

16. Career Consciousness of Japanese Youth Studying at International Schools Abroad

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(1) Purpose and Aim of Study

[Purpose]

With the cooperation of three international schools in Europe (the International School of Amsterdam, the International School of Düsseldorf, and the International School of Paris), Japanese upper secondary school students enrolled in the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Program (DP) in these institutions were surveyed. The results of the survey will be used to examine the educational impact of the IB Diploma Program, and the impact on career choice and development of living abroad and having a Japanese identity.

[IB/DP Curriculum]

- Students must choose three or four higher-level courses and two or three standard-level courses from a total of six subject groups (first language, second language, the individuals and societies, experimental sciences, mathematics, arts, and other elective subjects), and must also meet three requirements (extended essay; theory of knowledge (TOK); and creativity, action, service (CAS)).
- In each course, emphasis is placed on the development of logical and critical thinking based on reading assignments, discussions on designated themes, and the submission of lab reports and essays.

[Methodology]

- (1) Interview survey of enrolled students (follow-up survey: annually for three consecutive years)
- (2) Questionnaire survey of graduates
- (3) Interview survey of who have returned to Japan (persons graduated about ten years ago)

[Aim]

The aim of the study is to examine the impact of the educational effects of the IB program and intercultural experiences and their causal relation with career paths, career awareness, and future plans.

(2) Outline of Research Results

[Qualities and Skills Acquired]

- Students must invest a considerable amount of time in study and service in order to complete lab reports and essays in English and to meet the requirements for social service activities. By the completion of the program, students develop time management skills and endurance and gain a sense of accomplishment and self-respect.
- Students receive extensive instruction in essay writing and in the preparation of their extended essay. This helps develop their abilities of writing, thinking, and presenting.
- Regardless of the number of years spent abroad, students' level of confidence in their English ability is generally not high. Many students feel conflicted about the assumption in Japanese society that Japanese students enrolled in international schools are fluent in English and are expected to achieve proficiency levels comparable to students whose native language is English.
- Japanese students enrolled in international schools comment that the level of mathematics is higher and club activities are more interesting in Japanese lower secondary schools.

[Japanese Identity]

- Students were asked whether their Japanese identity was based on "nationality," "ethnicity" or "patterns of behavior and thought." Many students chose "nationality" (depending on formal requirement). Many students who have lived in the same foreign country since early childhood and were enrolled in local schools have a weak sense of Japanese identity ("Japanese in appearance only").
- Japanese A1 classes (Japanese taught as native language) provide a place for Japanese students to congregate. These classes strengthen the Japanese group and Japanese identity. They also serve as a source of emotional security while living abroad.

- Even while living abroad, the Internet and other means provide opportunities for superficial but extensive contact with information on Japan. People are affected by the pressures and circulation of information that occur within the narrow confines of the expatriate Japanese society.

[Career Paths]

(1) Choice of University

- Many of the students are in their second or third overseas stay on account of the overseas assignments of their fathers. After graduating from upper secondary school in June, the general pattern is to return to Japan for enrollment in preparatory classes with the intent of entering private Japanese universities that admit freshman students in September. (Most students enter Japanese universities and find jobs in Japan.)
- Those hoping to enter foreign universities tend to be students that have been enrolled in local schools in the United States and France since early childhood. The main purpose for entering foreign universities is to achieve higher levels of practical knowledge and skills (such as engineering, flute, or ballet).
- Students are very concerned that the IB program is not well known in Japan and is not properly recognized by Japanese university admissions officers.
- For university choice and career guidance, students depend on teachers (Paris) and choices made by parents and information obtained from local preparatory classes (Düsseldorf, Amsterdam).
- Many of the students entering Japanese universities (law, economics, etc.) are disappointed by the large classes and impersonal instruction.

(2) Employment

- Males indicate a preference for working for Japanese companies and requesting overseas assignments. Some show an interest in working for international organizations and NGOs. In both cases, there is a clear preference for living abroad as Japanese.

Among females, there is no strong interest in continuing to work after marriage. The marked preference for becoming housewives may reflect their own home environment of fathers on expatriate assignments and stay-at-home mothers.