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Developing Multicultural Intergroup Dialogue at a Japanese University: Toward Sustainable and Holistic International Student Support

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ABSTRACT: *While Japanese universities have adopted intercultural collaborative learning (ICL) to promote holistic international student support, ICL often lacks a social justice framework necessary for sustainable and equitable practices. This study addresses this gap by integrating intergroup dialogue (IGD)—a social justice pedagogy—into ICL. It examines how international and domestic students raise awareness of diversity, equity, and sustainability issues by participating in multicultural IGD at a Japanese university. We co-developed a workshop with a company and conducted interviews. The findings revealed that IGDs empowered international students and affirmed their identities, increased domestic students' critical consciousness, and improved advocacy attitudes while addressing challenges in institutional change. This study calls for a shift toward more holistic and sustainable international student support aligned with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.*

Keywords: diversity and inclusion, intergroup dialogue, international students, Japanese higher education, social justice, student support, sustainability

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education is crucial to advancing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4, which promotes inclusive and equitable quality education for all (Ashida, 2023; Filho et al., 2024; Ramaswamy et al., 2021; Schreiber et al., 2023). In alignment with the core commitment of the SDGs to "leave no one behind," scholars have explored how higher education institutions can promote diversity, equity, and sustainability through the creation of inclusive campuses for international students (Ramaswamy et al., 2021).

Japanese higher education institutions have seen increased and diverse international student populations. According to the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act, international students refer to foreign nationals granted the "student" (*ryugaku*) status of residence who are enrolled in education at the primary, secondary, or postsecondary level (Ministry of Justice, 2023). This article uses the term international students to refer to foreign-born students who hold the "student" status of residence and study at Japanese universities. The increase in the population of international students has been driven by various government initiatives to internationalize higher education, including the Plan to Host 300,000 International Students in 2008, the Project for Promotion of Global Human Resource Development (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2012), and the Top Global University project initiated in 2014 (Yamamoto, 2018; Yonezawa et al., 2009). However, government-led attempts to increase international student enrollment have not been accompanied by adequate expansion or quality assurance of support services. Scholars have criticized these policies for being driven by economic nationalism (Kariya, 2018), lacking sufficient planning for high-quality education and an inclusive environment, resulting in inadequate support mechanisms for international students (Onishi, 2016).

Scholars have documented that international students experience a range of challenges, including language barriers, financial issues, and psychological struggles related to relationships with domestic students and feelings of foreignness (Onishi, 2016; Taniguchi et al., 2022). In response, research and practice have explored support to address the individual needs of international students; however, a holistic and systematic approach has been overlooked. This approach is essential for enhancing the quality of international student support and ensuring its sustainability. In this context, sustainability entails a bottom-up

approach to support, in which various actors can respond to the challenges international students face in a cyclical, context-sensitive manner, grounded in the understanding that their root causes lie in the university's institutional culture.

Onishi (2016), a leading scholar in international student support, posited that merely responding to international students' individual needs is insufficient and argued that universities must adopt a holistic and systematic approach to internationalize the entire campus and foster inclusion. She noted that institutions should radically change the power imbalances between the host country and international students, as well as the central–peripheral relations between domestic and international students. This transformation requires rethinking the necessary skills and attitudes of college stakeholders (i.e., faculty, staff, and students), creating culturally relevant curricula and campus environments, and promoting campus-wide partnerships among said stakeholders (Roberts & Ammigan, 2024; Veerasamy & Raby, 2024). Rather than adopting a separatist approach—isolating international students from the broader student body—Japanese higher education institutions must embrace an integrationist approach that fosters meaningful interaction among international students, domestic students, and other multiple stakeholders (Taniguchi et al., 2022). Briefly, making international student support sustainable requires a comprehensive approach that engages all stakeholders in higher education.

In recent years, scholars and practitioners have examined the possibilities and challenges of intercultural collaborative learning (ICL), which could be a critical path for promoting holistic international student support (Sakamoto et al., 2017). Suematsu (2019a), a leading scholar of international education and ICL in Japan, defined ICL as follows:

> […] the learning experience where students with different language and cultural backgrounds share, understand, and accept diverse thoughts and values through meaningful interaction, and create new values while reinterpreting themselves. (p. iii)

This approach involves the internationalization of the curriculum—incorporating international and intercultural aspects into both formal and informal curricula (Leask, 2015). ICL aims to deconstruct the decentralization of international students and bring about a holistic transformation in higher education. Scholars have examined and reflected on various ICL practices implemented at their universities. For example, adopting a project-based learning approach in a hybrid ICL course during the COVID-19 pandemic, Fudeuchi et al. (2022) reported that the course achieved a certain degree of learning effectiveness. Some ICL practices encourage students to conduct fieldwork outside their campus and bridge learning among international students, domestic students, and local residents (Murata, 2017; Sengoku & Nagata, 2020; Tokunaga & Imoto, 2017). Sengoku and Nagata (2020) introduced an ICL approach that incorporates community-based learning, drawing on community assets in the program. Furthermore, some instructors adopt creative strategies to address language barriers, which often hinder active collaborative learning and mitigate hierarchies of language proficiency among students (Yoshino, 2017). These strategies include

encouraging the use of multiple languages and nonverbal communication and incorporating teaching fellows or student advisors to support interaction and reduce language obstacles (Fudeuchi et al., 2022; Sakamoto et al., 2017; Yoshino, 2017).

While prior studies have revealed ICLs' positive impacts, such as enhancing perspective-taking and intercultural competence (Sakamoto et al., 2017), others have emphasized the lack of a robust social justice framework essential for sustainable and equitable practices. Scholars have not thoroughly examined how ICLs can increase students' critical awareness and action preparedness to promote diversity, equity, and sustainability in Japanese higher education. This study addresses this gap by incorporating the intergroup dialogue (IGD) framework, which has a history of more than 30 years in the United States. While IGD has been developed and implemented mainly in the United States, we believe that some of its components are informative for developing social-justice-oriented educational practices, combined with ICL, in Japanese higher education, where efforts to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) have recently gained momentum.

Japanese universities have begun to implement top-down initiatives to promote diversity and inclusion, in line with national legislation and policies, such as the Basic Act for Gender Equal Society (Gender Equity Bureau Cabinet Office, 1999), the Act for Eliminating Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, 2013), and the Act on Promotion of Public Understanding of Diversity of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, 2023). In Japan, diversity initiatives often focus on gender—e.g., reducing gender inequality and empowering women. In the context of higher education, supporting female faculty and increasing the number of female students in STEM fields are examples of such initiatives (Yoshida, 2018). Recently, universities have widened their targets from gender issues to diversity issues and have begun focusing on marginalized groups—e.g., LGBTQ+ students, students with disabilities, and international students.

Zúñiga et al. described IGD as "a form of democratic engagement that fosters communication, critical reflection, and collaborative action across cultural and social divides" (2012, p. 1). It is a social justice pedagogy in which people from various backgrounds gather to discuss their thoughts on social inequality and their feelings. According to Frantell et al. (2019), IGD is based on Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis—which posits that intergroup interactions result in positive relationships between people of various backgrounds—and critical multicultural education—which examines the privileged and oppressed structures surrounding and underpinning multicultural contexts. Typically, IGD groups focus on one social identity and engage with oppressed and privileged groups in interactive educational activities (Zúñiga et al., 2014). These dialogic interactions aim to deepen participants' understanding of each other's point of view, as opposed to fostering debate to convince others of a particular belief (Flick, 1998).

This article reflects on a collaborative project on multicultural issues involving IGD-infused ICL (multicultural IGD) that we developed between University A and Company B in Japan. Specifically, we examine how

international and domestic students increase their awareness of diversity, equity, sustainability issues, and action preparedness by participating in multicultural IGD. We propose that multicultural IGD can be an effective approach to crystallizing holistic international student support, per Onishi's (2016) appeal, as it not only supports international students but also empowers multiple actors to address the causes of the difficulties international students face.

BRIDGING ICL AND IGD FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

Scholars have reported ICLs' positive impacts on both domestic and international students, including perspective-taking, intercultural understanding, intercultural competence, critical thinking, self-efficacy, intercultural friendship-building, language acquisition, network-building for mutual support, and employability (Fudeuchi et al., 2022; Murata, 2017; Nishioka & Yashima, 2018; Sakamoto et al., 2017; Suematsu, 2019b). Specifically, scholars have argued that ICLs enhance intercultural competence by allowing students to utilize cultural diversity as a learning resource and to collaborate and colearn (Sakamoto et al., 2017).

Previous research has revealed the positive impact of IGD on students in higher education. For example, a nine-university collaborative study examining the effects and processes of IGD revealed that students' "awareness of inequality and its relationship to institutional and structural factors" and "identity engagement" increased through IGD participation (Nagda et al., 2009, p. 5). The effects of the IGD on raising critical consciousness and self-advocative attitudes have been reported in prior studies (Dessel et al., 2006; Zúñiga et al., 2012, 2014). These findings show that IGD practices influence participants' awareness and understanding of social structures, individuals, and their relationships. Moreover, growth in identity engagement can be beneficial for empowering socially marginalized students. An IGD program involving diverse racial backgrounds revealed that IGD encouraged racially minoritized students to value their racial identities, whereas their awareness of race-related oppression empowered them to resist hiding their cultural backgrounds and take transformative action (Ford & Malaney, 2012).

Another recurrent topic in the literature is the construction of relationships and alliances by taking others' perspectives and improving empathetic understanding. IGD practices can encourage students with majority identities to unlearn stereotypes toward other social groups and gain affirming perceptions (Frantell et al., 2019). Research on IGD between LGBTQ+ students and their heterosexual peers revealed that some heterosexual peers enhanced their empathy and perspective-taking vis-à-vis LGBTQ+ communities through dialogue, which enabled them to shift their perceptions toward LGBTQ+ communities. This empathetic perspective-taking led heterosexual students to engage in supportive behaviors, such as standing up against injustice, displaying pride symbols on their belongings, and engaging in political actions to support pro-LGBTQ+ policies (Dessel et al., 2013).

IGD also impacts skill development, specifically communication skills. Its practices encourage participants to engage in dialogues in which conflicts and

disagreements are likely to occur. Research has shown that while they were engaged in a conflicting dialogue, IGD participants learned alternative ways to communicate with people of different backgrounds and beliefs. Hess et al. (2010) studied a dialogue course for students with different political values and reported that students "discovered a mode of conversation previously unknown, including not fighting, exploring uncertain thoughts, and authentically sharing and listening," owing to the safety of the dialogue environment in which they were able to explore new ways of interaction (p. 159).

Both ICL and IGD can be understood as complementary pedagogical approaches that contribute to the cultivation of inclusive and transformative learning environments in higher education. While ICLs tend to emphasize mutual learning through intercultural exchange and the coconstruction of knowledge, incorporating the critical and justice-oriented dimensions of IGD—such as identity engagement and structural awareness—can address ICLs' seeming limitations in confronting systemic inequities. Synthesizing these approaches enables a more holistic development of students' intercultural competence, critical consciousness, and agency for social change, contributing to holistic international student support.

In addition to IGD, educational practices that focus on intergenerational dialogue have gained attention in recent years as similar approaches for fostering communication and perspective-taking skills. For example, in the field of education for environmental sustainability, participatory online workshops involving intergenerational dialogue among young people, teachers, and teacher educators have been implemented (Rushton et al., 2024). Rushton et al. (2024) demonstrated that intergenerational dialogue can shift participants' conceptual frameworks, allowing them to engage with complex environmental issues from nuanced and diverse perspectives. These findings suggest that, like IGD, intergenerational dialogue provides a meaningful dialogic space where learners can engage with differences—in this case, generational differences—to develop essential competencies for navigating diverse and complex societies.

Synthesizing ICL and IGD, we conceptualize IGD-infused ICL as a transformative learning model in which intercultural exchange is deepened through dialogic reflexivity with critical stances. While conventional ICL tends to emphasize the coconstruction of knowledge across cultural boundaries, the infusion of IGD introduces a critical dimension that enables learners to consider how social structures and positionalities shape intercultural encounters, empowering all participants to act transformatively. By incorporating an intergenerational approach, IGD-infused ICLs informed the development of multicultural IGD.

METHODS

University A, one of the leading national research universities in Japan's greater metropolitan area, has a large international student population and has actively taken international initiatives. In recent years, the university has enrolled over 2,000 international students, most of whom are at the graduate level.

International students constitute approximately 10–15% of the total student population and originate from more than 100 countries and regions, with the largest group from East Asia. Recently, the university has promoted various DEI initiatives, such as developing guidelines on the inclusion of LGBTQ+ students and support systems for students with disabilities.

Since 2022, University A has partnered with Company B—the Japanese branch of a global company in which employees with diverse nationalities and international experience work—to develop a collaborative project on DEI issues. Company B has a strong interest in collaborating with universities to promote DEI issues in the workplace and society. By working with Company B, University A aims to incorporate international and intergenerational perspectives into its DEI efforts. Two faculty members (Tokunaga and Kawano) took the initiative in this project and held regular meetings with an employee overseeing the company's DEI initiatives.

We named this initiative the "*ibasho* project" after the Japanese indigenous concept of *ibasho*, which means "any place, space, and community where one feels comfortable, relaxed, calm, and feels accepted by surrounding people" (Tokunaga, 2018, p. 8). We aimed to explore the characteristics of college campuses and workplaces where students and employees from diverse backgrounds can feel a sense of *ibasho*. The project consisted of (1) a research component (developing a scale to measure belonging to universities and workplaces and examining IGD's impact) and (2) a practice component (developing IGD on DEI issues). In 2022, University A led two IGDs: a multicultural IGD, which is the focus of this article, and a gender/ability IGD on campus. In 2023, Company B took charge of the practice component and led two workshops in its office. This project was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the Institute of Human Sciences at the University of Tsukuba (approval no. T22-47).

Engaging graduate students was critical in this project. From 2022 to 2023, two graduate student collaborators, including Sawata, were involved in codesigning, cofacilitating, and coreflecting on the workshop, as well as analyzing data with faculty members. This collaborative approach aimed to promote meaningful student engagement to ensure the sustainability of the practice. This project design specifically addressed one of the common challenges in university-led programs: the reliance on and eventual depletion of institutional resources (e.g., faculty effort, budget). By distributing the effort of planning and implementation among students, we sought to build an enduring collaborative initiative between faculty and students. The long-term goal was to establish a self-sustaining cycle where workshop participants would transition into future codesigners and cofacilitators, thereby reducing the program's dependence on top-down administrative support and creating a continuous pipeline of experienced IGD practitioners.

Workshop Design and Participants

We codeveloped and conducted a multicultural IGD that focused on racial and ethnic discrimination against foreigners in Japan—specifically, the various barriers experienced by international and immigrant college students and foreign employees. We conducted a two-day workshop in August 2022, during which a group of international and Japanese college students from University A and employees from Company B participated in the IGD.

Four faculty members (including Tokunaga and Kawano), a company employee responsible for DEI, and two graduate students (including Sawata) constituted the core members of the IGD. We determined the number of participants based on prior IGD research, which indicated that IGD typically includes 12--18 participants (Zúñiga, 2012), ensuring that the attributes of students (domestic and international students), employees, and graduate student collaborators were balanced when they were divided into two groups for the workshop. Seven college students (two international and five Japanese) and four company employees (all Japanese) participated in the workshop over two days (Table 1).

Table 1: Student Participants

Role	Letter assigned to student	Student status	Age	Gender	N	FL
Undergraduate	A	International	20 s	W	China	Chinese
	B	Domestic	20 s	W	Japan	Japanese
	C	International	20 s	W	China	Chinese
	D	Domestic	20 s	M	Japan	Japanese
	E	Domestic	10 s	M	Japan	Japanese
	F	Domestic	20 s	W	Japan	Japanese
	G	Domestic	20 s	W	Japan	Japanese
Graduate student collaborators	H	International	20 s	W	Korea	Korean
	I	International	20 s	M	China	Chinese
	J	Domestic	20 s	M	Japan	Japanese

Note. W=woman, M=man, FL = First Language

The seven students voluntarily applied to participate via college announcements and faculty notifications at University A. They participated without compensation in the form of monetary payment or course credit, and their participation was independent of any university assessment. The four employees were recruited voluntarily following an internal company-wide announcement. The employees were all in their 40s and consisted of two men and two women.

We designed the workshop content on the basis of IGD's focus on "critical examination of social justice issues" (Zúñiga et al., 2014, p. 6). Prior to the workshop, the participants learned basic social justice concepts (e.g., oppression, privilege, and unconscious bias) and the social context of immigrants in Japan through e-learning. On the first day of the workshop, the participants engaged in a dialogue on three case studies—an immigrant college student (Case 1: Brazilian immigrant student), an international student (Case 2: Vietnamese international student), and a Japanese employee (Case 3: bilingual and bicultural Japanese employee)—focusing on the individual, systematic, and structural barriers hindering their success. Tokunaga developed Cases 1 and 2, drawing on her research, whereas a core member from Company B created Case 3 on the basis of her professional experiences. During lunchtime, we invited the CEO of Company B (who had lifelong international experience) to have an hour-long dialogue with the participants. On the second day, they engaged in dialogue and cocreated action plans to address these barriers and create a more diverse and inclusive college campus and workplace for problem-based learning (Table 2).

Table 2: Schedule and Contents of the Multicultural IGD Workshop

	DAY 1	DAY 2
AM	Check in, icebreaker Case study 1	Problem-based learning Sharing the central question: "What is needed for universities/workplaces to become environments where people of diverse nationalities and cultures can feel safe and fully demonstrate their abilities?" Identifying specific issues through group discussion
PM	Role model talk Case study 2 Case study 3	Problem-based learning Developing action plans to address the identified issues through group discussion Presentations and whole-group discussion, and feedback from instructors

Building on IGDs' emphasis on dialogue rather than debate or discussion, we value "engaged listening" (Zúñiga et al., 2012) and seek to develop "a safe, colearning environment" (Ford & Malaney, 2012, p. 31). To realize these aims, we established ground rules that emphasized respecting and learning from individual differences, viewing them as sources of new ideas and perspectives, and ensuring that all participants had opportunities to actively engage and contribute to the formation of constructive relationships. These principles were designed to cultivate an inclusive and dialogic learning environment that promoted mutual understanding and critical awareness among participants. As scholars emphasize facilitators' critical role in IGD (Frantell et al., 2019), graduate student facilitators promoted psychological safety in the workshop, asked reflective questions, and contributed to creating an equal relationship among diverse participants.

Data collection and data analysis

During the workshop, we recorded all the sessions, took field notes, conducted pre- and postsurveys, and carried out follow-up interviews with university participants. These materials served as the primary data sources for the applied research.

For the analytical process, we followed the general principles of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analytical process began with Tokunaga, Sawata, and a graduate student collaborator, who conducted the initial open coding after the interview recordings and field notes were transcribed. Next, we held a series of meetings to review and organize the codes into candidate themes, using key concepts identified in previous studies on IGD—such as identity awareness, perspective-taking, critical consciousness, and action preparedness (Frantell et al., 2019; Zúñiga et al., 2014)—as sensitizing concepts. Then, Kawano joined the analysis, engaging in discussions to examine the trustworthiness of the interpretations across the data, codes, and themes. Finally, the themes were iteratively refined through dialogue until consensus was reached.

We acknowledge that the faculty members and graduate students, who serve as both facilitators and analysts, brought their own perspectives and experiences to the research process. To ensure rigor, we engaged in ongoing reflexive dialogue to examine how our positionalities shaped the interpretations.

Positionality

We identified Japanese nationals, with Tokunaga and Sawata having lived as international students in the United States. Additionally, we situated ourselves as long-standing advocates of social justice and the rights of marginalized communities. Tokunaga has led participatory action research projects aimed at empowering and advocating immigrant youth in Japan and the United States. Moreover, Sawata has led affinity-based communities and justice-oriented research projects that advocate for queer and trans individuals in Japan and the United States. Additionally, Kawano has led practice-based projects in Japanese

higher education aimed at supporting students who identify as sexual and gender minorities, with a particular focus on developing inclusive institutional policies and support systems.

IMPACT OF MULTICULTURAL IGDS ON STUDENT PERCEPTIONS

Through the implementation of multicultural IGD, we found that 1) international students experienced empowerment and affirmation of their identities, 2) domestic students developed critical consciousness and acknowledged privileges, and 3) students demonstrated improved attitudes toward advocacy.

Empowerment and Identity Affirmation among International Students

Some international students who participated in the workshop felt empowered and affirmed their identity by engaging in dialogue with employees from international backgrounds. They mentioned the strong pressure that they experienced on campus to assimilate, which resulted in a high level of stress. C, a Chinese international student, reflected on the workshop in which they discussed two case studies on the college experiences and struggles of an international student and an immigrant student, respectively.

> As an international student, I have experienced the kinds of inconveniences in everyday life described in Cases 1 and 2; until now, I have never had the chance to talk about things like this seriously, so I have been building up a lot of stress. However, I was able to talk about many things through this opportunity, and I was able to relieve the stress I had been holding inside myself, so I was very pleased.

In the workshop, we first asked the participants to identify similarities and differences between themselves and the case studies. C was able to relate her experiences to the cases, which allowed her to express her emotions to the other participants. C stated the following:

> [The CEO of the company said] "It is okay to be different," and the moment I heard that, I was very relieved that it was okay to be a foreigner. I was relieved to hear that I do not have to speak Japanese like a Japanese person and that I do not have to have the same abilities as a Japanese person to receive good grades on my reports.

On the first day, the CEO of Company B participated in a workshop and shared her experiences of crossing multiple national and cultural borders, empowering international students who struggled to adapt to a new culture and society. The participants noted that differences are often treated negatively in Japan, which often leads foreigners to hide their identity and feel pressured to become "more Japanese." In light of the experiences shared by international students, the participants discussed the negative impact of the features of togetherness and conformity valued in Japan and discussed how to affirm

individual differences and identities. One employee shared the following during the workshop.

> I think that people should cherish their individuality, and if there are people who think that trying to fit into Japanese society means losing their individuality, then I think that if that is the environment you are in, you should leave. I truly want people to be proud of things that make them different, and I want them to be open about it.

These affirming comments seemed to allow international students to vent pressure to assimilate into Japanese society. They recognized that they could embrace and express their authentic selves, even temporarily.

Furthermore, international students began to appreciate the value of their outsider perspectives and their potential contributions to creating a multicultural, diverse society. Chinese international student A reflected on the first day of the workshop.

> What I learned today is that although I have always been in the position of an outsider trying to adapt to Japanese society, I now feel that I am also influencing Japan as an outsider. For example, as we discussed today, Japanese people also want casual suits for job interviews, and I think that there is a possibility that foreign culture has an impact on the atmosphere of Japanese society, as this may continue to expand in the future. I think that from now on, rather than adapting (to Japanese society), I can maintain my individuality and value the perspective of integrating with Japanese culture.

She became aware of her strengths and seemed to gain confidence in challenging Japan's cultural and social norms, regardless of size. This emerging awareness suggested a shift in perception, from feeling the need to adapt to Japanese norms as outsiders to viewing oneself as playing a role in the structural betterment of Japanese society. Although conventional international student support tends to focus only on cultural transition and healthy adaptation, it is crucial to encourage students to play civic roles that contribute to the betterment of institutions and society, not only in their home countries but also in their host countries. Considering international students as mere guests might deprive them of their potential strength and confidence as citizens.

Domestic Students Raised Critical Consciousness and Acknowledged Privilege

While University A has a large international student population, domestic students mentioned how unaware they were of the situation of international students on campus and noted their narrow perspective. D, a Japanese student, mentioned the following:

> I did not know anything about the status of residence for international students or the various systems in place, so I feel that my understanding

> of this has increased... I have realized many things, including the status of residence and the systems I have just mentioned, and I was able to think from a perspective I had never considered before, such as that of an international student or a member of the workforce, which has broadened my horizons.

Some domestic students learned that international students struggle to access student services due to language and cultural barriers, while they face barriers due to their residential status. As D and the other domestic students learned about international students' struggles, they increased their ability in "perspective-taking" (Frantell et al., 2019), which is valued in IGDs.

Furthermore, some students deepened their reflections on their position and relationships with international students. In a follow-up interview, G, a Japanese student, reflected on her engagement with international students.

> I realized how terrible my attitude toward international students was. There were some international students who became friends with me through professors, and at first, they asked me to teach them Japanese, and I said, 'Sure.' That student also had a tutor, so I helped out. Then, they asked me to help them move, and I thought, 'Well, this is definitely something you should ask your tutor to do.' And I thought, 'That's not my role.' However, then, I thought about it, and I realized that if a friend had asked me to help, I would have said yes without a second thought… I think it was because of the workshop that I realized this… I felt truly bad that I was not doing anything.

She seemed to realize that she categorized her friend as an international student and that her perception of the relationship with her friend did not go beyond "majority Japanese/tutor/supporter" and "international student/beneficiary." As she elaborated, "Even though I had studied intercultural understanding, when they (international students) appeared before me and I found myself on the majority side, I realized that I was unable to do anything and that I had unconsciously adopted the wrong way of thinking." By participating in the workshop, she deepened her self-reflection and noticed that her privilege as a majority Japanese person had led to a sense of powerlessness and indifference.

These self-reflections of domestic students through interactions with international students in the workshop suggest an emerging awareness of their privileges and the underlying power dynamics between the groups. Gaining awareness of power imbalances may be the first step toward establishing holistic and sustainable international student support, departing from the deficit model of international student support (Roberts & Ammigan, 2024; Veerasamy & Raby, 2024).

Improved Attitudes Toward Advocacy

Some students showed improved attitudes and motivation toward self-advocacy. Although the workshop did not result in concrete action, "motivation

for and confidence in taking action or engaging in social justice work" (Frantell et al., 2019, p. 676) is considered one of the outcomes of IGD. H, a Korean graduate student collaborator, reflected on this:

> I realized that the university was a small world. Because of my status as a student at a university, I am only in contact with students and faculty members in my daily life, but when I meet employees, I realize that there are many different ways of thinking. For example, through the discussion of Case 3 on the first day, the employees introduced us to 360-degree feedback (multisource feedback), which is used in their companies… For university students, for whom taking exams and receiving grades is a daily routine, the word 'feedback' is not a positive one, but it gave us an opportunity to rethink feedback.

Through dialogue with employees, she questioned the ways in which evaluations are conducted at universities, which are often one-way evaluations given by professors. In her group, which she facilitated, they discussed the lack of support for international students on campus and the importance of self-advocacy:

> H: I have also told my supervisor about the story I mentioned earlier that I went to the support office and received no help, and I went to the International Student Center and I received no help either. I had no idea who to talk to or how to obtain a response. However, in the corporate world, this is not possible, and even if possible, they would always find a solution. I realized that they would definitely determine who should do it, and I thought that was the way it should be. I also thought that because we pay tuition and other fees to schools and universities, I hope that they will do something about it to some extent. I thought it would be great if we could say that we would like to see changes made, even if it was after the fact, rather than just giving up.
>
> Employee 1: That's a great point of view.
>
> E: I truly think that the people in the student affairs office are a bit cold. I wonder why.

While they often felt powerless on campus and could not imagine voicing their opinions and perspectives to administrators and faculty members, the dialogue seemed to empower students to think critically about these issues and prepare for future actions. Such action-oriented empowerment, grounded in critical awareness, can be a valuable asset in improving holistic and sustainable international student support. By listening to and amplifying these voices, institutions can better understand students' needs and develop more effective means to support them.

However, it is important to acknowledge that some students expressed feelings of despair in terms of institutional change at the university. E, a Japanese student, shared his reflections about the workshop:

> As everyone said, when I face a problem, I feel a sense of hopelessness and wonder what I should do. I can see the problem, but I cannot do anything about it, and I wonder what I should do. On the other hand, I think it was good that I was able to confront the issue here today. This is a case in which I do not typically encounter it in my daily life, so I think it is a good thing.

F, a Japanese student majoring in higher education, also mentioned, "I wonder why it has not been changed. One reason for this is the structure of the university organization." Students felt unable to change their university because of its structural complexity, even after the workshop.

DISCUSSION

This study developed multicultural IGD as a means of holistic international student support by collaboratively designing workshops with students, faculty, and a company. The data were analyzed from the perspective of social justice orientation, as this has been lacking in most conventional ICL research and practices in Japan—this approach focused on empowerment, perspective-taking, and readiness for action. This study reveals the potential for multicultural IGD to empower international students for self-advocacy and encourage domestic students to take others' perspectives and reflect on their own privileges. These potential shifts could contribute to participants' identity formation, embracing their differences as a source of power and improving their competencies to live in a globalized society. These findings align with previous research on IGD and its effects (e.g., Flick, 1998). By integrating the core qualities of IGD into ICL, which is an effort to internationalize the curriculum (Leask, 2015), the developed multicultural IGD opens the way for international students to engage with Japanese society and institutions as coconstituents rather than mere recipients of support. This approach reflects a commitment to building inclusive higher education institutions that leave no one behind, thus ensuring alignment with the SDGs.

Additionally, incorporating another axis of differences in addition to cultural background—i.e., age/generation—into the workshop fostered dialogue between different generations, potentially broadening students' views toward society and themselves. For example, undergraduate student C and graduate student H described how conversations with employees from different generations contributed to a sense of identity affirmation, empowerment, and increased motivation for advocacy. This dialogue seemed to foster an understanding of social justice by enabling students to connect their personal experiences with broader societal issues. This suggests that intergenerational dialogue involving role models from different age groups plays a significant role in shaping students' self-perceptions and aspirations.

The students' awareness of and motivation for taking action seemed to improve through multicultural dialogues; however, it is noteworthy that they expressed feeling helpless about change at the university. Although holistic

international student support is necessary, as suggested by many scholars, such a support system requires higher education institutions to cultivate a system and culture that welcomes students as transformative actors. To overcome the dilemma between students' increased motivation to take action and their self-perceived inability to do so, it is necessary for university faculty and staff to create an environment that encourages students to contribute to institutional transformation. Specifically, the leadership of higher education institutions is critical; leaders can drive institutional strategies that empower students to meaningfully participate in shaping a more inclusive campus culture. While implementing such changes can be challenging, higher education institutions should embrace "strategic academic leadership" and "consider what mandate exists to support diversity and inclusion differently than has been done before within the institution" (Gleason, 2020, p. 291).

At University A, multicultural IGD led to the creation of a new structure that enabled students to become peer staff members of the university's DEI initiatives. This newly established structure in which faculty and staff serve as mediators between students' voices and institutional leaders is expected to contribute to the development of a more sustainable framework for promoting DEI at the institutional level.

CONCLUSION

This study developed a multicultural IGD that integrates IGD as a social justice pedagogy into ICL, aiming to foster international student support that emphasizes sustainability and holistic approaches in Japanese higher education. By engaging graduate students as codesigners and fostering multiple types of collaboration among domestic and international students, faculty, staff, and industry actors, it offers a sustainable alternative to resource dependent, siloed programs. Such polyphonic, holistic structures are essential for advancing diversity, equity, and sustainability in international education and institutional support systems.

As this study focused on a one-time workshop collaboratively conducted by a university and a company, it could not examine longitudinal behavioral changes or transformations at the organizational level. However, the *ibasho* project is an ongoing collaborative action initiative aimed at fostering institutional change vis-à-vis DEI. Future research should clarify the long-term effects of multicultural IGD and compare its impacts across multiple institutions.

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☐ *Some sections, with minimal or no editing*
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