

The Risk of Prioritizing Management over Education at Japanese Universities

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Abstract : Due to the decline of the 18-year-old population, Japanese universities have a tendency to convert their form of employment from tenured positions to fixed-term positions for newly hired teachers. The advantage of this is that universities can be more flexible in their employment plans in case they fail to fill the enrollment of quotas of prospective students or they need to supplement teachers who can engage in other academic fields or research areas where new demand is expected. The most serious disadvantage of this, however, is that if secure positions cannot be provided to faculty members, there is the possibility that coherence of education and continuity of research supported by the university cannot be achieved. Therefore, the question of this presentation is as follows: Are universities aiming to give first priority to management, or are they trying to prioritize educational and research rather than management? To answer this question, the author examined the number of job offerings for college foreign language teachers posted on the JREC-IN (Japan Research Career Information Network, which is run by Japan Science and Technology Agency) website from April 2012 to October 2015. The results show that there were 1,002 and 1,056 job offerings for tenured positions and fixed-term contracts respectively, suggesting that, overall, today's Japanese universities show a tendency to give first priority to management. More detailed examinations of the data, however, show that the tendency slightly varies depending on the types of universities. National universities which are supported by the central government and state universities which are supported by local governments posted more job offerings for tenured positions than for fixed-term contracts: national universities posted 285 and 257 job offerings for tenured positions and fixed-term contracts respectively, and state universities posted 106 and 86 job offerings for tenured positions and fixed-term contracts respectively. Yet the difference in number between the two types of employment status at national and state universities is marginal. As for private universities, they posted 713 job offerings for fixed-term contracts and 616 offerings for tenured positions. Moreover, 73% of the fixed-term contracts were offered for low rank positions including associate professors, lectures, and so forth. Generally speaking, those positions are offered to younger teachers. Therefore, this result indicates that private universities attempt to cut their budgets yet expect the same educational effect by hiring younger teachers. Although the results have shown that there are some differences in personal strategies among the three types of universities, the author argues that all three types of universities may lose important human resources that will take a pivotal role at their universities in the future unless they urgently review their employment strategies.

Keywords : higher education, management, employment status, foreign language education

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