



PTAS Project Report (for SMALL PROJECT GRANTS)

Project Title: J-YAP Inter-University Support Project - how did alternative online tuition on a “virtual year abroad” affect students’ motivation to learn about language and culture?

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The global pandemic of COVID-19 has had an immediate and acute impact on the Year Abroad (YA). This project investigated the impact on UoE students on the Japanese degree programmes of (1) alternative tuition - the new inter-institutional tuition organised by the participating Japanese YA Coordinators ([J-YAP Inter-University Support Programme: IUSP](#)) and (2) online Japanese language classes provided by Japanese universities. 10 of the 14 third-year students participated in IUSP.

Data Collection Methods

Five of the 15 third-year students answered the questionnaire after Semester 1 2020. Four of them volunteered to take a follow-up interview in May 2021. In the interview they were asked to comment on which learning arrangements had an impact on learning.

Main Findings

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1. Various new inter-institutional online sessions offered by IUSP in the UK had a positive impact on students.

 2. Lacking the opportunity to have an in-person YA in Japan caused anxiety about their study for their degrees, even though all the students had the chance to take online tuition from Japanese universities (see graph below).

 3. The different semester periods between UoE and Japan tended not to be taken into consideration in UoE's YA emergency plans, e.g., the policy viable for UoE's S2 was not applicable to Spring semester in Japan.

 4. Students' motivation for learning Japanese increased when they started Japanese universities' online courses and remained high until the end of November 2020.

 5. Japan's closure of its border in December 2020 affected some students' motivation, while others remained motivated in April 2021.

 6. Students feel they benefited from online tuition to improve their language skills.

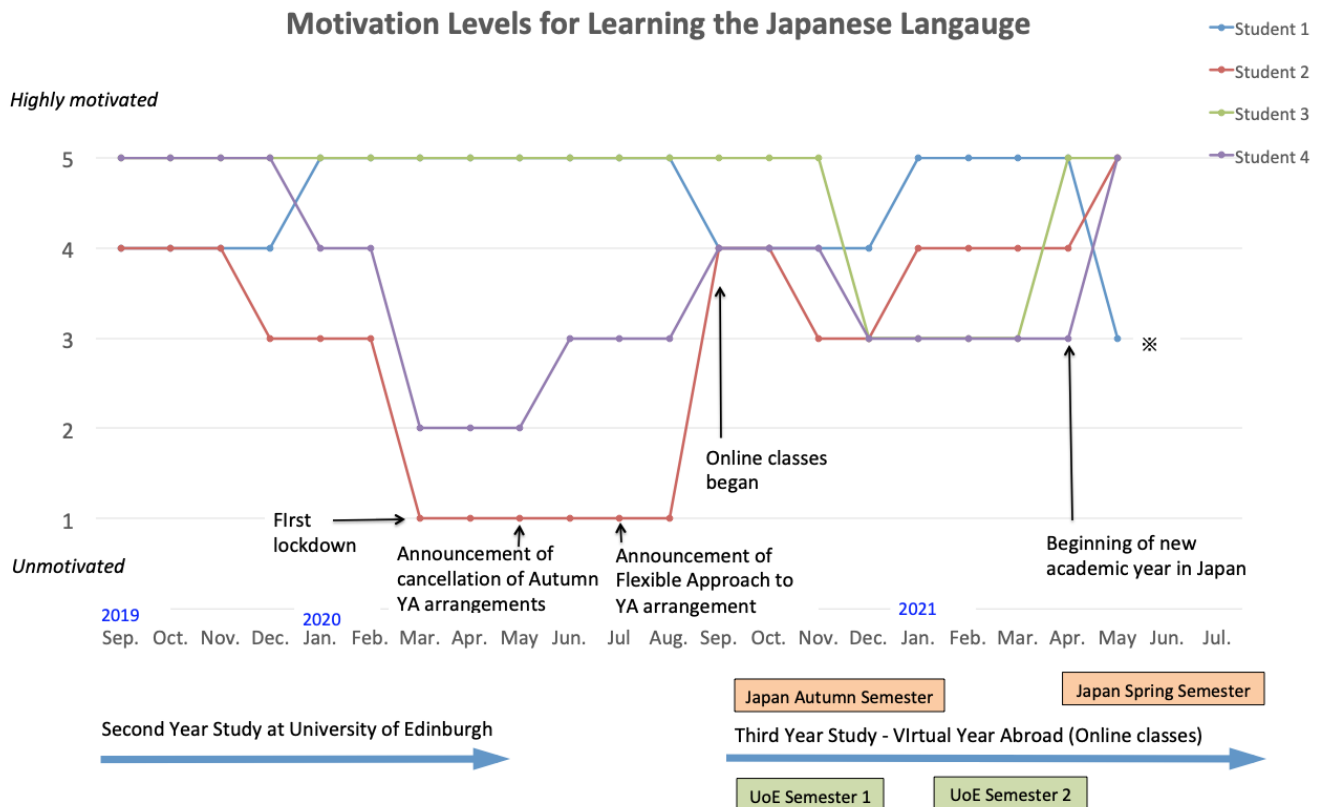
 7. Time difference (8-9 hours) made online classes difficult to take.

 8. All the interviewees appreciated online social events. However, lack of social interaction with classmates was one of the top concerns in the virtual YA.

 9. No formal teaching of Japanese culture was included in the virtual YA, but students were still able to learn through various materials and daily interaction with teachers and Japanese students.
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10. The participation rate of IUSP sessions by UoE students was high when they were not attending Japanese universities' classes during the spring break at Japanese universities (February to end of March).



※ Due to illness, this student's motivation decreased in May.

Summary

All the interviewees had a tough time accepting COVID-19 realities because of their huge disappointment at the total loss of their long-awaited life experience in Japan. Despite the negative impact on their motivation, they eventually overcame the turmoil and ended the virtual YA study in high spirits, appreciating the assistance from the teachers abroad and at home.



Given the difficulty caused by the time difference, more careful consideration is required when planning online tuition with institutions in different time zones.

The format of this pilot virtual YA could be extended to other language degrees with YA, if there are other participating institutions.

These findings have been shared among Japanese Studies colleagues, and we are planning to disseminate them within the university, among IUSP project members and possibly at external conferences in relevant fields.
