

Lifelong Education in Japan

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I Situation of Japanese Lifelong Education

The idea of lifelong education covers vocational training, non-vocational adult education and free access to schooling. The first chapter treats these three forms of lifelong education respectively. In addition, all the three fields make full use of conventional and innovative communication media but audio-visual education itself is usually placed into the category of non-vocational adult education. One of the noteworthy features in Japanese lifelong education activities which have already spread is that the private sector plays an important role in every field.

Privatised vocational training

The private sector accounts for a substantial part of vocational training. It is also superior in quality to that of the public sector. Although the actual condition varies with the branch of industry and according to the size of the company, Japanese incompany education seems to enjoy a good international reputation. Japanese private enterprises must maintain an independent lifelong training system, and are devoted earnestly to incompany education.

Most new recruits lack in special skills, business experience or professional qualifications, partly because the external labour market sectioned by trade remains undeveloped and partly because schooling only supplies a basic level of vocational education. Accordingly, employers prefer young recruits who have just graduated and whom they regard as flexible and promising. These young recruits are then given vocational or professional training under specific company training programmes. Moreover, owing to the custom of promotion through seniority, the employer has the task of keeping his employees capable of fulfilling their duty in any position continually until their retirement.

On the other hand, the national and local governments provide various learning opportunities, apart from public vocational training administered by the Ministry of Labour. The Ministries of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and of Transport, and Small and Medium Enterprise Agency own facilities for

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training in their respective relevant fields of trade. Furthermore, government officials have access to educational institutions maintained by the Ministries of Posts and Telecommunications and of Home Affairs, or Defense, Maritime Safety, National Police, National Tax Administration, Meteorological Agencies and so on, and to local in-service training centres. Nevertheless, the share of vocational training taken by the public sector is still minimal.

Healthy rivalry between the two sectors in adult education

As regards non-vocational adult education, there is too little evidence to work out the shares constituted by the public and private sectors, firstly because it is difficult to frame a full definition of adult education and secondly because data on the private sector is not available. However, lessons in traditional arts and activities are popular among the Japanese and in-company education programmes tend to include a few recreational and cultural activities. These facts imply that the private sector predominates over its public counterpart in the non-vocational field as well as in the vocational field.

In the public sector, non-vocational education policy is mainly comprised by various lecture programmes arranged by local education boards and improvement in public facilities such as town halls, museums and libraries. In recent years, as the idea of lifelong education has spread, educational opportunities provided for adults by non-educational departments have also been increasing. Their popular courses relate to (a) recreational interests and arts, (b) home making, (c) sports, and (d) general culture.

In the meantime, non-vocational lifelong education in the private sector has flourished with a variety of forms. A great number of people are active in learning traditional arts and activities through taking private lessons or attending classes, or through self-study using old and new media. This enthusiasm for learning seems to have arisen from the Japanese cultural and social background and historical context.

The people have been profoundly influenced by Confucian culture which values self-development by lifelong learning as well as respect for one's superiors. Furthermore, society expects its members to occupy a higher position or to fulfill more important tasks as they advance in years and pass through each life stage. Therefore, they understand the necessity to keep on learning upon completion of their formal education. The successive rapid changes in their living modes brought about by modernisation since the beginning of the Meiji era have strongly convinced the people of such a need. In addition, there is little

difference in culture between social classes and a comparatively high mobility between the classes makes people more ambitious to climb up the social ladder by means of self-development.

Few places for mature students in schooling

More than four out of five students at the post-secondary education level are enrolled in the private sector. Furthermore, most special training and miscellaneous schools (which are characterised by vocational or practical semi-formal education and therefore whose function could be regarded as closest to lifelong education) are in the private sector. In respect to universities and junior colleges, the private sector also offers all the correspondence courses in which the proportion of mature students is highest and the majority of evening courses which are more accessible to mature students than daytime courses.

Except for the above mentioned opportunities for post-secondary education, schools and institutions of higher education do not perform an important function in adult education. In fact, teenagers who have just left upper secondary schools occupy almost all the student places in higher education institutions and special training schools. At the upper secondary school level, the number of applicants for enrolment has been decreasing in evening and correspondence courses which used to cater to working youths, as more students go on to daytime courses. As a result, evening courses have been forced to turn into shelters which admit unsuccessful candidates for daytime courses instead of working youths.

Although neither schools nor universities intended to reject lifelong education or recurrent education, they have made little effort to promote adult education. This is partly due to the fact that they do not have to recruit mature students since application from teenagers alone fills their quotas. In addition, the demand for adult education in formal education institutions is unlikely to grow, and accordingly it might involve waste to create new places for mature students. In all, there has not been much incentive for formal education institutions to enter the field of adult education.

II Recent Change in Social Environment

The rapid change of social environment has heightened the need for a review of the conventional lifelong education system.

Shift in industrial structure and labour force

First of all, a highly industrialised society has experienced changes in trade and labour force:

(a) Frequent alterations in duty or quick transfers of position entailed by various technological innovations such as installation of robots or computers,

(b) Increase in the unemployed and job-seekers resulting from the contraction in secondary industries and expansion in tertiary industries, or from the cut of redundancies which changes in the industrial structure have entailed in the wake of the economic recession,

(c) Decrease in vacancies for new school leavers and graduates or in chances for temporary transfer to affiliate companies, and aging of the workforce, caused by tardy economic growth and postponement of mandatory retirement age,

(d) Increase in career women and in married women returning to work, as a result of lightened housework and through the influence of prevailing opinion on equality between the sexes,

(e) Contraction in juvenile workers owing to the fall in birth rate and rise in enrolment of post-compulsory education, and shortage of highly skilled or technical manpower and expansion in housewives or students working part-time,

(f) Opening the employment prospects for the reluctant retirees entailed by the extension of life expectancy, improvement in employment opportunities for the handicapped and breeding manpower to be efficient in business and world-wide trade relations.

Under those circumstances, the knowledge or skill which employees acquired and developed during their schooldays does not last out until the time of their retirement. Therefore, to enrich lifelong education opportunities is one of the most urgent tasks for them and their employers.

Effects on everyday life

At the same time, attention should be paid to the profound effects which technological innovations and economic development have exerted on community and family life or international relations:

(a) Extension of retired life by longevity and of spare time by reduction of working hours and domestic duties,

(b) Increase in learning needs emerging from value crises and an overflow of information, intertwining relationship between individuals, unstableness of

positions held, and uneasiness about the retired life,

(c) Desire to regain “wholeness” and enrich one’s “human” traits as a result of detailed specialisation in professional duties, feelings of solitude among the crowd and patience required in a heavily bureaucratic society,

(d) Aspiration for learning and self-development diversified and upgraded by the rise of living standards, the spread of higher education, the increase in free time and the value crisis,

(e) Dissolution of the community both in thinly populated and densely populated districts owing to the lack in effort among inhabitants to strengthen solidarity or to form new communities, caused by migration of the population from rural areas to urban areas,

(f) Increase in interdependence among the nations for global issues of population, food supply, energy resources, nature protection and peace and prosperity, and the delay in human capacity to cope with them.

These changes in social environment have been demanding improvements and a reformation of the present adult education structure so that individuals and society can successfully meet the situation .

III Attempt to Reform Adult Education

Vocational training by the public sector

As stated earlier, incompany education administered by private enterprises has almost satisfied the demand for vocational training in Japan. This has spared the government effort and expense on vocational training. It is also true that training in employment has the advantage of having employees adjust to technological innovations promptly. As long as the system of vocational training within company responds to the internalised labour market, it would be almost impossible to replace incompany education by formal education or by work preparation courses organised by the public sector.

However, examples of systematic and intensive training are found only in large-sized firms in manufacturing industries. They usually cater to young, male blue-collar high school leavers. The recent changes in occupational structure have attached much importance to the task of training workers who do not come into this category.

The tertiary industries whose population has grown to be greater than the total workforce in all the others, include more medium or small-sized companies which can ill afford to provide sufficient training. Furthermore, the majority of female workers has shifted from young single girls to middle-aged married

women, and the average age of male employees has also been rising. Accordingly, middle-aged workers who need to receive retraining so as to improve their abilities have been increasing.

In addition, now that the economic recession has affected the traditional lifetime employment system, employers have come to dismiss their redundancies more frequently under the name of business slimming. Therefore, retraining schemes are urgently desired by people out of employment. The content and process of incompany education will undergo considerable revision because the share of university or college graduates has swollen in the labour force.

On the other hand, shortage of skilled old hands has created a task to cultivate the skilled workers. The handicapped and reluctant retirees, for whom the public is requesting more vocational opportunities, also need occupational preparation. The current incompany education can hardly meet the demand for training of those in tertiary or service sectors and in medium or small-sized companies, or the middle-aged employees, well-educated white-collar workers and women in the workforce. Therefore, the public sector has to take an active role in covering those demands.

Urbanisation of adult education

Non-vocational adult education used to cater mainly for working youth without post-compulsory education. The demand for this sort of supplementary education (which had originated before the second world war) fell off in the process of urbanisation and popularisation of higher levels of education following the high economic growth. As a result, non-vocational education in the public sector consists largely of either courses for housewives or lectures for retired persons.

However, nowadays when urbanisation and the spread of education has resulted in more diversity in values and life-style, the conventional procedure of preparing a uniform course for a group of people classified by a simple criterion such as sex or age is no longer of much help in meeting the learners' upgraded and diversified aspirations and needs.

In recent years, the so-called "schooling industry" has come to provide courses on intellectual interests and artistic culture. These are mostly run by newspaper publishers, commercial television companies or department stores and so they possess some defects. Most of these courses are situated in metropolitan area or big cities which are too far for people in small towns or

rural area to commute to. Furthermore these ventures are undertaken with a profit motive so the participants are usually charged such high fees that only wealthy families can afford to attend. Moreover, programmes tend to be arranged so as to satisfy personal desires of learners rather than social needs from an objective view. These courses provide educational opportunities for their customers, but do not necessarily promote the development of local community.

Therefore, the task assigned to the public sector is to make up for these weaknesses in adult education establishments in the private sector. A first and important step might be a careful revision of the existing system which is not living up to this task.

Flexibility of schooling

Without some reforms, formal post-compulsory education institutions will also remain unable to properly perform their functions in adult education. The current system of schooling is designed entirely for the use of young fulltime students with little attention to mature students or workers whose responsibilities at home or at work make it difficult to attend an institute regularly for some length of time. On the other hand, they do not necessarily plan to obtain qualifications or a degree but to acquire specific knowledge or skills. The authorities should allow them to take courses separately, to accumulate units to be required for graduation by recurrent learning with some intervals, or to take some units at other institutes. It is also desired that lectures should conform to requirements for mature students and so include not only academic subjects but practical matters such as professional or technical skills and wisdom useful in everyday life.

The trend towards facilitating adult education within formal education is indicated by the establishment of special training schools in 1976, the University of the Air which admitted its first students in 1985 and the recent plans for community colleges in a number of districts.

Apart from these actions, some national and private universities have adopted a policy of leaving a certain number of places for mature students. More universities are likely to change their admission system to a more convenient or easier one for mature students as it is estimated that the number of new school leavers will decline in the 1990s.

However, benefits of the above-mentioned efforts in the fields of non-vocational adult education and schooling do not extend to the great part of the working male population, the nucleus of the society. The task of facilitating

opportunities for them to have an alternative learning opportunity to in-service education or self-development is still left to be done.

IV Role to Be Played by the Public Sector

In Japan, lifelong education has already developed nearly into the advanced stage and the private sector has almost always taken the initiative. Nevertheless the conventional system can hardly cope with the situation which has arisen from the new social and economic milieu and the public sector has been pressed to take measures. This does not mean that the public sector should assume full responsibility for providing lifelong education opportunities, or cover all expenses involved in such activities.

It goes without saying that the government cannot afford to meet the diverse needs on its own, partly because the public sector is ill suited to respond flexibly and promptly to the rapidly changing demand for lifelong learning, and partly because the government has recently been in serious financial difficulty. Therefore, the coverage and role of the public sector as a provider of lifelong education may remain marginal. Public policy will probably be confined to complementing and backing up the activities in the private sector.

Support of lifelong education in the private sector

The support from the government for lifelong education provided by the private sector could be classified into actions catering for the learners and those catering for the providers.

The former include (a) to awaken the indifferent public to the significance of lifelong education, (b) to furnish motivated people with relevant information and counselling, (c) to grant leave of absence from work to learners on employment, (d) to establish scholarships to financially encumbered mature learners.

The latter include (a) to act as a liaison between the public and private sectors or within the private sector, (b) to set up standards of programmes, courses and facilities for lifelong education and to authorise them, (c) to stimulate the providers to diversify lifelong education opportunities and to improve the rigid inelastic system, (d) to offer pecuniary aid for some courses, programmes and facilities.

They should not aim at regulating educational activities in the private sector but at having them develop in a healthy state.

Supply of lifelong education

Although the major task for the government is to support activities in the private sector, it is still expected to act as provider of lifelong education in the parts neglected by the private sector. The burdens which it should shoulder would be (a) programmes on national or global issues to be treated from the public point of view, (b) learning opportunities for the have-nots, the handicapped or inhabitants in sparsely populated area, (c) retraining intended for elderly people, middle-aged housewives or employees of medium and small-sized enterprises, and (d) opportunities to be shared by local inhabitants of learning issues on the development and welfare of community, juvenile orientation, or public health, and so on.

Nevertheless, the public sector could choose a policy to leave the private sector in charge of these sorts of learning opportunities instead of providing them directly and to take the position of promoter except in some isolated cases.

Integration of policies for lifelong education

One of the most pressing problems confronting the government is to combine separate systems of lifelong education operated by respective education units, and to integrate lifelong education policies carried out by respective administration branches. The reasons for this urgency are to be found partly in the following facts:

(a) Despite the fact that respective education units are offering various learning opportunities of considerably good quality, the systems of those opportunities are isolated and have no connection with each other. This has caused difficulty or inconvenience to the learners.

(b) The branches of central and local governments have been carrying out their respective plans and increasing lifelong education facilities without attention to other branches. Their actions have involved unnecessary duplication and waste of financial resources, and furthermore have put learners into confusion.

(c) The primary aim in improvement of lifelong education would be to increase employment and to benefit the welfare of the people by adjusting lifelong education opportunities to meet changes in the industrial and social environment. Therefore, improvement policy is linked with social and labour policies.

Fortunately, a number of local governments have just launched out into plans for a liaison council to strengthen contact with every relevant branch of

government and to co-ordinate policies for lifelong education. Moreover there are plans for a centre and network system to give learners information regarding demand and supply of lifelong education.

日本の生涯教育

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生涯教育は、広義には母親の胎内にあるときから棺を覆うに至るまでの、文字通り一生涯にわたる教育・学習活動を意味するが、ここでは狭義の生涯教育、すなわち義務教育及びこれに準ずる通常の学校教育終了後のすべての組織的な教育・学習活動を対象とする。

この意味での教育・学習活動は職業教育訓練（職業能力開発）、社会教育（非職業的成人教育）、中等後学校教育の三分野に大別される。この点は欧米先進諸国とさほど変わらないが、次の二点に日本の生涯教育の大きな特色を見出すことができる。その一つは、いずれの分野に関しても学習機会がかなり高い水準で整備されているものの、それぞれの分野の教育・学習活動は相互に閉ざされた状態で行われており、その間の連繫に乏しく交流が盛んでないということである。

もう一つは、三分野のすべてを通じて、教育・学習活動が盛んに行われているものの、いずれの分野にあっても民間部門の活動が極めて活発で、そのシェアも政府部門を上回っていることである。特に職業訓練の分野では、民間部門が量的にも質的にも政府部門を圧倒している。これに比べると社会教育の分野では両部門の釣合いがとれているが、ここでも民間の活動が強まってきている。学校教育も私学が圧倒的であるし、同時に若者中心で成人の割合が極端に小さいのが特色となっている。

以上のような特色は日本の歴史的経緯や文化的伝統を反映するものであり、それなりに長所もあり有効に機能してきたが、近年における社会状況の変化に伴ってこれまでの態勢では充分に対処できない事態が生じ、これに対応する公共施策が必要とされている。しかし、それは政府部門で生涯教育機会を全面的に供給すべきだとか、その費用をすべて公費で賄うべきだということを意味しない。なるべく民間の自主的な学習エネルギーを活用し、行政はバック・アップを基本とすべきであろう。

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