

## Japanese Educational System Problems

Yasko Ishimaru

In 1996, 46 percent of Japanese high school graduates went on to attend a two-year junior college or four-year university (“Schools and Curricula”). Having a high level of education, such as a college diploma or a university degree, is critical for Japanese students, since education directly affects their future career and a university’s name value determines students’ future employment prospects. As a result, the competition to enter prestigious universities is extremely severe and creates many negative effects on Japanese high school students. Three of the major problems are student’s lack of creativity, lack of freedom, and lack of future vision.

First, Japanese educational system does not encourage creativity among the students. The main cause is the regulation of university entrance examination criteria. In Japan, university entrance does not depend on the students’ performance in high school; that is, only the results of the entrance examinations determine whether or not students can enter a university. This leads to an over-emphasis on memorization in the high school curriculum. Students are very busy learning specific techniques in order to perform well on the entrance examinations, so they hardly spend time on other activities such as class discussions, presentations, or experiments, which are also supposed to be part of their education. For example, class discussions and presentations help students learn to explore and express their opinions in public, and experiments require keen observation and analysis, which train students to think analytically. By removing all of these other important activities, the Japanese educational system prevents students from developing creativity.

Second, students do not have much freedom. One reason is the number of assignments and examinations in high schools. The third year of high school (equivalent to grade 12 in Canada) is the most typical. Students have at least one exam every week, so they hardly have any weekends off. They spend almost all their holidays such as summer holidays taking supplementary classes. The second reason is the class size. Japanese high schools usually have fairly large class sizes with approximately 40-45 students in one class sharing one teacher (Johnson and Johnson). Such class sizes are too large for the teacher to pay attention to each student, so some students cannot get the help what they need. To solve this problem, many students attend private schools called *juku*, or “*cram schools*”, for additional assistance. In fact, 60% of Japanese high school students attended *juku* in 1993 (“The Japanese Education”). It is common for students to come home around 10 p.m. when they attend *juku*. These two factors cause students to have hardly any free time to balance their life.

Finally, Japanese educational system creates the lack of future vision among students. One of the main reasons is pressure from teachers. For each high school, the percentage of students entering university, especially prestigious ones, directly influences the school’s reputation. The more students go to decent universities, the better image the high school will enjoy. Therefore, more students will apply to the high school. As a result, teachers are usually very eager to push students to aim for prestigious universities rather than focuses on their career goals. These pressures from teachers make students unable to develop a clear vision of their future.

In brief, Japanese educational system prevents students from developing creativity, enjoying free time, and maintaining a clear future vision. The pressure to perform well on university entrance examinations is overwhelming for many high school students. It is not healthy that the examination performance is the only factor for university acceptance. Even though it is not easy to change the system on which the country has depended for a long time, it is important to make changes to improve it.

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