Citizenship Education in Japan
- Current Situation and its Limitations at Stake-

Mari Nagasue

INTRODUCTION

Citizenship education programs have been flourishing in the European Union and the United States, and attracting scholars' attention from various different fields. Citizenship education is not only a new educational curriculum but is rooted in the changes of social structures from the late twentieth century. Recently in Japan, an amendment was passed to lower the voting age from 20 to 18, and the importance of citizenship education has been attracting more attention.

It has only been about twenty years since Japan had introduced the concept of citizenship education. The term "citizenship" could have varying interpretations, from a legal status belonging to a country to one's social and political standing within a community, which includes an array of different political, ideological, and philosophical perspectives with diverse goals, practices, and approaches. Although the interpretations, implementations, and perspectives vary, the core objective of citizenship education is to nurture good democratic citizens. (Schugurensky and Myers, 2003). Educational policies promoting citizenship education for democracy has been an area of increasing concern in Japan, since the level of social and political participation among young adults is still very low. First, historical developments are analyzed to understand how the Japanese citizenship education concept was established. Then, Gert Biesta's concept regarding the functions of education is introduced, and how they relate to citizenship education in Japan. Subsequently, a recent case study conducted through interviews of Japanese high school students is analyzed to see how citizenship education is actually perceived by the students, followed by a discussion to investigate the reality of citizenship education through the high school students' standpoint. This article targets the inconsistencies the three

actors (official discourse, teachers, and students) of citizenship education experience in what is expected in theory versus its inapplicability in the actual class room, and aims to investigate what factors are affecting the effective implementation of citizenship education, and what is creating the divergence between the conceptual framework and the actual scene of practice in high schools.

DEVELOPMENT OF CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN CONTEMPORARY JAPAN

When the new Course of Study was published for the first time after the WWII in 1947, a new social studies course was introduced, which was based on the American model, especially those of progressive Virginia Plan and Californian Plan. (Nagai, n.d.). It was determined then that in the newly established Japanese education, politics and education must be kept separate. This separation of politics and education was practiced not only in the curriculum but also in pedagogy, and political neutrality in education was strongly reinforced. (Arai, 2019).

In 1947, social studies became an extended, integrated subject, which had the objectives of citizenship education to foster social recognition and raise "good" citizens who would be the deliverers of Japanese democracy. The government educational guidelines back then did not possess any legally restraining power, hence the teaching contents were left to the discretion of the teachers. Teachers designed the course contents by paying attention to the students and their communal/regional circumstances, and the acquisition of knowledge, understanding, and ability was learned from solving social problems that were related to the students' everyday life. (Naganuma et al, 2012). However, this new model caused a great confusion in the field of education, and was highly criticized by political and educational circles, as well as various nongovernmental educational organizations for ignoring the reality of Japanese society and blamed for a decline in academic ability. (Nagai, n.d.).

In the revision of 1958, and the subject of social studies was subdivided into categories, and later on, the subdivided politics and economy and the field of social studies were reorganized into civics education. Additionally, the government curriculum guidelines gained a legally binding strength, which

disabled the teachers to use their own discretion in designing civics courses. In such field of social studies and civics education, the emphasis was more set on social recognition to learn about the ways in which the society is organized, and the opportunities for pragmatic approaches were very scarce. For example, in the field of politics, students recognized the mechanisms of a democratic system and became aware of social rules, but a chance to get involved with the actual rule making or learning political skills was almost absent. (Inoue, n.d.; Matsuno, 1997). Nevertheless, the post-war Course of Study opened the first step towards the introduction of citizenship education in Japan, and its foundation was formed. Since the 1950's, reforms in educational guidelines have been taking place almost every ten years, and there has been a shift from the Americans style of social studies which emphasize on life principles, empiricism, and synthetism to more Japanified model, which stresses systematisms, and intellectualism. (Nagai, n.d.)

Considerations on CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

In the 1980's, a special education council was founded in order to revise the post-war education. In its response, the education council highlighted what was later known to be Shingakuryokukan (New Vision for Academic Ability), which focused more on the children's spontaneous activities and experiences rather than the traditional way of packing up knowledge. In the New Vision for Academic Ability policy, cultivating the students' own will to learn, ability to think, power of judgment, and expressiveness were emphasized, and the teachers' disposition of instruction shifted to supporting children rather than coaching.

The prosperous bubble economy in the 1980's and its termination in the early 1990's also marked some influence in the nation's educational policy. In 1996, the Keidanren (Federation of Economic Organizations) issued a policy statement consisting of five recommendations for education, administration, and home, and seven actions for the corporate, business world, which expressed the essential talents that are desired for building an attractive country. (Keidanren, n.d.). Keidanren advocated that during such times of recession after the economic bubble burst, talents needed are those who can be the independent actors possessing high self-responsibility and strong creativity.

In addition to the advocacy by Keidanren, the Central Education Council also

issued a report in 1996, promoting Ikiru Chikara (Zest for Life) policy. In this report, the Central Education Council denied the conventional method of memorization, and favorably listed the abilities for initiatives, judgement, creativity, and problem solving skills as the alternative. Zest for Life policy emphasized on fostering abilities and dispositions to find a task by oneself, learn and think independently, judge with subjectivity, act autonomously, and solve problems with efficiency in a rapidly changing society. Zest for Life Policy continues to be one of the major concept in the Course of Study in the 2000's. Shingakuryokukan, the 1996 policy statement issued by Keidanren and Ikiru Chikara not only promoted autonomy, aggressiveness, creativeness, and the ability to judge which are considered to be essential for career education, but they had also demonstrated that very similar characteristics are desirable and necessitated for raising democratic citizens from the educational council's point-of-view and for fostering strong actors in the economic workforce from the Keidanren's standpoint. This indicates that from both educational and economic views, reforms in education were indispensable for the better preparation of young citizens for the development of democracy and strong economy.

-HINDRANCE ON CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION POLICY MAKING-

Two ministries are in charge of developing educational policies in Japan. One is the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW), and the other is the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science, Sports and Technology (MEXT). As Parmenter et al indicate, the two Ministries lack effective coordination, and in response to their inefficiency, the Cabinet issued the "Seishonen Ikusei Seisaku Keikaku" (Youth Development Policy Plan) in 2003, which became the pillar for policy measures in the Ministries, and the foundation of citizenship education in Japan. (2008). The Youth Development Policy Plan focuses on four significant areas; social independence, assistance for youth in particular need, youth as active members of society, and motivation to create an atmosphere for free and open discussion. (Parmenter et al, 2008). The respective Ministries invent policies based on the Youth Development Policy Plan, however, MHLW executes social security policies while MEXT formulated policies regarding education. Although both Ministries create policies based on the same plan, MHLW concentrates on areas primarily out of schools whereas MEXT focuses predominantly in schools. As Parmenter et al signifies, this lack of coordination

creates an issue that there is no combined structure of citizenship education embracing both school and community, the lack of integration makes school and community separate issues in the field of citizenship education.

An economic perspective THE CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION DECLARATION OF 2006

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) issued "Shitizunshippu Kyoiku Sengen (The Citizenship Education Declaration)" in 2006, which shed a major light for the first time to the concept of citizenship education in Japan. In this declaration, the importance of nurturing new abilities in order to respond to the increasing globalization was stated. The importance of the individual, creativity, and self-expression, simultaneously with the exercising of rights and obligations to be actively engaged in a diverse society was mentioned in the first lines of the declaration to clarify the qualities needed for a continuous development of the society. Since the previous education did not prepare the citizens well nor provide them an opportunity to acquire knowledge and the skills to put it into practice, the declaration asserts that it is vital to raise independent, self-reliant, autonomous citizens. (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, 2006a)

Although the declaration was published from the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, it demonstrates that citizenship education increasingly occupied high interest in Japan, and the issuance of Citizenship Education Declaration was a symbolic example. It was written from the educators' and educational researchers' point of view, and it showed that abilities desired for fostering good economic citizens had many common characteristics required for democratic citizenship education. This Citizenship Education Declaration looks as though it is promoting democratic citizenship education in Japan, however, it should not be forgotten that METI's main concern is the economy. Moreover, for METI to go out of its realm and advert to educational aspects indicate that from METI's point-of-view, the existing system was not suitable in producing independent workers and active consumers who will be the dynamic actors of the Japanese economy. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the desired characteristics and conditions for cultivating democratic citizens and autonomous economic participants have great similarities, both having a goal to prepare young citizens as active participants in the society through individual's interactions

with the others in the community.

For the first time in "The Citizenship Education Declaration," the term "citizenship" has been defined as "the qualities to actively engage with diverse persons in a society, which is constructed by various values and cultures, with the purpose to protect oneself, plan self-fulfillment, and to contribute to the realization of a better society." (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, 2006a). As the Japanese society is moving towards what is refer to as the "mature society" with high economic standards, it mentions the upsurge of complications due to numerous disparities, such as income, occupations, academic ability, and health, which can lead to situations where people cannot cope with diverse values and alienate themselves from the society. (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, 2006a). The declaration endorses the need for citizenship education, which can provide an opportunity to foster the abilities to find the issues in communities, participate in solving the matter in every stages of planning, consideration, decision-making, implementation, and evaluation, protect oneself while building an appropriate relationship with other persons, lead a fruitful life with a job, and contribute to forming a better society. In addition, these abilities cannot be attained without participating in diverse environments, such as family, communities, regions, school, work, and other communities. The declaration explains the urgent need for citizenship education, but also elucidates that citizenship education must not oblige the citizens for voluntary work or foster citizens who are convenient only for the country or the society. It stresses that what is important are the endowments to actively engage in social decision making and processes of administration, and exercise individual rights and fulfill duties.

In order to expand the citizenship education, the declaration claims that proceeding with a classroom education alone without having a tangible opportunity in social participation is not effective. Therefore, together with offering the opportunity to learn, securing a place for actual practices is essential to propagate citizenship education. With regards to providing an opportunity to learn, citizenship programs and teaching materials ought to be offered to both school age youth and Shakaijin (a fully-fledged member of the society in the sense of working adults) through schools, regions, home, organizations, places of employment and distance learning.

The significance of social participation is also augmented in the declaration,

and the places of substantial occasions must be secured. Especially in Japan, opportunities for young children and minors to participate in the society is considered inadequate, and it is extremely important for them to take part in decision making processes and actual practices before becoming adults. In the school educational system, not only the subject of citizenship education but also school events and student council are good possibilities of experiencing the concept of citizenship in real action.

CASE STUDY: Reactions and Reflections of Senior High School Students

A series of group interviews were conducted with the total of 21 senior high school students in 2020, to investigate what their perception of citizenship education is, and how their real life experiences reveal effectiveness or discrepancies of the existing educational policies and classroom education. The interviewees ranged from 16 years to 18 years of age at the time of interview, all physically attending the first to third year of senior high school. The interviews were conducted in small groups anonymously to protect the privacy of the individual students.

First, a series of questions were asked to see if the students were interested in civics education as a school subject. The responses showed just about half of the students (48%) were interested. Students' opinions revealed a lack of interest in the school taught courses, and the main reason of unconcern came from the manner of instruction rather than the actual contents. Examples of the students' responses included, "Teachers are not making the course interesting", "Vocabulary used is too difficult", "It's taught in a hurry and skipping too many sections makes it harder to follow", "Cannot understand the relations with other subjects", and "Cannot see how what has been taught is connected to our everyday life." From the students' responses, it is possible to speculate that there is a problem between the amount of contents and time constraints in classroom teaching, and also a lack of connection between what is taught in class and its application in the students' daily lives.

Secondly, the students were asked about citizenship education and participation in the community. Students were asked if they have ever heard of the word, "Citizenship Education" or "Sovereign Education (Shukensha Kyoiku)",

and 95% answered that they are aware of the terms. However, when they were asked about the practical examples associated with the two terms, most were related to electoral participation. Students were also asked about participation in community activities, and if they are interested in taking part. 38% of the students were interested in participating in some sort of community activities, while 38% answered to have very little interest or no interest at all, and 24% responded with "don't know."

Despite their level of interest towards community activities, all of the students answered positive involvement in communal actions through school projects. These activities included picking up rubbish in public areas, acting as safety guide flaggers at local road intersections, volunteering for conversations at nursing homes for the elderly, collecting PET bottles and other plastic products for environmental issues, and so on. Since participation in these projects were compulsory, all of the students took part in groups, but the activities were preset by the schools or was originally introduced by former students but had become customary.

Besides school projects, only two students had responded to be taking part in community activities. One of the students, who has been volunteering as a fund-raiser for a dog shelter, mentioned that since her family dog was originally adopted from a dog shelter, she is very much interested in doing something for the cause, but school work, extracurricular club activities, and studying for university entrance exams do not leave her enough time to participate in the fund-raising as much as she would like to.

In addition, 81% of the students responded that they have not searched for any community participation outside of school, and 48% had answered they are not sure what exactly is meant by "community involvement." The primary reason behind this low motivation was the time. As the student volunteering at the dog shelter replied, most of the students answered back that even if they find a cause that they are much interested in, they do not have the time to participate, unless they give up studying or participation in club activities, and they cannot afford to allocate the time since they are about to take the university entrance exams.

DISCUSSION

The advantage of the interviews taken for the case study was that since it was organized outside of schools, the students were free to discuss any matter without fearing the eyes of the teachers or having to worry about how their responses affect their grade performances. However, there were no doubt limitations to the interviews conducted for the case study. Since the sample size was only 21 students, their responses are not enough to represent the students nationwide. Additionally, due to the spread of COVID-19, no further physical interviews were made possible in order to avoid forming clusters or having close physical contacts. However, their live experiences and opinions reflect how the educational policy is conducted in school and received by the actual students.

According to Gert Biesta's three functions of education, it is clear that the current Japanese educational system heavily relies on the domains of qualification and socialization. The students are provided with adequate knowledge, skills and understanding at school (qualification), and take part in becoming a part of existing social, cultural order (socialization). However, the level of autonomy and inactivity indicate a difficulty in subjectification.

Yusuke Arai of Nihon University analyzes that the current Japanese education emphasizes heavily on the functions of qualification and socialization in order to sustain political neutrality, which is a requirement by the Basic Education Act of Japan. (Arai, 2019). Arai notes, "the political education provided at school is aimed at conferring information and knowledge on the existing political system as a sovereign citizen and at fostering attitudes toward and motivation for participation in politics." (2019, P.70) Although it is obligatory, it is challenging to maintain political neutrality, and thus adding a tremendous pressure on actively engaged teachers. In 2015, MEXT issued supplementary teaching materials on the formal political participation. However, the supplementary teachers' guide repeatedly emphasized the politically neutral position, and stressed that they are to refrain from communicating their own opinions or making comments on political issues. (Arai, 2019). Such pressure on the teachers and their restrictions on making political remarks in their teachings make the class culture prone for the students to remain neutral or not to express their free opinions. Moreover, some teachers argue that in the

need to rear students' ability to make decisions based on specific grounds, it is a great contradiction that the teachers are banned from expressing their own opinions. (Moronaga, 2015).

In addition to the binding of political neutrality in education, teachers are pressured to prepare the students for university entrance exams from the parents, schools, and students themselves. However, civics education in most cases is not considered as a main subject of entrance exams to the institutions at the next level. This indicates that majority of high schools cannot assign too much class time for citizenship education, because it is not directly related to the passing of entrance exams. On top, the allocation of marks for social studies at university entrance exams is low. Also, although there are some descriptive questions, most of the exam problems have fixed answers which require pure memorization, hence creatively answering to open-answer questions is not considered a priority, especially for high competition universities. (Kawaguchi et al, 2017). Furthermore, students are taught how to take the entrance exams in the most efficient way in cram schools that they are accustomed to valuing efficiency over taking time to acquire critical thinking ability.

Professor Tsuyoshi Fuji of Meiji University articulates that one of the major problems is for the Japanese teachers to feel too nervous about dealing with political issues in classrooms. It is derived from the notion that political education is culturally a taboo in academic settings, and the teachers are supposed to maintain a neutral position when it comes to discussing politics. Thus, teachers are experiencing confusion when it comes to introducing citizenship education in schools. (Fuji, n.d.). Nevertheless, Professor Fuji argues that Japan is very behind when it comes to citizenship education world standards, and there is an urgent need to catch up very quickly. Teachers must be aware that they are only one of the many factors for the students to make decisions. And once the students have developed an adequate level of political literacy, teachers do not have to worry about overwhelming them with biased opinions or too much information. (Fuji, n.d.).

CONCLUSION

From comparing the different policy guidelines issued by several government institutions and councils, it was clear that the respective demands require

similar characteristics of creativity, autonomy, expressiveness, ability to judge, solve problems and self-reliance. These characteristics are essential for increasing subjectification of the students, as well as for fostering political literacy for nurturing active citizens. However, despite all the official discourses, teachers are incapable of implementing effective classroom teaching, due to legal and cultural constraints. Additionally, students are torn between what sort of education they need in life and what they are required to do for their future (i.e. passing university exams), and the case study revealed that there is a great confusion. Hence, the official discourses, situations of the teachers and circumstances of the students all have disparities in between and they are hovering effective citizenship education. The gaps in between the three participants of education must be narrowed in order to identify what kind of Japanese society the new curriculum wants to implement through citizenship education. Moreover, the standardized testing for universities which require intensive memorization, and the culture of accepting such exam standards must change, in order for the school culture to accept a more expressive, autonomous classroom learning. Limitations of citizenship education in classrooms is caused not by the curriculum itself but the learning environment. Therefore, curriculum development must take into account such factors and introduce a new way to be more effective, otherwise making citizenship education a compulsory subject is not going to make any difference. It has become clear that effective implementation needs more than a top down discrete national guidelines and must incorporate bottom up demands and opinions from the teachers and the students to eliminate the discrepancies in all participants. It may be difficult for the citizenship education in Japan to transform drastically in a short period of time, however, Japan is at the junction to consider the importance of independent actors and autonomy in education as well as in society, which hopefully will alter the traditional school culture and contribute to the further development of more effective democratic citizenship education in the future.

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Abstract

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Mari Nagasue

Citizenship education programs have been incorporated in school curricula aggressively in many countries since the late 1990's. Japan has been following the world trend and emphasizing the necessity of citizenship education by introducing educational reforms to intensify the school programs related to citizenship education. With the most recent educational reform, Japan has set an objective to strengthen the citizenship education by making it a compulsory subject for high school students, beginning in 2022.

This article explores the situation of the existing citizenship education program in Japanese high schools, and analyzes its limitations from the students' point of view. The focus is set on the historical development, and what exactly is projected by the current citizenship education within the framework of the functions of education. Additionally, the article tries to elucidate the obstacles that are hindering the implementation of the citizenship education programs. This article identifies and explains that the existing discrepancies between the official policies, teachers' positions, and students' class room experiences are behind the difficulties of executing citizenship education program in current Japan.