

Case Study: Linking Career Education to University Education in Japan

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Abstract—Japanese society is experiencing an aging population and declining birth rate along with the popularization of higher education, spread of economic globalization, rapid progress in technical innovation, changes in employment conditions, and emergence of a knowledge-based society. Against this background, interest in career education at Japanese universities has increased in recent years. This paper describes how the government has implemented career education policies in Japan, and introduces the cases of two universities that have successfully linked career education to university education in Japan.

Keywords—Career Education, Employability, Higher Education, Japanese University, University Education.

I. BACKGROUND

THE aging of society continues to advance in Japan, alongside a declining birth rate and the popularization of higher education. As demonstrated by the School Basic Survey (Fig. 1) conducted by Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, the percentage of those who go on to attend universities rose to 30.5% in 1990; by 2013 that figure soared to 50.8%.

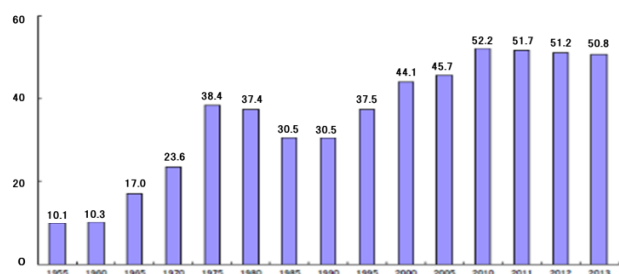


Fig. 1 Change in the rate of advancement to universities in Japan (Source: [1])

Japanese universities are now facing a dilemma: more than half of all high school graduates go on to attend an institution of higher learning. As such, we are moving toward [2]'s "universal phase." Given this quantitative change in the percentage of those continuing on to attend universities in addition to the traditional emphasis placed on scholarly ability, university education in Japan has been forced to embrace qualitative changes to accept the diverse range of students who enter their institutions—students who differ in terms of their motivations for learning, levels of eagerness, and perspectives for the future.

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Japanese society has undergone rapid change consequent to recent economic globalization and rapid technological progress. To succeed amid intensive competition in the global market, Japanese corporations have been transferring their production bases overseas and are undergoing industrial reorganization. Consequently, the employment environment in modern Japan has undergone dramatic changes. The changes in Japanese employment conditions are shown in Fig. 2. The conventional system for human resource development, which by the 1990s was based on the prerequisite of long-term, stable employment at a single Japanese company, is today no longer able to function fully. Japanese people must rise to the challenge of securing new types of work and exploring new possibilities while polishing their skills by changing jobs.

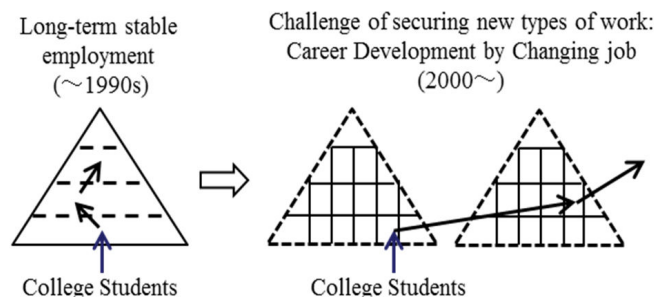


Fig. 2 Change in Japanese Employment Conditions

Reference [3] named a society where people develop their career by changing jobs a "portfolio society," and indicated that Japanese universities are being required to support students' career development so that, by the time they graduate, they possess the abilities and attitudes necessary for social and vocational independence.

Additionally, a knowledge-based society has emerged worldwide. This society bears testimony to the increasing importance of human capital as the foundation for activities in all aspects of society, politics, economics, and culture. In a knowledge-based society, interest in career education has not only been marked by "a period of change from schools to workplaces," but it has also become inextricably linked to "a lifelong career," which makes possible the continuous development of people's abilities throughout their lifetime [4].

Reference [5] indicated that the purpose of career education includes "immediate employment," "immediate employability," and "sustainable employability." University career education is not solely for obtaining "employment" immediately after graduation. Further, it is more important for students to develop "sustainable employability" while honing their skills in a dynamic environment, allowing them to tackle

new jobs and possibilities with the outlook and motivation to face the unknown.

II. JAPANESE GOVERNMENT POLICY

In light of the above-mentioned issues, the need and importance of career education in Japan is growing stronger; as such, the Japanese government has proposed career education policies. Japanese universities were encouraged to start their career education programs in accordance with the report entitled “Future Vision on Career Education and Vocational Education in Schools” [6] published by the Central Education Council in January 2011, and the revised “Standards for the Establishment of Universities” published in April 2011.

In 2006, the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry (METI) defined the basic abilities required for working together with various people in the workplace and local communities as the “Fundamental Competencies for Working Persons” at a committee meeting comprising intellectuals from businesses and universities. It shows the directionality of growth toward the future for university students. As shown in Fig. 3, the abilities were categorized into three overarching groups (comprising 12 competency factors): the ability to “step forward and act persistently even if you fail,” “question and think through,” and “collaborate with various people to achieve goals.”

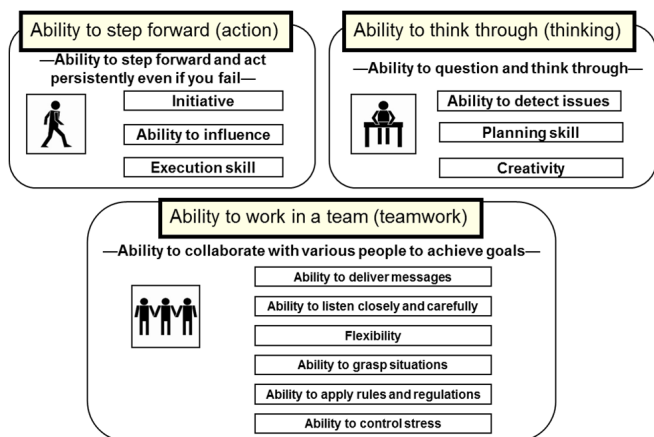


Fig. 3 Fundamental Competencies for Working Persons by METI (Source: [7])

Further, based on a proposal by the METI in 2007, the “Industry-Academia Partnership for Human Resource Development” was established. Extensive dialogue between industry and academia concerning cross-sectional themes and fields fostered a shared awareness, and specific actions were taken related to both.

III. CASES

As described above, government support for policies have prompted diverse stakeholders in Japanese universities to recognize the importance of career education. In recent years, career education has been rapidly implemented at Japanese universities. However, most Japanese universities are still

struggling to link career education with university education.

In the final part of this paper, two pioneering Japanese universities’ cases are introduced. Both universities have succeeded in responding to issues related to social problems, adjusting to the “world of work,” and cultivating students’ mindset toward continuous, lifelong learning and career development. The following two cases are potentially capable of promoting practical forms of education, while remaining deeply involved in society and contributing to the link between career and university education in Japan.

A. Doshisha University

Doshisha University provides students with practical and comprehensive learning experiences in a wide range of fields under the slogan, “bringing the educational power of society into a university.” In collaboration with local communities, Doshisha University strives to nurture students using Project-Based Learning (PBL).

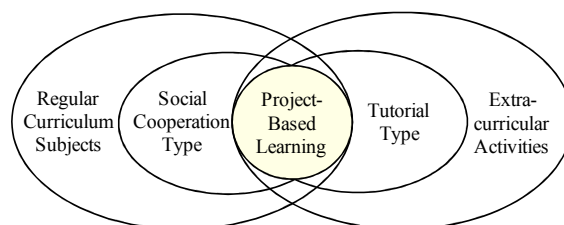


Fig. 4 Project-based learning model at Doshisha University (Source:[8])

There are two types of PBL at Doshisha University, as shown in Fig. 4. One is “social cooperation” and the other, “tutorial.” In the social cooperation type, students learn through activities autonomously on site to discover the problems of modern society. In the tutorial type, students independently search for problems and solve them in certain conditions and environments. Additionally, PBL is roughly classified into “regular curriculum subjects” and “extracurricular activities” by learner forms. In the regular curriculum subjects, PBL is developed in college-wide courses beyond the boundaries of the faculty. In extracurricular activities, however, PBL plays an important role as a place of learning for students. Though the learning forms are different, students learn and develop “project management literacy.”

PBL at Doshisha University attracts wide attention from society, and many suggestions are given to higher education institutes in Japan.

B. Kyoto Sangyo University

According to [9], Cooperative Education “connects academic studies at educational institutions with experience at the workplace.” As one of the most effective educational systems to support the formation of university students’ careers, Cooperative Education has been practiced by many industrial societies in Western countries. Japan is considered to be one of the few countries where Cooperative Education has not been established.

Kyoto Sangyo University (KSU) is a pioneering university

that has implemented Cooperative Education at Japanese universities. At KSU, the Japanese Cooperative Education model named “On/Off Campus Fusion” is performed as shown in Fig. 5.

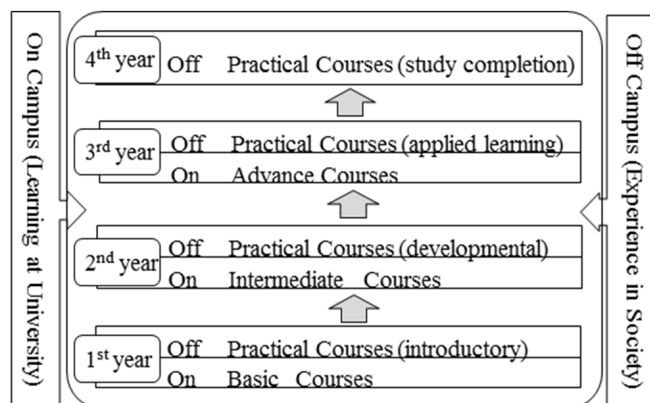


Fig. 5 Japanese cooperative education model at KSU (Source: [10])

Under this system at KSU, students participate in “on campus” (university) and “off campus” (society) education throughout a four-year bachelor’s degree program. This “sandwich-type” educational program is one that projects students in an upward spiral using the synergy effect of “learning at the university” and “experience in society.” Faculties in specialized areas have adopted this educational program, and it achieves certain effects in human resource development to promote the advancement of local communities.

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