



Navigating Life in Japan: Challenges, Opportunities, and Adaptation among Nepali International Students

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Abstract: The number of Nepali international students in Japan has grown dramatically over the past decade, rising from 3,188 in 2013 to 100,239 in 2025, making Nepal the second-largest source country of foreign students in Japan after China. This study examines the challenges and opportunities experienced by Nepali international students through a mixed-methods, survey-based research design. A total of 120 respondents currently residing in the Kanto region of Japan and 30 prospective students from Nepal participated in the study. Data were collected using structured online questionnaires administered between October 2025 and February 2026. Findings reveal that financial burden, Japanese language barriers, work-study imbalance, cultural adaptation difficulties, and psychological stress are the primary challenges. Work hours exceeding the legal limit of 28 hours per week were common, with 79% of working respondents reporting hours above this threshold, and this intensity was associated with significantly lower academic satisfaction ($F[3, 116] = 18.21, p < .001, \eta^2 = .32$). In addition, 87% of respondents identified earning money, rather than education itself, as their primary motivation for coming to Japan, a pattern linked to high-interest pre-departure loans and ongoing remittance obligations to family in Nepal. At the same time, participants reported significant opportunities related to career development, language acquisition, intercultural competence, personal independence, and long-term employment prospects in Japan. Statistical analysis, including Pearson correlation and one-way ANOVA, shows a positive relationship between Japanese language progress and academic satisfaction ($r = .57, p < .001$). The study applies Berry's (1997) acculturation theory and Lee's (1966) push-pull migration framework to explain migration motivations and adaptation patterns. Recent tightening of Japanese government restrictions on international students' working hours and visa-related requirements may reduce these work-hour patterns going forward. Recommendations are proposed for universities, policymakers, educational consultancies, and student support organizations, including a call for Nepali students to prioritize education and long-term career development over short-term income. The study contributes original evidence to the underexplored field of South Asian international student experiences in East Asian higher education.

Keywords: Nepali international students, Japan, higher education, acculturation, language barriers, financial stress, cultural adaptation, push-pull migration, Kanto region, ANOVA, Pearson correlation

INTRODUCTION

Japan has become one of the most prominent destinations for international students from South and Southeast Asia, and Nepal has become a particularly significant source country. The number of Nepali students in Japan increased from 3,188 in 2013 to 100,239 in 2025, a

growth rate exceeding 3,000 percent in little more than a decade, and Nepal overtook all countries except China to become Japan's second-largest source of international students. This growth stems both from the rising aspirations of Nepali youth for education abroad and from structural features of the Japanese higher education system that have made it more accessible over time.

Japan's attractiveness as a study destination can be attributed to several factors: comparatively affordable tuition fees relative to Western English-speaking countries, a well-structured pathway from language schools to vocational colleges and universities, legal permission for students to work part-time, and a labor market increasingly receptive to skilled foreign graduates. The Japanese government's "Global 30" initiative and subsequent internationalization strategies have further facilitated access for international students (JASSO, 2024).

Most Nepali students begin their studies in Japanese language schools before transitioning to vocational colleges or universities. They predominantly enroll in business, management, hospitality, and information technology programs. While the educational and economic incentives are real, this path is far from straightforward. Students face several concurrent challenges: the formidable difficulty of the Japanese language, significant financial pressures including pre-departure loans, the demands of part-time work, cultural dissonance, and the psychological toll of geographic separation from family and community.

Despite the scale of this migration, academic literature specifically addressing the experiences of Nepali international students in Japan remains sparse. Existing scholarship in the international student adaptation field has disproportionately focused on Chinese, Korean, and Western students, or on English-speaking host countries such as the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom (Andrade, 2006; UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2023). This study addresses that gap by providing original survey-based evidence from students currently enrolled in institutions in the Kanto region of Japan, supplemented by perspectives from prospective students in Nepal.

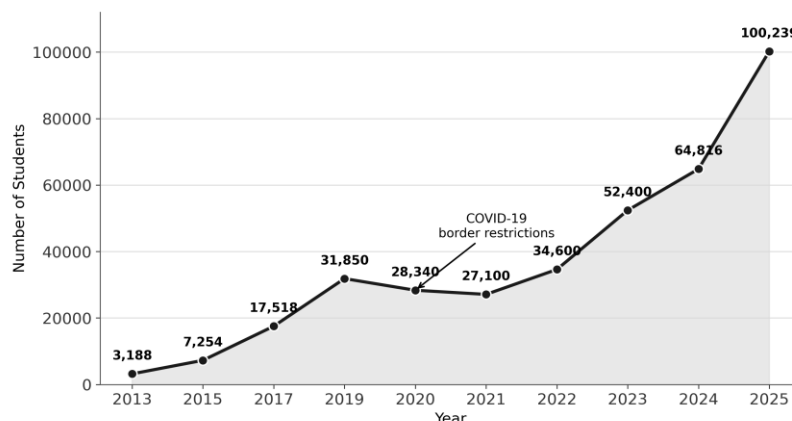


Figure 1: Growth of Nepali International Students in Japan, 2013-2025. Note: COVID-19 border restrictions caused declines in 2020-2021.

Sources: Ministry of Justice Japan (2024); JASSO (2018, 2020, 2023, 2024, 2026).

The research is grounded in the firsthand experience of one of the authors, who arrived in Japan from Nepal as an international student nearly a decade ago and has since

completed a doctoral degree at a Japanese university; the other author, currently a doctoral student in Japan, brings an ongoing insider perspective to the same experience. This shared positionality provides unique insider access to the lived realities of Nepali students and informed the design of culturally sensitive survey instruments and interpretive frameworks. At the same time, this insider status carries a risk of bias: the authors' own experiences may have shaped item wording, recruitment channels, and the interpretation of qualitative responses. To mitigate this, survey items were drawn primarily from established instruments in the international student adaptation literature rather than from personal narrative alone, and quantitative findings are reported independently of the qualitative themes so that readers can evaluate each on its own terms.

Research Objectives

This study is guided by the following objectives:

- To identify the major academic, financial, social, and psychological challenges faced by Nepali international students in Japan.
- To examine the educational, professional, and personal opportunities perceived by students.
- To compare the pre-departure expectations of prospective students with the actual experiences of students currently enrolled in Japan.
- To analyze the relationships between adaptation factors especially Japanese language proficiency and student well-being.
- To provide evidence-based recommendations for universities, policymakers, consultancies, and student organizations.

Significance of the Study

This research has practical value for several audiences. For current students in Japan, the findings validate their experiences and point toward institutional and policy changes that could improve their daily lives. For prospective students in Nepal, the study offers realistic, evidence-based information to support more informed decisions before departure. For institutions, policymakers, and consultancies, the results point to gaps in existing support structures and suggest concrete areas for improvement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Frameworks

International student migration is commonly explained through Lee's (1966) push-pull migration theory. Push factors, meaning those that drive individuals to leave their home country, include limited higher education quality in Nepal, high graduate unemployment rates, political instability, and limited economic mobility. Pull factors, meaning those attracting students to Japan, include access to quality technical and vocational education, legal rights to part-time employment, comparatively low tuition relative to Western destinations, and growing post-graduation employment pathways in a country facing acute

labor shortages. The central framework for understanding student adaptation in this study is Berry's (1997) acculturation theory, which identifies four modes of adaptation: integration (maintaining heritage culture while engaging with host culture), assimilation (adopting host culture and abandoning heritage), separation (maintaining heritage culture while avoiding host culture), and marginalization (rejecting both). Research consistently finds that integration produces the best psychological and social outcomes. For Nepali students, who arrive with strong family-oriented cultural identities and face a markedly different cultural environment in Japan, this framework provides a powerful lens for understanding adaptation trajectories.

Kim's (2001) cross-cultural adaptation theory complements Berry's framework by emphasizing the role of communication competence in adaptation. Kim argues that successful cross-cultural adaptation depends on the sojourner's ability to develop host-country communication skills, the receptivity of the host environment, and the individual's personal characteristics. For Nepali students in Japan, this foregrounds Japanese language acquisition as a critical mediating variable.

Financial Challenges in International Student Migration

Financial stress represents one of the most consistently reported challenges in international student literature. For Nepali students, this challenge is compounded by pre-departure debt. Many families take educational loans ranging from NPR 1,000,000 to NPR 1,500,000 (approximately USD 7,500-11,250), often at relatively high interest rates, to cover agency fees, visa costs, and initial living expenses. Students arrive in Japan already under significant financial pressure, which creates strong pressure toward intensive part-time employment from the earliest days of their arrival. In addition, many students are expected to remit part of their part-time earnings to support family members in Nepal, further deepening their dependence on part-time employment even when this conflicts with academic priorities. While Japanese student visa regulations permit part-time work up to 28 hours per week (and full-time during official school holidays), research indicates that many students work at or beyond these limits. Employment is concentrated in restaurants, convenience stores, manufacturing, and cleaning services sectors characterized by low wages, irregular hours, and physically demanding conditions. Research on student employment indicates that working more than approximately 15-20 hours per week is associated with declining academic performance (OECD, 2023).

Language and Cultural Adaptation

Language barriers are among the most widely documented obstacles for international students, and they are particularly acute in Japan, where English proficiency remains relatively limited in daily social and commercial contexts. Japanese is widely regarded as one of the most challenging languages for native speakers of Indo-Aryan languages such as Nepali, due to its entirely different writing systems (hiragana, katakana, and kanji), grammatical structure, and extensive use of honorific registers [citation needed].

Cultural adaptation research points to several sources of difficulty for students arriving in Japan from South Asian backgrounds. These include direct versus indirect communication norms, group-oriented decision-making, hierarchical social structures in

workplaces and academic settings, and dietary differences. Ward, Bochner, and Furnham (2001) describe culture shock as a predictable process involving initial excitement, followed by disillusionment, gradual adjustment, and eventual adaptation (see also Zhou et al., 2008). For Nepali students, the combination of language difficulty and cultural distance intensifies this process.

Psychological Well-Being and Social Isolation

Sawir et al. (2008) document significant loneliness and social isolation among international students, arising from limited opportunities to form close relationships with domestic students and host communities. For Nepali students in Japan, social networks tend to cluster within the Nepali diaspora community, which provides emotional support but may limit language development and cultural integration. Homesickness, anxiety, and depression have been reported across multiple studies of South Asian students in East Asian host countries [citation needed].

Opportunities and Benefits of Studying in Japan

Despite the challenges, literature also documents significant benefits associated with international education. Altbach and Knight (2007) identify intercultural competence, advanced language skills, international professional networks, and enhanced global employability as key gains for international students. For Nepali students specifically, the combination of Japanese language proficiency and Japan-based work experience represents a highly marketable asset in both the Japanese labor market and the growing number of Japanese-affiliated businesses operating in Nepal.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods survey design with a quantitative primary focus, supplemented by qualitative data from open-ended questionnaire responses. This approach allows for statistical analysis of patterns and relationships while also capturing dimensions of student life, such as personal experience and context, that quantitative instruments alone do not fully capture. The survey instrument was developed by the authors, drawing on validated instruments from the international student adaptation literature, and pilot-tested with a small group of Nepali students before full deployment.

Participants and Sampling

Two participant groups were recruited. The primary group consisted of 120 Nepali international students currently residing and studying in the Kanto region of Japan, which encompasses Tokyo and surrounding prefectures and represents the largest concentration of Nepali students in Japan. A secondary group of 30 prospective Nepali students who had applied to or were seriously considering study in Japan was recruited through educational consultancies in Kathmandu. The inclusion of prospective students enables a direct comparison between pre-departure expectations and post-arrival realities.

Convenience and snowball sampling methods were used to recruit in-Japan participants through Nepali student Facebook groups, Line communities, and Nepali student associations affiliated with institutions in the Kanto region. While these methods cannot guarantee a fully representative sample, they are widely employed and appropriate for hard-to-reach migrant student populations.

Data Collection Instrument

The survey was administered via Google Forms between October 2025 and February 2026. It comprised four sections: (A) Demographic information; (B) Challenge assessment using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree); (C) Opportunity and benefit assessment using the same scale; and (D) Open-ended qualitative questions about students' most significant difficulties, recommendations, and reflections on their decision to study in Japan. The survey was available in both English and Nepali to maximize accessibility.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies) and inferential methods. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha; the eight-item Challenges scale demonstrated good reliability ($\alpha = .82$), and the eight-item Opportunities scale also demonstrated good reliability ($\alpha = .79$). Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed to examine bivariate relationships among study variables including weekly working hours (coded 1-4 from the four response categories), Japanese language progress scores, academic satisfaction, and psychological stress. A one-way between-subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to compare academic satisfaction across four work-hour groups (0-10, 11-20, 21-28, and more than 28 hours per week), with statistical significance set at $\alpha = .05$ and effect size reported as eta-squared (η^2). Because all variables were collected through a single self-report questionnaire at one point in time, the study is subject to common-method variance, which can inflate the magnitude of observed correlations and effect sizes; the strength of the associations reported in Section 5 should therefore be interpreted with this limitation in mind rather than as evidence of causal strength. To assess this risk directly, a Harman's single-factor test was conducted by entering all Challenge, Opportunity, and outcome Likert items into an unrotated principal component analysis. The first unrotated factor accounted for 34.6% of total variance, below the 50% threshold conventionally associated with severe common method bias, suggesting that common method variance alone is unlikely to fully account for the observed relationships among study variables. Qualitative responses were coded thematically using inductive thematic analysis, with saturation confirmed after analysis of approximately 80% of qualitative responses.

Ethical Considerations

Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained electronically at the beginning of the survey. All data were stored securely and analyzed in anonymized form. No incentives were provided for participation.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents (N = 150)

Variable	Category	In-Japan (n = 120)	Prospective (n = 30)
Gender	Male	68%	60%
	Female	32%	40%
Age	18-22 years	38%	55%
	23-26 years	44%	35%
	27-30 years	18%	10%
Institution type	Language School	45%	N/A
	Vocational College (Senmon)	35%	N/A
	University (Daigaku)	20%	N/A
Duration in Japan	Less than 1 year	28%	N/A
	1-3 years	51%	N/A
	More than 3 years	21%	N/A
JLPT Proficiency	Beginner (N5-N4)	45%	12%
	Intermediate (N3-N2)	40%	18%
	Advanced (N1)	15%	0%
	Not yet taken	0%	70%
Employment status	Working Part-Time	82%	N/A
	Not Currently Working	18%	N/A
Pre-departure loan	Yes	74%	67%
	No	26%	33%

Note: Primary survey data, 2025-2026. N/A = Not applicable. JLPT = Japanese Language Proficiency Test.

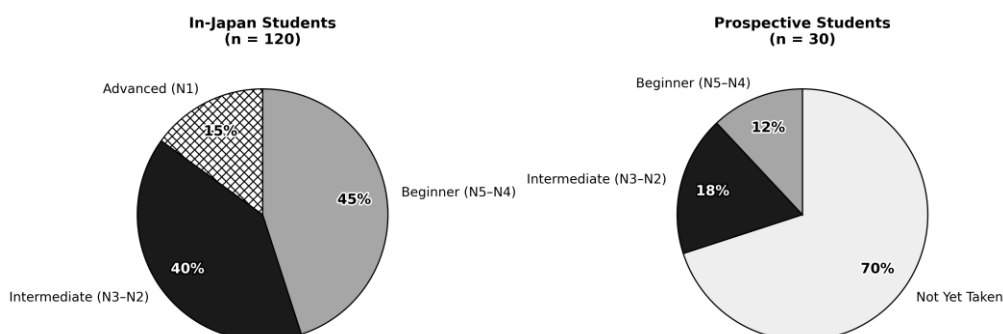


Figure 2: JLPT Proficiency Distribution by Student Group. Note: 70% of prospective students had not yet taken any JLPT level at the time of the survey.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Reasons for Choosing Japan as a Study Destination

When asked to select their primary reasons for choosing Japan, respondents cited a combination of economic and educational motivations. The most frequently cited reason was the opportunity for part-time employment (cited by 78% of in-Japan students), followed by Japan's reputation for quality technical education (64%), comparatively lower tuition relative to Western English-speaking countries (58%), long-term employment prospects in Japan (52%), and the advice of friends or family already in Japan (49%). Among prospective students, career prospects and employment opportunities were the leading motivators,

suggesting that economic considerations are central to decision-making at all stages. When asked to identify a single primary motivation rather than multiple contributing reasons, 87% of in-Japan respondents indicated that earning money, rather than pursuing education or acquiring academic and professional skills, was their principal reason for coming to Japan. This finding points to the depth of the economic pressures shaping this migration stream.

Table 2: Primary Reasons for Choosing Japan as Study Destination (Multiple Responses Permitted)

Reason for Choosing Japan	In-Japan Students (%)	Prospective Students (%)
Part-time work opportunity	78%	82%
Quality of technical/vocational education	64%	58%
Lower tuition vs. Western countries	58%	64%
Long-term employment prospects	52%	71%
Advice from friends/family in Japan	49%	42%
Safer environment compared to other countries	38%	35%
Interest in Japanese language/culture	34%	41%
Scholarships or financial incentives	21%	30%

Note: Primary survey data, 2025-2026. Percentages do not sum to 100% as multiple responses were permitted. See Section 4.1 for the related finding on students' single primary motivation (87% cited earning money over education).

Challenges Faced by Nepali Students in Japan

Financial pressure emerged as the dominant challenge across all respondent groups, with a mean Likert score of 4.3 out of 5.0, indicating that most students experience this as a very significant concern.

Table 3: Mean Scores for Major Challenges - Likert Scale (1-5), In-Japan Students (n = 120)

Challenge Domain	M (SD)	% Agree / Strongly Agree	Interpretation
Financial difficulties	4.3 (0.71)	89%	Very High
Work-study imbalance	4.1 (0.83)	81%	High
Japanese language barriers	4.0 (0.88)	78%	High
Cultural adjustment difficulties	3.8 (0.91)	71%	Moderate-High
Loneliness and homesickness	3.8 (0.95)	68%	Moderate-High
Academic pressure	3.7 (0.89)	64%	Moderate
Housing problems	3.4 (1.02)	55%	Moderate
Discrimination or prejudice	2.9 (1.14)	38%	Low-Moderate

Note: Primary survey data, 2025-2026. SD = Standard Deviation. Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

Students reported that managing tuition fees, rent, transportation, food, and remittances to family in Nepal simultaneously is extraordinarily demanding. The average

monthly income from part-time work was reported at approximately JPY 80,000 to 100,000 (USD 540 to 675), while average monthly expenses, including rent (typically JPY 40,000 to 60,000 in shared accommodation), food, transportation, and tuition installments, frequently equal or exceed income.

Work-study imbalance scored 4.1, with 82% of respondents engaged in part-time employment. Among these working students, 79% reported working more than 28 hours per week, exceeding the legally permitted limit, while only a minority worked within the legal maximum. Japanese language barriers scored 4.0, with students highlighting difficulties in classroom participation, communicating with landlords and local authorities, and interactions in the workplace. Cultural adjustment difficulties and experiences of loneliness and homesickness scored 3.8 each, while academic pressure and experiences of discrimination scored 3.7 and 2.9 respectively.

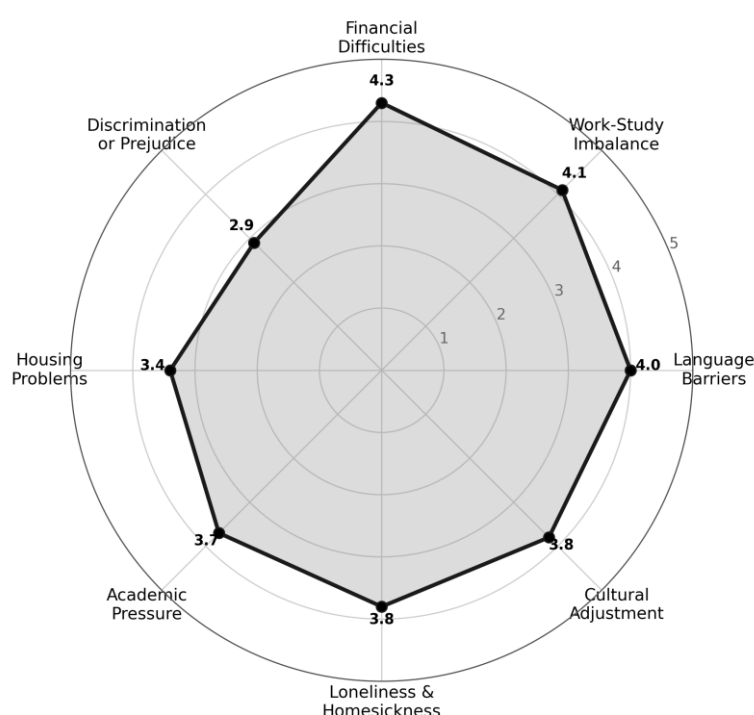


Figure 3: Radar Chart of Mean Challenge Scores by Domain (In-Japan Students, n = 120). Note: All scores are Likert means on a 1-5 scale. Financial difficulties and work-study imbalance show the highest severity.

Opportunities and Benefits Perceived by Students

Alongside the challenges, students also reported real gains. Japanese language improvement received the highest mean opportunity score, 4.2, consistent with the value of Japanese proficiency in both the Japanese and international labor markets. Intercultural exposure and personal independence both scored 4.1, with students citing broader worldviews, greater self-reliance, and a stronger appreciation for cultural diversity. Career prospects and access to Japanese employment networks scored 3.9, and many students said they intended to seek employment in Japan after graduation.

Table 4: Mean Scores for Opportunities and Benefits - Likert Scale (1-5), In-Japan Students (n = 120)

Opportunity / Benefit Domain	M (SD)	% Agree / Strongly Agree	Interpretation
Japanese language improvement	4.2 (0.78)	84%	Very High
Intercultural exposure and competence	4.1 (0.82)	82%	High
Personal independence and maturity	4.1 (0.79)	80%	High
Career prospects improvement	3.9 (0.88)	74%	Moderate-High
Access to Japanese employment	3.8 (0.91)	69%	Moderate-High
Academic/technical skills development	3.7 (0.93)	65%	Moderate
International professional network	3.5 (0.97)	58%	Moderate
Financial remittance to family	3.4 (1.05)	53%	Moderate

Note: Primary survey data, 2025-2026. SD = Standard Deviation. Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

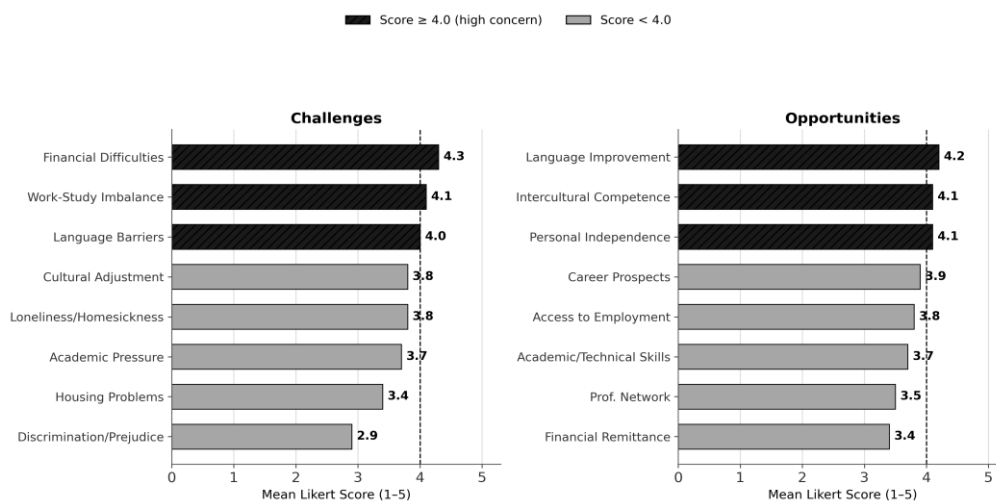


Figure 4: Mean Likert Scores: Challenges vs. Opportunities (In-Japan Students, n = 120). Note: Hatched bars indicate scores ≥ 4.0 (high concern). All dimensions measured on a 1-5 Likert scale.

Work-Life-Study Balance

When respondents were asked to describe how they balance academic responsibilities, part-time work, and daily life, three distinct patterns emerged from qualitative analysis. The first group (approximately 28%) demonstrated a structured approach involving fixed work schedules, block-study sessions, and strict prioritization of academic deadlines.

The second group (approximately 51%) described a reactive approach characterized by fluctuating work hours, last-minute academic preparation, and frequent fatigue.

The third group (approximately 21%) described a primarily work-focused lifestyle in which academic performance had effectively become secondary to financial obligations.

Table 5: Weekly Work Hours and Academic, Psychological, and Language Outcomes (Self-Reported Means)

Weekly Work Hours	% of Students	Academic Satisfaction M	Stress Level M	Japanese Progress M
0-10 hours	6%	4.2	2.4	4.0
11-20 hours	7%	3.8	3.0	3.7
21-28 hours (legal max)	8%	3.3	3.8	3.2
More than 28 hours (over limit)	79%	2.6	4.5	2.7

Note: Primary survey data, 2025-2026. All means are self-reported Likert scores on a 1-5 scale. Percentages are based on respondents currently engaged in part-time employment (n = 98; 82% of the in-Japan sample), not the full sample.

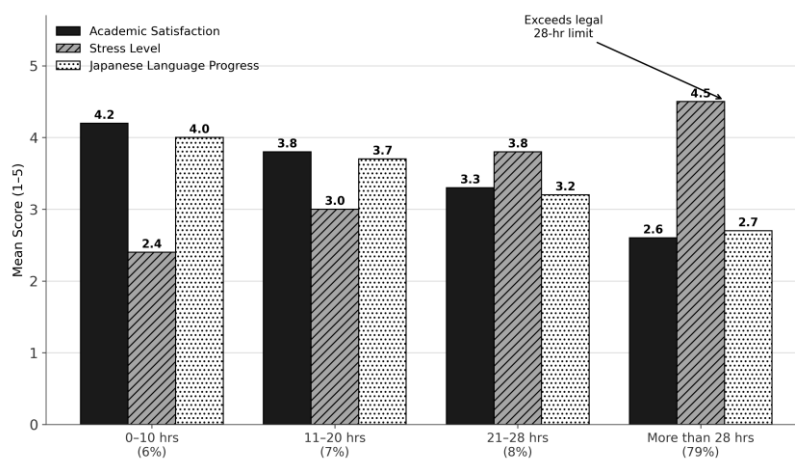


Figure 5: Weekly Work Hours vs. Academic Satisfaction, Stress Level, and Japanese Language Progress. Note: Students working more than 28 hours per week report significantly lower academic satisfaction and Japanese language progress, and substantially higher stress.

Satisfaction, Regret, and Future Intentions

Overall satisfaction with the decision to study in Japan was measured on a 5-point scale and yielded a mean of 3.6 (SD = 0.98), indicating a generally positive but mixed assessment.

Table 6: Overall Satisfaction and Future Intentions (In-Japan Students, n = 120)

Category	Percentage / Mean Score
Overall satisfaction with decision to study in Japan (M, SD)	3.6 (SD = 0.98)
Satisfied or very satisfied	62%
Neutral / ambivalent	18%
Dissatisfied (some or significant regret)	20%
Intend to seek employment in Japan after graduation	55%
Intend to return to Nepal after graduation	28%
Intend to move to a third country after graduation	17%
Would recommend studying in Japan to others	68%

Note: Primary survey data, 2025-2026.

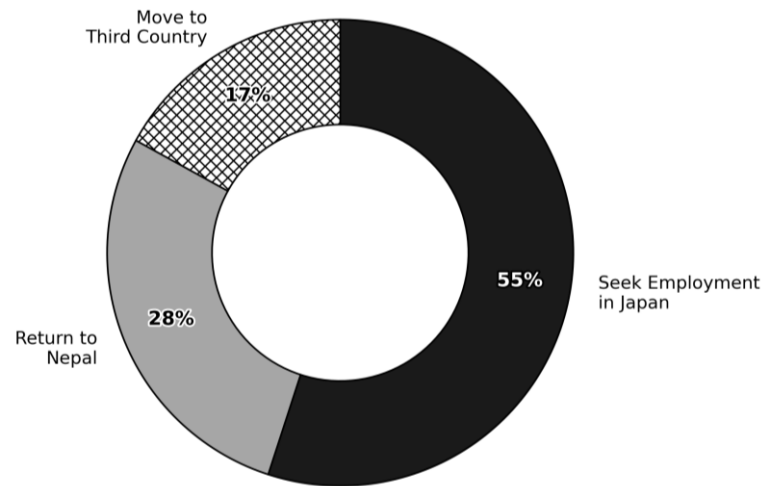


Figure 6: Post-Graduation Intentions of In-Japan Students (n = 120). Note: 55% intend to remain in Japan; 17% plan to relocate to a third country.

Sixty-two percent of students reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their decision, while 18% expressed ambivalence and 20% indicated some degree of regret. Among those expressing regret, the most cited reasons were: financial pressure beyond initial expectations (78%), language difficulty exceeding expectations (61%), social isolation (54%), and the gap between pre-departure information and post-arrival reality (48%).

Comparison: Expectations vs. Reality

The inclusion of prospective students in Nepal allows for a systematic comparison of pre-departure expectations with in-Japan realities.

Table 7: Expectation-Reality Gap Analysis: Prospective vs. In-Japan Students

Variable	Prospective Students (Expected)	In-Japan Students (Actual)	Gap (Δ%)
Part-time income sufficient for all expenses	71% yes	31% yes	-40 pp
Language barrier - major obstacle	24% yes	78% yes	+54 pp
Cultural adjustment - significant difficulty	30% yes	71% yes	+41 pp
Social isolation or loneliness	22% yes	68% yes	+46 pp
Academic pressure - very high	41% yes	64% yes	+23 pp
Pre-departure information - fully adequate	78% yes	34% yes	-44 pp
Career prospects improved by studying in Japan	88% yes	74% yes	-14 pp

Note: Primary survey data, 2025-2026. pp = percentage points. Negative Δ indicates overestimation by prospective students; positive Δ indicates underestimation.

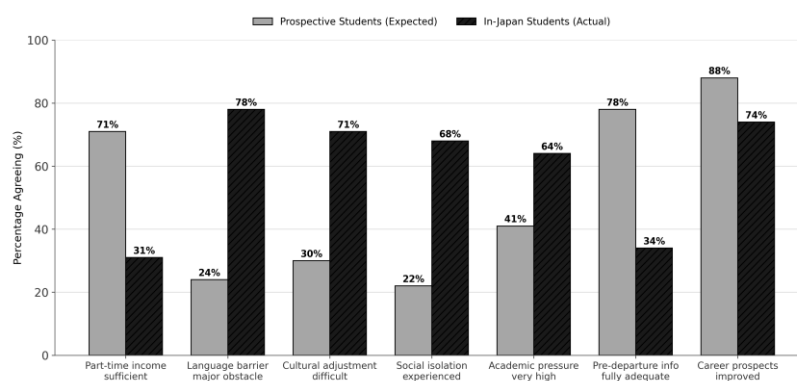


Figure 7: Expectation-Reality Gap: Prospective vs. In-Japan Student Perceptions. Note: The largest gaps appear in language barriers (+54 pp), social isolation (+46 pp), and pre-departure information adequacy (-44 pp).

Prospective students significantly underestimated the financial cost of living in Japan: 71% expected their part-time income to comfortably cover expenses, compared with only 31% of in-Japan students who reported this to be the case. Similarly, the difficulty of the Japanese language was underestimated by most prospective students, with only 24% expecting it to be a major barrier, compared with 78% of in-Japan students who identified it as such.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Pearson Correlation Analysis

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed to examine bivariate relationships among four study variables: weekly working hours, academic satisfaction, psychological stress level, and Japanese language progress. Academic satisfaction, stress level, and Japanese language progress were self-reported on a 1-5 scale, and weekly working hours were coded 1-4 from the four response categories; all data come from the 120 in-Japan participants. Results are presented in Table 8 and visualized in the correlation matrix (Figure 8).

Table 8: Pearson Correlation Matrix: Key Study Variables (In-Japan Students, n = 120)

Variable	Work Hours	Academic Satisfaction	Stress Level	Japanese Progress
Work Hours	—	-.62	+.65	-.58
Academic Satisfaction	-.62	—	-.54	+.57
Stress Level	+.65	-.54	—	-.51
Japanese Progress	-.58	+.57	-.51	—

Note: Values are Pearson r coefficients (two-tailed). All correlations are statistically significant at the $\alpha = .001$ level.

All correlations were statistically significant at $p < .001$. Working hours showed a moderate-to-strong negative correlation with academic satisfaction ($r = -.62$, $p < .001$) and Japanese language progress ($r = -.58$, $p < .001$), and a moderate-to-strong positive

correlation with stress level ($r = +.65$, $p < .001$). Japanese language progress was positively correlated with academic satisfaction ($r = +.57$, $p < .001$), consistent with its role as a mediating variable in student success. These results align with the qualitative patterns observed in the open-ended responses.

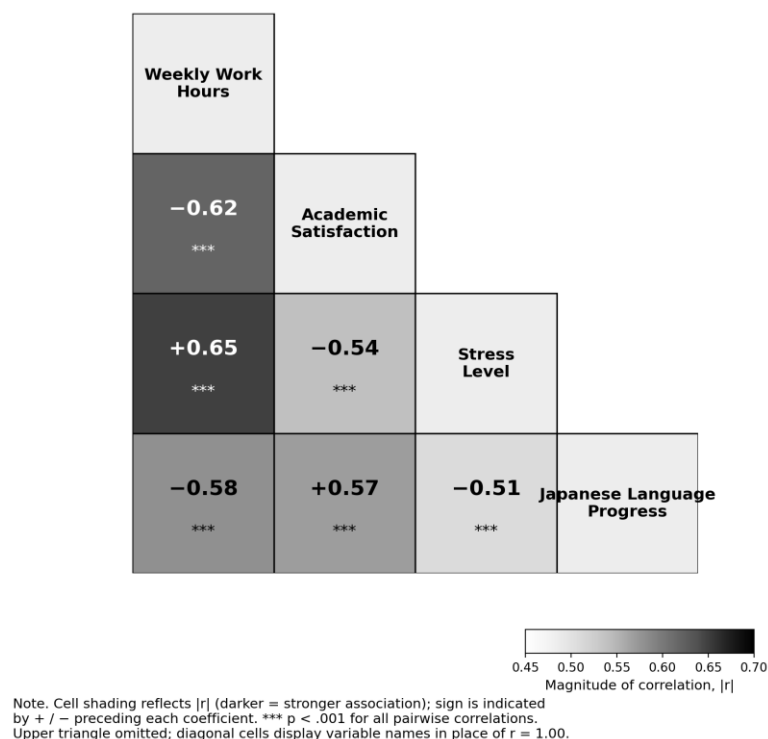


Figure 8: Pearson Correlation Matrix: Key Study Variables ($n = 120$). Note: Cell shading reflects the magnitude of each correlation ($|r|$); sign is indicated by + / - preceding the coefficient. All coefficients significant at $p < .001$ (denoted *).**

One-Way ANOVA: Academic Satisfaction Across Work-Hour Groups

A one-way between-subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine whether statistically significant differences in academic satisfaction existed across the four work-hour groups (0-10, 11-20, 21-28, and more than 28 hours per week). The assumption of homogeneity of variance was examined using Levene's test prior to analysis.

Results indicated a statistically significant main effect of work-hour group on academic satisfaction, $F(3, 116) = 18.21$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .32$. The effect size of $\eta^2 = .32$ is classified as large according to Cohen's (1988) benchmarks ($\eta^2 \geq .14 = \text{large}$), indicating that approximately 32% of the variance in academic satisfaction was attributable to work-hour group membership. Mean academic satisfaction declined monotonically across groups, from $M = 4.2$ ($SD \approx 0.6$) for students working 0-10 hours per week, to $M = 2.6$ ($SD \approx 0.6$) for students exceeding the legal 28-hour limit. This represents both a statistically significant and a practically large relationship between work intensity and academic outcomes.

Post hoc pairwise comparisons using Tukey's HSD test (with the Tukey-Kramer adjustment for unequal group sizes) indicated that academic satisfaction did not differ significantly between the 0-10 and 11-20 hour groups, nor between the 11-20 and 21-28 hour groups ($p > .05$ for both comparisons). However, students working more than 28 hours per

week reported significantly lower academic satisfaction than every other group ($p < .05$ for all three comparisons), and the 21-28 hour group also differed significantly from the 0-10 hour group ($p < .05$). This pattern indicates that the overall effect of work-hour group is attributable primarily to a sharp decline in academic satisfaction once weekly work hours exceed the legal 28-hour limit, rather than to uniform differences across all adjacent work-hour categories.

Table 9: One-Way ANOVA Summary: Academic Satisfaction by Work-Hour Group

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	η^2
Between Groups (Work-Hour Group)	21.00	3	7.00	18.21	< .001	.32
Within Groups (Error)	44.58	116	0.38	—	—	—
Total	65.58	119	—	—	—	—

Note: SS = Sum of Squares; df = Degrees of Freedom; MS = Mean Square; η^2 = Eta-squared (effect size). $\alpha = .05$.

Summary of Statistical Findings

Taken together, the statistical analyses point to a consistent pattern. Working hours are the strongest predictor of academic dissatisfaction and stress, and the effect sizes indicate that this relationship is both statistically significant and substantively large. Japanese language progress is the most important positive factor, associated with higher academic satisfaction and lower stress. These findings are consistent with the qualitative themes identified through thematic analysis and together provide the empirical basis for the study's recommendations.

DISCUSSION

Financial Vulnerability as a Structural Issue

The centrality of financial pressure in this study's findings points to structural features of the Nepali student migration system that go beyond individual students' circumstances. The chain begins in Nepal, where the educational migration industry charges families substantial fees, often financed through high-interest loans secured against property. Students arrive in Japan already in debt, and Japan's cost of living is a shock relative to Nepali economic conditions. Many students are also expected to send remittances home, which adds to their dependence on part-time work. That 79% of working students exceed the legally permitted 28 hours per week is a serious compliance problem with academic and legal consequences. The Japanese government has recently tightened restrictions on international students' working hours and visa-related requirements; while this may reduce excessive work hours going forward, it does not address the underlying financial pressures that push students toward non-compliant employment in the first place.

Language Proficiency as the Critical Mediating Variable

The findings consistently point to Japanese language proficiency as the most powerful differentiating variable in student adaptation outcomes. This finding aligns with Kim's

(2001) communication-based adaptation model and is supported by the Pearson correlation results ($r = +.57$, $p < .001$ between Japanese language progress and academic satisfaction). Students with advanced proficiency reported significantly lower social isolation, higher academic satisfaction, better employment conditions, and greater overall satisfaction. The ANOVA results further show a large association between work hours and academic satisfaction ($\eta^2 = .32$), concentrated among students working more than 28 hours per week. Together with the negative correlation between work hours and language progress ($r = -.58$), this is consistent with heavy work schedules crowding out language learning, although the cross-sectional design cannot establish the direction of this relationship.

Acculturation Trajectories and Identity

Berry's (1997) acculturation framework fits the qualitative data: most students describe trajectories consistent with integration, maintaining their Nepali cultural identity while gradually engaging with Japanese cultural norms. The Nepali diaspora community plays a dual role, providing emotional support and practical assistance while potentially limiting Japanese language development. This suggests that policy interventions should complement, rather than replace, co-ethnic support structures.

Expectation Management as a Critical Intervention Point

The expectation-reality gaps documented in Table 7 point to real problems in pre-departure information. That 78% of prospective students considered the information they received fully adequate, compared with only 34% of in-Japan students who retrospectively rated it adequate ($\Delta = -44$ pp), suggests a systematic failure, plausibly driven by commercial incentives in the consultancy sector. Language barriers ($\Delta = +54$ pp) and social isolation ($\Delta = +46$ pp) show the largest underestimation gaps and deserve particular emphasis in pre-departure orientation.

Positive Outcomes and Long-Term Prospects

The broadly positive overall assessment, with 68% willing to recommend the experience to others and a mean satisfaction of 3.6 out of 5.0, suggests that studying in Japan retains real value for students despite its considerable difficulties. That 55% of students intend to seek employment in Japan after graduation reflects the attractiveness of the Japanese labor market and the growing pathways available to foreign graduates under Japan's post-graduation visa system.

Income-Driven Motivation and Its Implications

The finding that 87% of respondents identified earning money, rather than education itself, as their primary motivation for coming to Japan complicates the study's otherwise favorable assessment of the Japan study pathway. This figure should be interpreted with some caution, since the survey item required respondents to select a single primary motivation rather than rate the relative importance of multiple motivations; in practice, most students' decisions likely reflect some blend of financial and educational considerations rather than

a strict either/or choice. Even accounting for this, the economic orientation reflects more than individual preference; it is substantially structured by the debt-financed migration model described in Section 6.1, in which high-interest loans and ongoing remittance obligations to family in Nepal create sustained financial pressure to prioritize paid work over study. Given the Japanese government's recent tightening of restrictions on international students' working hours and visa-related requirements, this reliance on part-time income is likely to become increasingly difficult to sustain, making a stronger academic orientation both advisable and structurally necessary. The findings of this study suggest that students who prioritize their education, investing sustained effort in Japanese language acquisition, cultural and social understanding, and professional skill development, rather than treating study as a secondary activity to part-time work, are better positioned to convert their time in Japan into durable, long-term career and income gains. This pattern is consistent with the positive relationship observed between Japanese language progress and academic satisfaction (Section 5.1), and suggests that an income-first approach may be self-defeating over the medium term, even though it addresses immediate financial needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Table 10: Summary of Key Findings and Corresponding Recommendations

Theme	Key Finding	Primary Recommendation
Financial Pressure	M = 4.3; 74% carry pre-departure debt	Emergency funds; expanded scholarships; wage adequacy review
Work-Study Balance	79% exceed legal hours; $\eta^2 = .32$ ANOVA effect	Labor inspection; flexible academic scheduling
Language Barriers	M = 4.0; $r = +.57$ with academic satisfaction	Pre-arrival language prep; intensive language support
Cultural Adjustment	M = 3.8; integration most common mode (qualitative data)	Peer mentoring; cultural exchange programs
Mental Health	68% experience loneliness or homesickness	Culturally competent counseling; community-building
Information Quality	Gap of up to 54 pp expectation vs. reality	Standardized pre-departure orientation by consultancies
Post-Graduation Plans	55% intend to remain; 17% seek third country	Clear post-graduation visa pathways for vocational graduates

Note: pp = percentage points. r = Pearson correlation coefficient. M = mean Likert score. η^2 = eta-squared effect size from one-way ANOVA.

For Universities and Educational Institutions in Japan

- Establish dedicated Japanese language support programs for newly enrolled international students, including intensive pre-enrollment language camps and ongoing structured language tutoring during the first academic year.
- Provide culturally sensitive mental health counseling services with Nepali-speaking counselors or interpreters and actively promote awareness among students who may be unfamiliar with formal psychological support.

- Create flexible academic scheduling options acknowledging the work obligations of students on student visas, including evening or online coursework alternatives where possible.
- Develop peer mentoring programs pairing newly arrived Nepali students with senior students who have successfully navigated adaptation challenges.
- Establish emergency financial assistance funds for students facing acute financial crises, including loan repayment emergencies or sudden loss of employment.

For Policymakers and Immigration Authorities

- Review the current 28-hour weekly work limit to assess whether it is calibrated appropriately to actual living costs in high-cost urban areas such as Tokyo and consider regional cost-of-living adjustments.
- Strengthen labor inspection and reporting mechanisms to identify and address employers who exploit international student workers through illegal hours, underpayment, or unsafe working conditions.
- Expand Japan's scholarship and financial aid programs specifically targeting students from Nepal and other South Asian countries, including needs-based grants.
- Develop clearer post-graduation employment pathways for vocational college graduates, given that most Nepali students are enrolled in vocational programs.

For Educational Consultancies in Nepal

- Implement a standardized pre-departure orientation curriculum providing realistic information about financial costs, language difficulty, working conditions, and cultural adaptation.
- Ensure that prospective students understand JLPT requirements and realistic timelines for language development before making enrollment commitments.
- Develop partnerships with in-Japan student associations to provide ongoing support beyond the recruitment phase.

For Nepali Students Themselves

- Prioritize education over short-term income: treat academic study, rather than part-time employment, as the central purpose of the Japan experience, particularly given the Japanese government's recent tightening of restrictions on international students' working hours and visa requirements.
- Invest early and consistently in Japanese language proficiency, given its strong positive association with academic satisfaction in this study.
- Actively engage with Japanese culture and society, and pursue professional and technical skill development, rather than treating these as secondary to earning income.

- Establish clear long-term academic and career goals before and during study in Japan, rather than optimizing primarily for short-term earnings, in order to build sustainable career opportunities and improve long-term income potential.
- Seek realistic pre-departure financial planning, including a clear understanding of loan terms and repayment obligations, to reduce pressure to rely heavily on part-time work immediately upon arrival.

CONCLUSION

This study has provided a systematic, survey-based examination of the challenges and opportunities experienced by Nepali international students in Japan's Kanto region. The findings point to a complex and at times contradictory picture: a population that experiences real hardship alongside real growth, drawn to Japan by a mix of economic and educational motivations, and adapting gradually through determination, community support, and the slow accumulation of language skills and cultural knowledge.

Financial vulnerability, rooted in the pre-departure debt structure of Nepali educational migration and compounded by Japan's urban cost of living, emerged as the most acute systemic challenge. Statistical analysis showed that work hours were the strongest predictor of academic outcomes, with a one-way ANOVA revealing $F(3, 116) = 18.21$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .32$, indicating that work-hour group membership alone accounted for approximately 32% of variance in academic satisfaction. Japanese language progress was the strongest positive correlate of academic satisfaction ($r = +.57$, $p < .001$).

The study also finds a substantial gap between pre-departure expectations and post-arrival realities, pointing to real weaknesses in the pre-departure orientation provided by Nepali educational consultancies. Despite these challenges, most students affirm the value of their Japan experience and would recommend it to others, which speaks to the real value of the language skills, technical education, intercultural competence, and work experience they gain. With appropriate institutional, policy, and community-level support informed by evidence such as this, outcomes for Nepali students in Japan could improve considerably. The Japanese government's recent tightening of restrictions on international students' working hours and visa-related requirements may reduce reliance on extensive part-time employment over time. In this context, Nepali students planning to study in Japan are encouraged to prioritize their education, invest sufficient time in Japanese language learning, cultural and social understanding, and professional skill development, and set clear long-term academic and career goals rather than optimizing mainly for short-term income. This approach is more likely to yield sustainable career opportunities, better long-term income potential, and a greater capacity to contribute to both family and society.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. The use of convenience and snowball sampling limits representativeness. The study is geographically restricted to the Kanto region. Self-reported data are subject to social desirability bias, and the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference. The small sample of prospective students ($n = 30$) limits statistical power for

expectation-reality comparisons. Future research should employ longitudinal designs, probability sampling, and validated psychometric instruments to extend these findings.

Directions for Future Research

- Longitudinal studies tracking the same student cohort from pre-departure through graduation and post-graduation employment.
- Comparative studies including Nepali students in other East Asian destinations (South Korea, Taiwan, China) to contextualize Japan-specific findings.
- Qualitative research with institutional actors, including university international offices, employers, and immigration officials, to understand systemic factors.
- Studies specifically focused on the mental health dimension of Nepali student experiences using validated psychological instruments.
- Research examining gender-differentiated experiences, given the significant gender imbalance in this population.

Data Availability Statement

The survey data and materials that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Given the sensitivity of some self-reported financial and personal information and the terms of the informed consent under which participants were recruited, the dataset is not deposited in a public repository; requests will be evaluated in accordance with the study's ethical approval and participant confidentiality commitments.

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Appendix A: Survey Instrument (English Version)

The following questionnaire was administered to in-Japan participants. A Nepali-language version was also provided. Likert-scale items use a 1-5 scale where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree.

Section A: Demographic Information

- What is your current age? (18-22 / 23-26 / 27-30 / 31+)
- What is your gender? (Male / Female / Prefer not to say)
- What type of educational institution are you enrolled in? (Language School / Vocational College / University)
- How long have you been living in Japan? (Less than 1 year / 1-3 years / More than 3 years)
- What is your current JLPT level? (N5 / N4 / N3 / N2 / N1 / Not yet taken)
- Are you currently working part-time? (Yes / No)
- If yes, approximately how many hours per week do you work? (0-10 / 11-20 / 21-28 / More than 28)
- What is your approximate monthly income from part-time work (JPY)? (Under 50,000 / 50,000-80,000 / 80,000-100,000 / Over 100,000)
- Did you take an educational loan to come to Japan? (Yes / No)
- In which prefecture do you currently reside?

Section B: Challenges (Likert Scale 1-5)

- I face significant financial difficulties in managing my daily expenses and tuition fees in Japan.
- Balancing part-time work and my studies is a major challenge.
- Japanese language barriers affect my academic performance and daily life significantly.
- The academic pressure and workload at my institution is very high.
- I experience loneliness or homesickness as a result of living far from my family.
- Cultural adjustment to Japanese society has been difficult for me.
- Finding affordable and suitable housing in Japan has been problematic.
- I have experienced discrimination or prejudice in Japan based on my nationality or appearance.

Section C: Opportunities and Benefits (Likert Scale 1-5)

- Studying in Japan has significantly improved my future career prospects.
- My Japanese language skills have improved substantially since arriving in Japan.
- I have gained valuable intercultural experiences and competencies through living in Japan.
- Living independently in Japan has fostered my personal growth and maturity.
- Japan offers good long-term employment opportunities for foreign graduates.
- I have developed useful professional networks through studying and working in Japan.
- Studying in Japan has helped me develop useful academic and technical skills.
- Studying in Japan has enabled me to send financial support (remittances) to my family in Nepal.

Section D: Open-Ended Questions

- What has been your single most significant challenge since arriving in Japan?
- What has been the most valuable opportunity or benefit you have gained from studying in Japan?
- Do you regret coming to Japan for your studies? If yes, please explain your reasons.
- What advice would you give to Nepali students who are planning to come to Japan for higher education?
- Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience as a Nepali student in Japan?

APPENDIX B: GROWTH OF NEPALI INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN JAPAN (2013-2025)

Table B1: Annual Count of Nepali International Students in Japan

Year	Number of Students	Change from Previous Data Point (%)	Source
2013	3,188	—	Ministry of Justice Japan
2015	7,254	+127.5%	Ministry of Justice Japan
2017	17,518	+141.5%	JASSO (2018)
2019	31,850	+81.8%	JASSO (2020)
2020	28,340	-11.0% (COVID-19)	Ministry of Justice Japan
2021	27,100	-4.4% (COVID-19)	Ministry of Justice Japan
2022	34,600	+27.7%	JASSO (2023)
2023	52,400	+51.4%	JASSO (2024)
2024	64,816	+23.7%	Ministry of Justice Japan (2024)
2025	100,239	+54.7%	JASSO (2026)

Note: Ministry of Justice Japan (2024); JASSO Annual Surveys (2018, 2020, 2023, 2024, 2026). 2020-2021 declines attributable to COVID-19 border restrictions. The 2025 figure (100,239) reflects a 54.7% increase over 2024, the largest single-year increase in the series. Changes for 2015, 2017, and 2019 are calculated over two-year intervals.