/her home culture. Four strategies can be adopted: separation, marginalization, assimilation and integration being this last one the "ideal outcome of acculturation" (Yun & Le, 2012). Though this theory was originally created to explain the acculturation strategies of refugees and immigrants, it is also suited to study exchange of student sojourners, as the need of a strategy balancing host and home culture to reach the integration group is important to ensure the students' well-being (Ward et al., 2001).
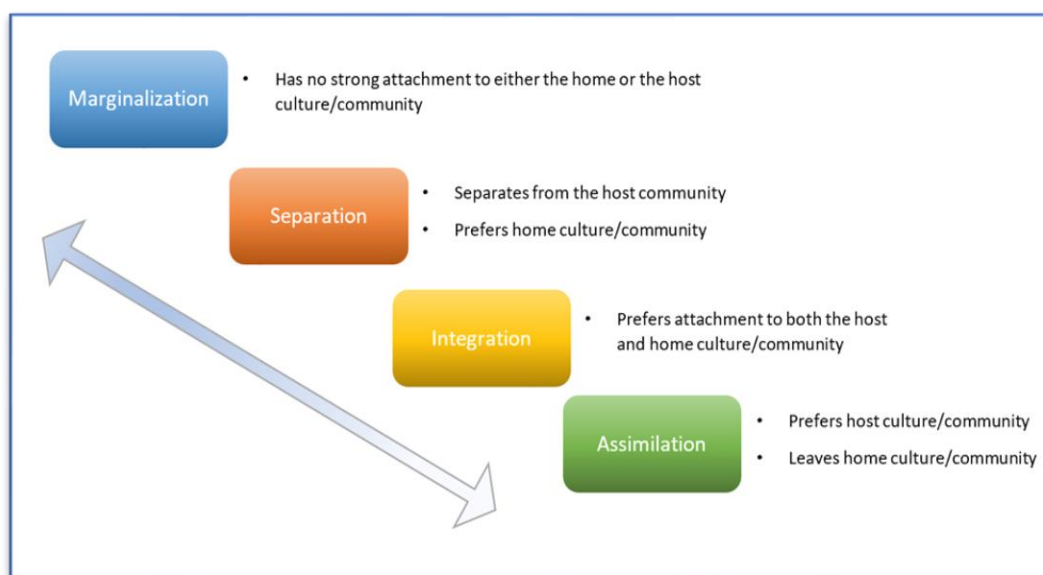
Figure 3 : Berry's acculturation theory

2.5 Elements influencing the adaptation process

The adaptation of the student sojourners to a foreign environment can turn into a stressful experience as they encounter new sociocultural and psychological experiments preventing their steady integration. Ward et al., in their academic articles from 1998 and 2001, explained that sociocultural and psychological issues related to the student's integration, while conceptually distinct, remain intertwined with the creation of coping strategies (Burn, 2017). In fact, while the psychological acculturation process is marked by cognitive identity issues related to dissimilarities in the sociocultural environment and stress, the sociocultural transition process of the traveling students is impacted by the new behavioral practices perceived in a foreign environment (Ward et al., 2001).

A major factor in the acculturation progression of student sojourners, that has been studied by Ward et al. (2001) is time. Throughout the first stages of transition, both the psychological adjustment difficulties and the transition process of the students are at their

highest, while a decrease follows over time (Brown & Holloway, 2008). As the psychological stress of adjusting to a new environment fade, sociocultural adaptation issues arise, leading to cognitive pressure on the students pushed to be ambassadors of their owns cultures while interacting with their host culture counterparts (Ward et al., 2005 in Langlois, 2019). The transition period varies between three to six months, but psychological and sociocultural experiences never fade as the traveling student learns the behaviors of the host culture and experiences new situations during his stay abroad (Burn, 2017). Other factors such as class work, exams, and friendships become the main factors of stress for traveling students when the acculturation process finishes (Ward et al., 2005).

International students put an emphasis on academic results and goals, differentiating them from other intercultural travelers such as tourists and immigrants. International students, in order to have a smooth transition process, need to adapt to a study environment not using their main language in a different educational system while being shown the same treatment as a regular university student (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Their challenge is to envision their adaptation process while experiencing new patterns in classroom interactions and relationships with their teachers and fellow classmates (Ward et al., 2005). Though the acculturation process of international students in an unfamiliar environment is affected by several factors, language proficiency and social support are mostly impacting students transitioning to a virtual learning experience as explained in the following subsections.

2.5.1 Language Proficiency

Surmounting the language obstacle is necessary for a smooth intercultural transition process (Cao et al., 2016; Lin, 2006; Zheng & Berry, 1991 in Burn, 2017). The language

proficiency of the student sojourner heavily influences his communication skills in a new environment (Burn, 2017). Ward, Bochner & Furnham (2001) explained the importance of knowing the host language, which impacts the affective and behavioral components of their theory. Their statement is further pushed in academic articles from Kmiotek & Boski (2017), Cheng & Fox (2009) and Noels, Pon & Clement (1996). These studies differ in their studied groups: the use of the French language for Polish university students in France (Kmiotek & Boski, 2017), the use of the English language for international students (Cheng & Fox, 2009), and specifically Chinese students (Noels, Pon & Clement, 1996) in Canada. However, these three articles reach the same conclusion, as they highlight the existence of a connection between the psychological well-being of the university student and his/her language fluency during the acculturation process (Ward et al., 2005 in Burn, 2017). Consequently, (Cao et al., 2016), if the international student is not proficient enough in the host language he/she can feel isolated or confused, hampering the possibility to exchange information and interest with local students and the host country's community. Learning the host country's language will let the international student be more independent and confident, creating a stable environment for the acculturation process.

Therefore the role of the languages classes for international students in high education is very important. Wang & Hannes (2014), while studying the sociocultural adaptation of Asian international students in the Flemish part of Belgium, realized that, for these students, the most relevant aspect of their academic and learning performance abroad is precisely their language proficiency and language classes. Glass & Westmont (2014) reached the same conclusion while studying the integration of international students in eight different American universities. The absence of communication skills

directly impacts international students' performances and overall academic success in the host university.

A language barrier can also bring misunderstandings during communication patterns such as group work, breakout room online classes, or club activities in the host university. These misunderstandings will lead to unsatisfying relationships, hampering their connections to the host community (Ward et al., 2005). Not having neither communication skills nor knowledge of the language can lower the motivation of international students, thus reducing their degree of enjoyment of the host culture and raising psychological stress levels (Ward et al., 2005). The interaction with locals is made possible with suitable language skills, leading the community to assist the student sojourner in their acculturation process (Ward et al., 2005). To conclude, several studies realized by Pruitt (1978), Ward & Kennedy (1993), and Zimmerman (1995) all resulted in perceiving the interaction with host nationals in their language as benefitting international students in different aspects, such as a reduction of academic problems (Pruitt, 1978), an improvement of social life (Ward & Kennedy, 1993) and overall improved communication competence and adaptation to life overseas (Zimmerman, 1995).

2.5.2 Social Support and Friendships

The psychological well-being and socio-cultural adaptation of a student depends to a large extent on friendships, social support and the sense of belonging to a social network (Burn, 2017). All issues of discrimination and inclusion between human beings and the host community impact their well-being negatively as, by nature, all human beings are

social creatures and like to share experiences and comfort with others (Brunton & Jeffrey, 2014).

The international students coping mechanisms during the sociocultural adaptation to a foreign environment are strongly influenced by the support from family, friends and classmates (Ward et al., 2001). As a result, compared with the other local students, the international students ask more frequently for social support (Ward et al., 2001 in Burn, 2017). Participation in peer-pairing programs and spend more leisure time with local students made international students have a better social adaptation to a foreign environment compared to the ones who did not blend in (Abe, Talbot & Geelhoed, 1998; Zhou et al., 2008 in Burn, 2017). Hendrickson et al.'s (2011) study of friendship networks created by 86 international students at the University of Hawaii reached the same conclusion, as intercultural relationships break stereotypes and facilitate cultural understanding and adaptation to a foreign environment (Hendrickson et al., 2011; Kashima & Loh, 2006). Consequently, the psychological and sociocultural adjustment will depend on the amount of social support received by the international students in their host environment.

Literature revolving around friendships created by international students tends to make a distinction between three different groups following the model of friendship patterns among overseas students of Bochner et al. (Bochner et al., 1977 in Burn, 2017). These three different groups are co-national friendships, host-national friendships, and multi-national friendships (Hendrickson et al., 2011). Each group has its separate function and strong points, as a co-national network helps affirm and express the culture of origin of the student sojourners (Neri & Ville, 2008), a host-national network is more focused

on helping academically and professionally the international students (Hendrickson et al., 2011), and a multi-national network has a recreational function due to new possibilities to learn about diverse cultures (Yum, 2001).

Creating friendships on these three levels all provide the same overall effect of dissipating homesickness and the feeling of isolation felt by international students during their transition process (Church, 1982). Peer mentoring, specifically, became a popular way for international students to start contact with host nationals to understand the behaviors of the local population (Kim, 2001). The peer mentoring activities consist in involving local students in the new students' transition process by assigning them a mentor or buddy to help them navigate into their daily life. For example, Ritsumeikan APU has a program for international students called 'APU Buddy', which helps pair Japanese students with newly arrived international students of the same age and major. An effective way to help the international student in his/her daily life and academic adaptation during the acculturation process is to have a local friend as a host culture mentor (Yeh & Inose, 2003).

Language proficiency and social support are the main factors affecting the acculturation process of international students in an unfamiliar environment. A study realized by Yamazaki et al. (1997) reinforces the assertion, explained in the beginning of this section, that a poor knowledge of the host language impacts directly the socialization process in a foreign environment. Finding a common, worldwide-used language such as English to use in conversations permit foreign students and host nationals to exchange information and become friends (Kudo & Simkin, 2003). Furthermore, socialization in a host environment can be challenging for international students due to a feeling of self-

consciousness about their accent and pronunciation of English and the host language (Yeh & Inose, 2003). This feeling of embarrassment lead some of the foreign students prefer social interactions with students from their country of origin and avoid contacts with the host nationals (Bochner, McLeod & Lin, 1977; Woolf, 2007).

3. Methodology

This section details the qualitative methodology approach used while performing the interviews and analyzing the data gathered for this study. The parameters affecting the qualitative data gathering and interviews are explained in the first part, while the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), the method used to interpret, classify and describe the data gathered, will be explained in the second part.

3.1 Qualitative Research

The data-gathering part of this thesis study adopts the qualitative methodological approach. The qualitative research approach has been used since the 1950's to explain a more contextualized and naturalistic view of humans in society, as opposed to the quantitative approach (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007; Gray et al., 2007). The qualitative research procedure is based on an induction approach, as analytical theory conclusions are the result of the data gathering and analysis. Consequently, a qualitative procedure avoids hypothesis predictions about the research findings (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Qualitative research methods are more flexible than quantitative ones, as issues not previously envisioned at the beginning of the research can be tackled with more spontaneity with the help of adaptable interview questions (Seale, 2004). As Hatch (2002) describes it, the ambition of qualitative research is to explain the experiences and inner mindsets the interviewees are perceiving from their surroundings, leading this approach to be a more personal one through the interview process.

Face-to-face and online interviews are the main methods of data gathering for researchers using qualitative methods. For Seale (2004) and Bhattacherjee (2012),

qualitative interviews serve as in-depth roughly structured conversations oriented toward the research purposes of the interviewer. Loftland (1971) describes an in-depth interview as a series of pre-set questions asked by the researcher to a person about their feelings and experiences, while the data gathered is recorded and notes are taken with sets of key sentences and words for accurate data analysis. A fluid conversation in a relaxed environment usually helps the interviewees open up about their personal thoughts, hence why conducting the interviews with a sense of equality between the persons involved is an important part of the process (Seale, 2004).

Qualitative methods are grounded on a feeling of spontaneity and adaptability. A qualitative interview is deemed successful when criteria such as respect for the interviewees, a non-argumentative attitude, and patience to listen to the replies provided by the responders are met (Berry, Poortinga et al., 2011). Adaptation related to non-verbal responses emitted by the participants is an important point of the interviews, as questions can be adapted to understand the thoughts of the responders. These adjustments can lead to new cues for the researcher during the data gathering and analysis process (Hatch, 2002).

3.2 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is an approach to qualitative research developed first by Smith in 1996. In his first research, Smith tried to define and apply this concept to health psychology. Later, in 2009, 2011, and 2014, Smith refined his approach and broadened this data analysis method to the domains of social and health sciences. IPA is a qualitative approach focused on understanding the thoughts of the

participants, as the concern for lived experiences and its hermeneutic root is ideal for researchers to capture the personal perspectives of the interviewees (Smith, 2011; Smith et al., 2009).

IPA articulates around three main intelectual currents: phenomenology, hermeneutics and ideography.

- Phenomenology aims to study the phenomena revealed in our consciences. Consequently, it is centered on the aspects that matters the most in life.

- Hermeneutics studies the theory of interpretation, thus the importance of interpreting what is happening. As individuals have their own mental and emotional life, they produce meaning and give sense to what they experience.

- Ideography focuses on individuals, events, situations and the results of specific actions. The important idea of the ideographic approach is the understanding of human behaviour.

Academic articles using the IPA analysis model are usually using interviews of forty minutes to an hour to gather data from one to fifteen responders (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The IPA method gives the possibility for the researcher to focus on each participant distinctively during the data-gathering interviews. The results of these interviews are valuable, presenting a detailed account of the mental and physical situation of the participants (Burn, 2017). In order to analyze the replies given by the interviewees and create an accurate analytic article, Smith describes the IPA process as "double hermeneutic" (Smith, 2011). In this process, the researcher is trying to understand the

replies of the responders, whom themselves are trying to explain their experiences through the interview process (Smith et al., 2009).

Five different stages are involved during the IPA process (see Figure 4).
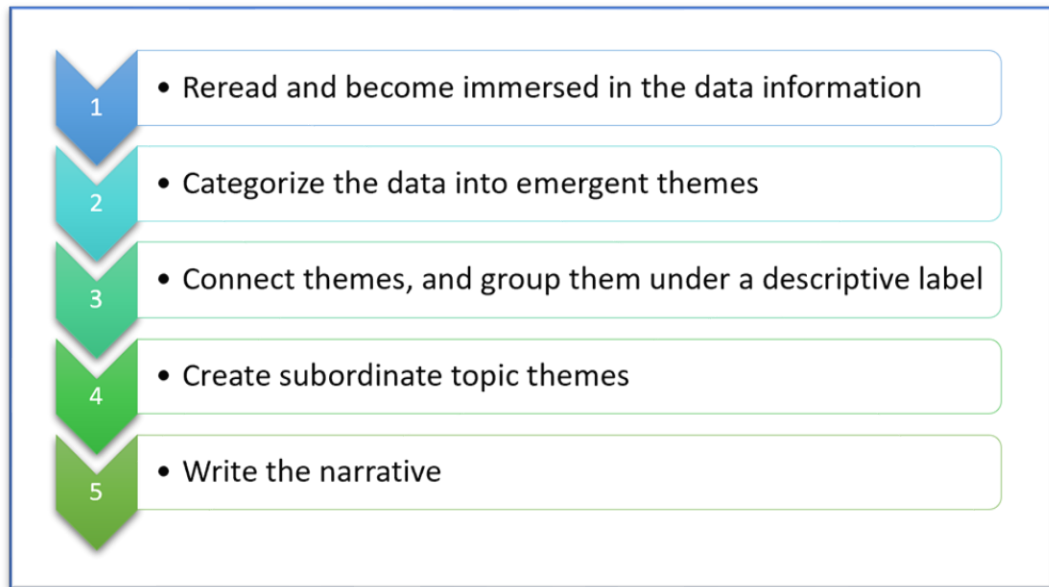
Figure 4 : IPA Approach

The first stage is about examining and understanding the data information thoroughly to identify connections between the different interviews. The second stage involves coding and analyzing the data. During the second stage, irrelevant data is shelved, and useful information is classified into different groups. The second stage process is carried out during the third and fourth stage, as the remaining data is evaluated, synthesized, and compared to discover themes and labels. After all the data is organized into patterns and categories, an overall picture can start forming itself (Hatch, 2002). The fifth stage is about understanding the experience of the participants while writing the narrative and the results in the final academic article or report. Having this in mind, the researcher's data analysis includes quotes from the participants as well as their data interpretation (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

4 Data collection

Understanding the variables involved during the data collection process is an important factor in order to grasp the analysis results. These variables include the location of the study, the interviewee's backgrounds, and the interview procedure (Seale, 2004). Therefore, information about Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, the students interviewed in this study and the steps involved in the interview process will be explained in this part.

4.1 Beppu, Japan, and Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (Ritsumeikan APU)

The university Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (Ritsumeikan APU) is located in the island of Kyushu, in the south of Japan, and more precisely in the city of Beppu.

While Beppu city is home for 118.000 inhabitants, Ritsumeikan APU is welcoming 5.691 students in its campus (APU Data Book 2022 – 1/11/2022). The University is composed of two main colleges: the College of Asia Pacific Studies, composed of different sub-sections focused on International Relations and Peace Studies; Environment and Development; Culture, Society and Media; Hospitality and Tourism. The second college is called the College of International Management, with sub-sections focused on Strategic Marketing and Organization; Accounting and Finance; and Innovations and Economics. Classes and information provided by Ritsumeikan APU are mainly in Japanese and English. Japanese-learning language classes are included in the cursus of first-year undergraduate students and deemed essential due to the four-year daily life of the students in the country. Japanese-learning teaching classes are also proposed after the first year to undergraduates who desire to develop their Japanese language skills and

graduates as a complement to their full English-speaking classes (Ritsumeikan APU, 2022).

The internalization is one of Ritsumeikan APU´s characteristics which highlights this University among the other japanese ones. 2.694 international students are currently studying in Ritsumeikan APU, constituting 47% of the total number of students enrolled in this university.

Such a percentage is far superior to the one corresponding to the second and third major communities of international students existing in the Tokyo Institute of Technology (17,3%) and in the University of Tokyo (16,4%) (Times Higher Education, 2022). Students coming from 102 countries are gathered in Ritsumeikan APU, creating a vast multicultural environment with a large proportion of international students coming from the nearest countries (South Korea, Indonesia, China, Viet Nam, Thailand).

International students enrolled in study-abroad exchange programs are also attracted to Ritsumeikan APU. The university has a bilateral partnership agreement with 158 other Universities worldwide, most of which are signed with European and Asian universities (APU Exchange Program Destinations, 2022).

This multicultural environment, like no other in Japan, lead the Ritsumeikan APU's leaders to create the concept of "Multicultural Weeks" during which students can showcase the language and culture of their home countries, thus creating and sharing new experiences for a lifetime (APU Data Book, 2022).

4.2 Participants

The students interviewed in this research are three international students enrolled in the university Ritsumeikan APU, either as a first-year undergraduate or as long-term exchange students. The first-year undergraduate exchange student is a 19-year-old Brazilian female previously enrolled in a high school in Brazil. The two long-term exchange students are a 20-year-old male student and a 21-year-old female student, both from France and enrolled in the same French business school prior to their exchange program. The three interviewees rated their Japanese level prior to enrolling Ritsumeikan APU as somewhere around JLPT 5 (basic level) or JLPT 4 (elementary level). However, the online semester they achieve before physically coming to Japan is different, as the first-year undergraduate experienced the semester of Fall 2020 online, while the two exchange students followed online classes during the Fall 2021 semester. The chart in Figure 5 helps clarify the data related to the three interviewees.

To ensure the privacy of the interviewees, their specific identity was not disclosed. The three interviewees have been assigned the coded names Student 1, Student 2 and Student 3 during the data coding process and their actual names will not be written in the data analysis and conclusions.

	Student 1 (St. 1)	Student 2 (St. 2)	Student 3 (St. 3)
Country	Brazil	France	France
Age	19	20	21
Sex	Female	Male	Female
Japanese Level	JLPT 5	JLPT 5	JLPT 4
Previous Enrollment	Brazilian High School	French Business School	French Business School
Online Semester	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2021

Figure 5 : Interviewees' data

4.3 Interview Process

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the three subjects, and follow-up questions to clarify the data obtained were realized a few times after the interviews. Recordings of the interviews were made to help with the transcription process and for further referencing and quoting of the interviewees' replies. Appendix 1 presents the questions asked to the students during the week they were interviewed (5th to 10th of December 2022).

No struggle related to the language skills of the participants was noted, as all the interviewees had proficient English skills prior to enrolling at Ritsumeikan APU. The interviews were realized without prior knowledge from the participants of the questions asked during the discussions. This lack of preparation from the interviewees allowed the researcher to have a meaningful conversation revolving around the questions asked during the interviews. The researcher gave ample time for the interviewees to collect their thoughts and, when needed, clarified or repeated the questions to be understood by the interviewees.

There was no need for a translator during the interviews. As the research is both fluent in Portuguese and French, transcription and translation of the few non-English words used during the interviews was relayed accurately. Finally, the interviewees were pleased that the researcher could understand the meaning of their thoughts though a careful listening of their replies and a keen observation of their behavioral responses.

5 Data Analysis

This chapter will present observations and results provided by the analysis of the data collected during the interviews. This analysis follows Ward et al.'s ABC theoretical framework and provide a reply to the open research question established in this study. The analysis of the data will be presented objectively, directly quoting replies from the international students gathered during the interview process. Nevertheless, and for obvious reasons of privacy protection of each of them, the personal details/data will be omitted.

Following the IPA framework of data analysis during the coding process, the data collected was divided into category themes related to the international students' acculturative feelings and experiences. The main themes created while processing the data are the affective, behavioral, and cognitive issues faced by international students during their six-month online semester studying at Ritsumeikan APU.

Three different moments were considered in the emotional/affective approach:

- when the interviewees first learned about the conduct of their upcoming semester through an online setting.
- during their whole semester's experience.
- at the end of the semester, when they entered Japan due to a lift of the travel ban.

As for the behavioural approach, the most important thing was to understand in what way the international students tried to create new frienships online during the semester spent in Ritsumeikan APU.

The cognitive approach information related to the reaction of each of the interviewed students to online classes in Ritsumeikan APU, mainly for three subjects:

- the unwinding of online classes in a Japanese setting.
- the use of different languages to adapt to a new environment.
- the feeling of integration of the students into Ritsumeikan APU's community.

5.1 Affective factors: International students' feelings during their online semester

5.1.1 At the beginning of the semester

The three students interviewed all felt disappointed when knowing that their upcoming travel to Japan was suspended indefinitely at that time. Coming to study in Japan at Ritsumeikan APU was perceived differently by the three interviewees, nonetheless always in a positive manner such as "a dream come true" (St. 1), an "objective" (St. 2), and a "wonderful opportunity" (St. 3). Learning that the upcoming semester classes in a foreign university will be given online, however, didn't faze any of the three students due to a previous experience of online classes in their home country (Brazil and France). As Student 2 described the situation:

> "Normally, I was supposed to come to [Ritsumeikan] APU a year
>
> before,because of the way the [exchange] program is supposed to be built.

So it was already pushed back and there were already talks about online

classes for a long time. So I was pretty prepared for it."

The reality of online classes due to the Covid-19 pandemic was already assimilated by the international students before their enrollment in Ritsumeikan APU, either as a freshman (St. 1) or a long-term exchange student (St. 2, St. 3).

The three international students interviewed decided to discard the possibility of deferring or further delaying their studies at Ritsumeikan APU due to several reasons, such as a dialogue with parents pushing the choice of taking online classes (St. 1), a will to reach the work force as soon as possible (St. 2), or a need to repay a student loan (St. 3). Even if different causes pushed the international students to accept the possibility of taking online classes at Ritsumeikan APU, a general feeling during this decision was noted and best described by Student 3:

"I just accepted my faith. I sticked with my decision the whole semester

and didn't change."

The hope of coming to Japan as soon as possible helped the three interviewees in their choice of taking the classes online. Quoting Student 3:

"I had the hope at the beginning for online classes to be until October so it

was fine. I thought it would be just a month. I thought I would be coming

for my birthday in October to do it in Japan."

Students 1 and 2 described similar points of views of "wasted time with online classes" previously to their acceptance and start of their program at Ritsumeikan APU and a feeling of "business as usual" compared to the few semesters they experienced in their home countries. The feelings of the interviewees slowly transitioned from disappointment to stress, sadness, and depression when the situation they thought to be ending quickly transitioned into a full six-month online experience.

5.1.2 During the semester

An overall feeling of disorientation and lack of motivation was noted from the three interviewees as the months went by during the six-month online semester at Ritsumeikan APU. The three international students noted that the lack of motivation directly impacted their academic results and their attempts of creating new bounds with fellow international classmates in the Japanese university.

The three interviewees pointed the timezone difference with Japan as a "killer of academic results" (St. 1). Since France and Brazil carry respectively an eight and twelve-hour time difference with Japan, online classes provided by Ritsumeikan APU were given during nighttime in these countries. This time difference was a major handicap on creating an environment suitable for long sessions of studying for international students, pointed by similar comments from two of them:

> "I had to take classes at midnight, at the time when everyone in my house was sleeping. Since my house is small, I couldn't speak loudly and had to stay in my room all the time due to the lights for my parents." (St. 1)

"My house had some problems with the lights at night during the classes,

so I had to use a very small desk lamp to follow eight hours of classes, it

was a bad environment." (St. 3).

This lack of a suitable study place had negative effects on the focus of Students 1 and 3 during the classes, qualified as "hard to follow" (St. 3.).

Student 2 found an original solution to the timezone issue during the middle of the online semester spent at Ritsumeikan APU. With a friend following online classes in another Japanese university, he decided to rent an AirBnb in Seoul, Korea for three months in order to cope with the time difference and find stability in his life. Reducing the time difference helped him create a feeling of social life in Korea with the possibility to go out and enjoy restaurants at the same time as his acquaintances in the country (St. 2). This student also noted a brightening of his mood while being close to the Japanese timezone, as he restarted doing hobbies he quitted during his three-month online period in France due to a lack of time and motivation (St. 2).

Students 1 and 3 didn't had any possibility of reducing the timezone difference like Student 2 did, creating a feeling of separation and loneliness even while being in the same country as their close friends. Student 3, particularly, entered a phase of depression due to "a lack of passion, the timezone difference, and few social interactions with friends" (St. 3). This depression hampered her psychological well-being and the relationships between the different people living in her house (St. 3).

The feeling of loneliness felt by the three interviewees was accentuated when fellow classmates from the same French exchange program and Brazilian timezone dropped out of the classes during the online semester at Ritsumeikan APU. As Students 1 and 3 stated:

"The other Brazilians who started at the same time and helped me through the semester ended up dropping out of [Ritsumeikan] APU." (St. 1)

"Some people gave up, they were officially on the classes but they just didn't show up for the whole semester." (St. 3.).

Watching classmates drop out of classes had a negative impact on the psychological state of mind of the ones who decided to stay (St. 3). This negative well-being was felt by the international students until the end of their online semester at Ritsumeikan APU.

5.1.3 At the end of the semester

The three international students interviewed felt relief when news about the opening of Japanese borders was issued at the end of their online semester (St. 1, 2, 3). Closing the time difference with Japan and enjoying the Japanese culture were the two main points noted during the interview to explain their feeling of relief.

The interviewees' replies on the overall feeling and description of their experience of the online classes all coincide in describing their first semester at Ritsumeikan APU as "one of the most challenging times of my life" (St. 1). The timezone differences, the decrease of academic performances, the lack of social interactions and the feeling of overall fatigue and laziness took a toll on the well-being of the students, with some of the aftereffects still felt a year after finishing their semester. For example, Student 3 reported

still having some psychological difficulties to adapt to hybrid-learning academic methods and decided to consult the university's psychologist to help her transition to a new social and academic environment.

5.2 Behavioral factors: Friendships and the lack of social interactions in an online setting

5.2.1 Interactions with local friends

An important part of the psychological well-being of the international students come from the support of friends and families during the transition to a new environment and the acculturation process. Students 1, 2 and 3 all relied on the emotional support of their local friends to help them during the hard times of the adaptation to late-night, Japanese-style classes. While Students 1 and 2 used extensively social networks to connect with their friends during the online semester, Student 3, who describes herself as "less sociable" (St. 3) used social networks with the same frequency as pre-pandemic.

Social networks helped the three students to keep in contact with their friends while they were adapting to night classes even if their schedules were different. Student 2 quoted that:

> "Since my schedule was the opposite of them, I was sending messages
>
> during the night and they replied during the day. We were never online at
>
> the same moment, so there was no direct interactions."

However, Student 2 was pretty accustomed to it as he had hobbies such as gaming, which needs to interact online with their friends players. For Student 2:

"I've always been into online and games. So I'm really used to talking with

my friends, mainly through a voice chat. Even my real-life close friends.

Most of the time when I was in France I was still talking to them through

game chats and discords". (St. 2)

The level of adaptation to online interactions was however different for Students 1 and 3 who preferred face-to-face interactions with their local friends. Student 3 managed to meet another French international student studying online at Ritsumeikan APU during the semi-lockdown in France and connected to her, but the interactions with a single student were not considered as enough for her:

"She was very nice and kind, but one person is not enough to do a social

life." (St. 3).

The family support and help of the local community helped Student 1 through the hardships of online classes' adaptation. Student 1 described herself as "very sociable and extrovert" (St. 1) who participated in the church's community every weekend even during the semi-lockdown in Brazil and considered this place as one of the only meeting points to relax and connect due to the inverted schedule. She also could count on the support of her mother to endure long hours of online classes in the same room:

"Sometimes my mom woke up at 3 a.m., and she started cooking my

favourite food to support me during the classes. I couldn't leave the class

in the middle, so I was very grateful."

Student 3 had the same kind of emotional support from her boyfriend, which she deemed as "essential" in the adaptation to her online classes setup. The support of their

local friends was an important factor of the three international students' adaptation to Ritsumeikan APU's online classes, but as the months of online classes passed, interactions with other students registered at the Japanese university were noticed.

5.2.2 New relationships between international students

Social interactions and friendships with other international students were experienced by the three interviewees during their six-month online semester in a Japanese environment. These interactions took time to happen as the students didn't know each other prior to their enrollment in Ritsumeikan APU. Interactions with other international students happened during the semester as the three interviewees met and grew accustomed to familiar faces in smaller-setting classes such as the Japanese language-learning ones (17 students per class maximum).

The three students interviewed perceived their friendships with other international students encountered in a different way. While Students 1 and 3 ended up bonding as time passed with international students who became their closest friends inside the academic institution through the Japanese language-learning classes, Student 2 felt friendships resulting from an online semester setting as described:

> "I missed the aspect of going out with friends to do activities or going out
>
> to the restaurant, which is something that I love to do normally and I
>
> couldn't really do it with them [the international students] obviously. So it
>
> was only speaking and it felt a little bit like we were just creating

friendships from being united in suffering [the online classes] in a way. So

it wasn't a natural friendship." (St. 2)

As Student 2 was still used to interacting with classmates and friends online due to his hobbies, he participated in group talks in applications such as Discord to keep in touch with his Japanese language-learning classmates. However, after his arrival in Japan at the end of his online semester, he lost contact with his former classmates to create healthier friendships coming from face-to-face interactions on campus (St. 2).

Discord servers to connect international students outside of the classes were created and helped the three interviewees in gathering some information about the academic requirements of the classes throughout the semester, but the interviewees reported being overwhelmed by the timezone difference to use it constantly (St. 1, 2, 3). Student 1 reported the activity in this message application as follows:

"They [The international students] used to chat a lot on Discord and these

things. I was like, I think the environment is really friendly. I was included

in some groups and they watch movies online together. However, my mind

wasn't on making friends because I wanted to sleep too much after

finishing my assignments."

Student 3 had a different mindset about creating friendships compared to Student 1 and 2. Seeing repeatedly the same international students over and over again in the same classes allowed her to feel at ease with her new acquaintances who turned into great friends:

"I make friends in general by seeing the same person over and over and over again. So, at some point I get to know them with online classes. At some point I try to, like, talk to them outside of class, but it always felt very weird. Actually, one of my best friends now, I did try to talk with her first. She thought, oh, she really want to be friends with me, in the sense that I kind of sounded desperate." (St. 3).

Interactions with other international students, while perceived differently depending on the interviewee, helped them overall to create social interactions through an online setting while attending classes at Ritsumeikan APU. However, interaction with the host culture and Japanese students were considered as lacking by the three interviewees (St. 1, 2, 3).

5.2.3 Lack of possibilities with native Japanese students

Friendships and interactions with native students of the host culture is perceived as an important step to assimilate in a foreign culture. Native students can help the newcomers with the language, the customs and in general, in the successful conduct of everyday life.

The three interviewed students, however, never managed to connect with Japanese students during the online classes. Their interactions with this particular group of students are described as "nonexistent, or close to nonexistent" (St. 3). The three interviewees all shared classes with Japanese students, but the number of students was too large to permit

any meaningful interaction with them. The three students also noted that, during online smaller groupworks, Japanese students seemed to be more shy and less talkative than the other Asian or international students, denying the possibility of follow-up contacts and messages after the end of the shared work or classes.

The interactions with Japanese students outside classes follow the same pattern, as Japanese students were perceived as "a bit disconnected to us [the international students]" (St. 1). Student 2 tried to interact with some Japanese students met during his Japanese foundation classes as Teaching Assistants, but the messages between them quickly ended :

> "I didn't meet many Japanese students during my online semester. They were in the Japanese Foundation class, it's like two or three classes during the whole semester. So you don't get to know them. I added some on Instagram but it doesn't mean much." (St. 2)

A lack of overall interactions with native students was perceived as a "letdown" (St. 1), as the international students were curious of the Japanese culture and the possibilities offered by talking to the native students. The lack of interactions with Japanese students had a negative impact on the integration to Ritsumeikan APU's community, as the three interviewees felt that the environment they were connected to was mostly conducted in an English setting.

5.3 Cognitive factors: The adaptation to a new learning environment

5.3.1 Online classes in a Japanese environment

The adaptation to online classes proposed by a foreign university and taught in a new environment brought confusion to the three interviewees. While most of the applications used to follow online classes at Ritsumeikan APU were the same as the ones used in France and Brazil (Zoom and Microsoft Outlook), the teaching style proposed at Ritsumeikan APU differs. For Student 2, Ritsumeikan APU professors are more open to discussions inside the class, and students are given the possibility to interact online and ask questions, either through the chatbox discussion or by "raising their hand" via the Zoom buttons.

The three interviewees all pointed out that some classes and professors were more adapted to an online style of teaching compared to others. For example, Student 2 took business and entrepreneurship classes as part of his major at Ritsumeikan APU. He felt that the classes in his major were given in an appropriate manner due to his adaptation and the professor's acknowledgment of his situation:

> "I bought a graphic tablet, so I could take notes on it and use the PDFs given in the class more freely. I had a good feeling of the online business classes and, if I have the chance nowadays, I always decide to take my business classes online during course registration." (St. 2)

However, the adaptation to online classes didn't happen for Students 1 and 3, as they struggled to stay focused on most of the classes, including the ones on their preferred topics. As Student 3 mentioned:

> "I, personally, cannot concentrate more than five minutes in an online class. I can love the class. I can love the subject. I can love the teacher at some point but I will not be able to stay focused even if they try to talk to me at some point. I feel like I'm talking to a computer program when I take online classes. So I need to focus way more my energy to be able to interact during the class." (St. 3).

This lack of focus led to an overall feeling of laziness and tiredness impacting the grades of the interviewees for a long period of time. The three interviewees saw their results dropping during their semester online, as stated by Students 1, 2 and 3:

> "My GPA as of today is still impacted by the online semester classes' results. I can only choose classes in the second registration period a year after it finished. I am working hard to try to erase these results." (St. 1).

> "I never failed classes in university before. And this semester was the first time I was failing classes. Actually, I failed nearly all of them. But I took these classes again after arriving to Japan the next semester, and I got really good grades." (St. 2).

> "I think I missed some deadlines. I didn't review my classes. I didn't try to learn things. I just had terrible grades. I didn't work outside of classes because I was too tired." (St. 3).

The drop in academic results added stress in an already stressful environment and did not help the integration of the interviewees to a Japanese academic online environment. Student 2 made efforts to relax, but his concerns about academic results impede his efforts:

"I tried to relax to let off some of the pressure. But I couldn't because of the credits obviously. So I still have the pressure of succeeding my classes but having zero motivation to go through them." (St. 2)

The higher education process in Ritsumeikan APU pushed students to do groupwork in order to submit essays and presentations. However, the three interviewees all felt disappointed while trying to communicate with their groupmates, leading them to work on the projects assigned by the professors by themselves (St. 1, 2, 3). This lack of communication added more homework to an already difficult schedule. The language-learning classes, specifically, were considered the hardest due to the adaptation to a new online teaching style and a heavy workload (St. 1, 2, 3).

5.3.2 Use of new languages in a foreign online environment

Social and academic life in Ritsumeikan APU requires a proficient use of English to communicate with staff members, teachers and fellow classmates. The use of English wasn't considered as a burden for the interviewees, as they had a strong understanding of the language prior to their enrollment in Ritsumeikan APU. Student 2 explained his prior knowledge of English as a result of classes taken in his business school in France:

"English wasn't the problem as half of the classes of my business school in France were given in English. Transitioning to a full-English speaking environment was smooth in my case." (St. 2).

As for Students 1 and 3, communicating in English was perceived as a natural part of studying in a foreign university, as this language was the most commonly spoken to communicate with classmates (St. 1, 3).

However, the three students pointed difficulties concerning the learning of Japanese language. The three interviewees had a first contact with Japanese language prior to their enrollment in Ritsumeikan APU, either through family connections (St. 1) or Japanese learning opportunities provided by their business school in France (St. 2, 3). This previous knowledge of the basics of Japanese language permitted the three students to be sorted in Japanese-learning classes corresponding their current level instead of restarting from a beginners' status.

Ritsumeikan APU has a policy of teaching mandatory Japanese-learning classes for every undergraduate student freshly enrolled either through the full-undergraduate 4-year license or during the duration of the exchange program. The three interviewees followed these classes during their online semester, and their statements pointed out the difficulties of learning a language through online means:

"Japanese-learning classes were smaller [student-wide], so we could create discord groups to help each other if we didn't understand something during

the class. But the classes were getting harder and my motivation dropped because of the increasing online workload that was more demanding than other classes." (St. 1).

"I didn't learn a language for a long time when I took the Japanese Foundation classes. Learning a language means that you need to have high motivation, even more when it's online. The environment in the classes was nice because they were smaller [compared to business classes], but the amount of work, the quizzes and the need to be focused all the time for every little thing made this course the most difficult to follow during the semester." (St. 2).

"I had a background since I studied Japanese a bit [in the French business school]. So the first quarter of the online semester wasn't as terrible for me compared to my other friends taking the same class. When I started to learn new things in the second quarter it was too difficult. Leaning new kanjis at 8 a.m. after having classes with no break since 0:45 a.m. due to the time difference killed my enthusiasm." (St. 3).

The three students shared another common point related to the Japanese-learning classes during the interviews. The lack of interactions with Japanese students in their everyday online classes gave them a sense of complacency about the use of English, as they felt they didn't need to practice their newly learned Japanese sentences to communicate with other international students (St. 2, 3). Since most of the interactions between the interviewees and Ritsumeikan APU's community were realized in English, the process of acclimatation and participation into online groups and circles was facilitated as long as their motivation pushed them to participate to online events.

5.3.3 Feeling of integration into Ritsumeikan APU's community

Participating in activities outside classes is considered as an important part of socialization during the university's life of a student. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, these interactions transitioned from a usual, face-to-face standard to a full-online setting.

Adjusting to a different process of online interactions to participate in Ritsumeikan APU campus' life revealed itself to be one of the most challenging outcomes pointed by the three interviewees. The three students were aware that some online events such as workshops, online meetings shaped as gathering parties and cultural weeks were realized during their online semester, but the time difference prevented them to join these events:

> "Since these events were set after or during classes, I was just thinking of
>
> sleeping after the tiring classes and never participate in anything." (St. 1).

However, Student 3 had enough motivation to join the online activities of an APU circle depending on the workload and the days of the week the meetings were held. The interviewee described the meetings as "fun and interesting due to the different backgrounds of the people involved in the club" (St. 3).

The overall lack of participation from the three interviewees to online events provided by Ritsumeikan APU's community and the abundant use of English in a Japanese university created mixed feelings of appurtenance to the university's social sphere:

"I would have not noticed if it was anywhere else in the world. It wouldn't have been different at all. If it was a university in Germany giving Japanese classes it would have been the exact same. I didn't feel anything from the Japanese experience online, both from what I expected and from what I noticed after arriving in Japan." (St. 2).

"I had class as a APU student all the time, but at the same time, I wasn't physically in the university. I cannot describe that. It's kind of a weird feeling." (St. 3)

However, these feelings changed when the three students arrived in Japan after they finished their online semester due to the opening of Japanese borders to international travel. Student 2 best resumed this situation:

"Outside of [Ritsumeikan] APU, just having an online link didn't really change anything, whereas being on campus, I could experience their [the Japanese] culture in physical ways, such as things like food or doing activities that they [the Japaneses] usually do in their country. I finally felt I was part of a different community than my usual French one." (St. 2).

Experiencing the culture firsthand shaped another perspective of Ritsumeikan APU's community into the imaginary of the three interviewees, something that wasn't possible to realize with an online setting.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the analysis of three interviews conducted on international students enrolled in a Japanese university offered a perspective on their adaptation and acculturation process during a six-month semester period. Their replies have been valuable for answering the research question and created a narrative in this thesis. Using the ABC framework to frame the replies allowed the results and the data analysis to be clear in terms of understanding the feelings felt by the students during their online semester and reflected during the interviews. The information collected and the results of this study would be useful for two different purposes. The first purpose will be a preemptive one, as this research can influence international students to choose to study online in a foreign environment for a long period of time. This thesis also contributes to the academic field by studying how international students adapt to online classes in a foreign context while using a well-developed framework for new purposes.

Using Ward et al.'s (2001) ABC framework to analyze the data gathered from the interviews has revealed to be a benefit and a difficulty at the same time. The most important issue noticed while analyzing the data was to make a differentiation between the data collected concerning the adaptation of the interviewees to the online classes and their acculturation into a foreign environment. Since most of the literature using the ABC framework used this model in order to understand the acculturation process of the international students physically living in another country, adapting the model to allow a data analysis on international students following online classes turned out to be challenging. However, the three aspects of the ABC theory (affective, behavioral, cognitive) allowed to make clear distinctions during the data coding process, which reflects on the data analysis part of this thesis.

The results of the data analysis showed that the reduced social interactions and the impact of timezones directly influenced the international students' ABC domains of adaptation. Having less interactions with other international and host country students reduced the opportunities for knowledge transmission and integration into Ritsumeikan APU's community. International students perceived the situation as emotionally demanding at the beginning when the pandemic impede their travel to Japan. Important decisions such as the continuation of their studies online had to be made. The adaptation to a foreign online setting was realized with little information from the Japanese government and with broad guidelines from Ritsumeikan APU. Students felt relieved at the end of their online experience considered as a negative one for their social life and academic results. A main contribution of this study is to highlight how international students were deprived of access to cultural knowledge of the host country as well as the awareness resulting of face-to-face social interactions. The sudden appearance of the Covid-19 pandemic showed how vulnerable social and academic relations can be in times of crisis and demonstrate their importance to higher education institutions.

Limitations for this study revolved around two points. The first one was the number of interviewees gathered in order to collect data. The three students interviewed gave ample information further analyzed, which turned out to be a great asset in the comprehension of the data collected. Nevertheless, a larger number of interviewees could be used to confirm that the feelings and replies given by a few students will be shared more broadly. Especially, interviewing students living in areas and countries geographically closer to Japan would allow to understand if the online experience at Ritsumeikan APU was perceived as positive or negative, as this group of students will not be affected by a large timezone difference impacting their daily online academic life.

Concerning the ABC framework, although it is not mentioned as a fourth factor in the acculturation process, there might be another aspect to be considered as relevant for the adaptation of international students to a foreign setting. The impact that the working and learning environment has on every individual has showed through this thesis to be an important factor of the adaptation process of the students. For example, Student 2 decided to travel to change his timezone difference, thus permitting him to enjoy a more stable environment leading to a social life during the pandemic. As a proposition to update the understanding of the framework, the environmental factor should be studied with more accuracy to grasp the thoughts of the subjects going to a sociocultural transition process during their lives.

For future directions on the same research topic, the researcher will recommend to study the comparison between the perception of an online academic semester realized by international students in a foreign environment and their feelings and thoughts during an academic semester followed physically on the campus of the foreign university after their online experience. Allowing a comparison could allow researchers and universities to adapt their teaching methods and online contents to reach the most trustful experience of an academic life in a foreign environment through online means. The development of this research will prove a challenge for universities aiming to restart their internationalization process and can help future studies on topics related to interactions and transition between real and virtual mobility.

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8. Appendix

8.1 Questionnaire

<u>Introduction data</u>

1. What is your name?

2. How old are you?

3. What is your gender?

4. What is your country/university of origin?

5. What is your major?

6. What is your Japanese/English level?

7. When did you arrive in APU? For how long did you choose to follow online classes in APU?

<u>Interview part</u>

1. How did you react to the transition to online classes?

   1.1. What did you feel when you acknowledged classes were going to be online?

   1.2. Where were you at that moment?

   1.3. Were you in a certain way attending that announcement?

   1.4. How did you cope with the uncertainty of the situation mostly concerning its duration?

   1.5. What was your decision? Did you postpone for a bit or accept online classes immediately?

   1.6. Have you considered interrupting your academic program for a while?

1.7. What measures were you forced to take to follow online classes? (computer, find calm local/accommodation, ….)?

1.8. Did you take it as a challenge? Why?

2. How did you manage to adapt to online classes?

2.1. Did you change your everyday life / lifestyle? In which way? (New timetable, more alone, …)

2.2. Did you miss face-to-face interactions?

2.3. Were you comfortable with this situation? Were you sad/happy?

2.4. How did you adapt your usual study method to this new situation?

2.5. Has your motivation slipped away? How did you cope with it?

2.6. Did online classes change your academic performances?

2.7. How satisfied were/are you with these online classes?

2.8. Do you think online classes are harder to follow than presential ones?

2.9. Did you have connectivity problems?

2.10. How difficult was it for you to attend classes alone?

3. How did you interact with others?

3.1. Was it difficult to make friends?

3.2. How and how often did you talk with your professors/administrative and academic staff?

3.3. Which were the main difficulties you find? Language/communication, separation, isolation ….?

3.4. Did you try to exchange with students from other country than yours?

3.5. Did you feel that you belonged into APU's community?

3.6. What changed in your social behavior? Example: find new hobbies ….

3.7. What did you do when you didn't understand a lesson and wanted more explanations?

3.8. How would you describe the relationship with your professors?

4. What about your extracurricular activities?

   4.1. Did you find your life more sedentary?

   4.2. Did you feel the need to go out and do some sport?

   4.3. Could you appreciate Japanese culture through online means provided by APU?

   4.4. Did you think the efforts needed to follow online classes overtook your spare time?

   4.5. Did you change your habits in social networks? I mean spend more or less time (describe your interactions).

5. What do you think online classes brought you?

   5.1. Were you able to follow (easily) online classes? Did you expect it?

   5.2. Do you think you acquired new capacities? Which ones?

   5.3. How challenging was this type of learning (online classes) for you?

   5.4. Do you feel more confident, autonomous, independent after following this experience?

   5.5. Would you like to renew this experience in another country?

6. How can you describe your feelings before and during this experience?

   6.1. Before: what motivated you to come to APU?

   6.2. What made you accept to follow online classes?

6.3. Did you have any stereotypes about online classes? Which ones?

6.4. Do you perceive online classes differently now?

6.5. Would you recommend online classes to your friends?

6.6. What was the best and worst point about studying online?

6.7. Did you feel your personality changing during your experience?

7. How would you describe your online classes experience overall?

7.1. Like/dislike

7.2. Other Remarks