Student Engagement in Quality Assurance: The Peculiar Form of Student Faculty Development in Japan

Masahiro Tanaka
(University of Tsukuba, Japan)
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Introduction
The term ‘student engagement’ (Gakusei Sankaku) is not widely known in Japan. Nevertheless, many universities have been administering teaching evaluation questionnaires and student surveys. Moreover, a peculiar form of student Faculty Development (FD) has also become widespread in Japan.
Introduction 2

• The purpose of this presentation is to analyse the development of student engagement in Japan, focusing on student FD.

• For this analysis, I adopt the three-level framework by Healey et al. (2010: 22):
  – **Micro**: engagement in their own learning and that of other students
  – **Meso**: engagement in quality assurance and enhancement processes
  – **Macro**: engagement in strategy development
Japanese Universities
# Japanese Universities (May 2015)

## Number of Institutions

<table>
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<th></th>
<th>National</th>
<th>Local Public</th>
<th>Private</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Universities</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>604</td>
<td>779</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior Colleges</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>346</td>
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</table>

## Number of Freshmen

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<th>National</th>
<th>Local Public</th>
<th>Private</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Universities</td>
<td>100,631</td>
<td>30,940</td>
<td>485,936</td>
<td>617,507</td>
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<tr>
<td>Junior Colleges</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3,098</td>
<td>57,900</td>
<td>60,988</td>
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</table>

## Enrolment Rate in Universities and Junior Colleges

<table>
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<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Universities and Junior Colleges</td>
<td>56.4%</td>
<td>56.6%</td>
<td>56.5%</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Student Engagement at the Macro-level
Student Unions

• In Japanese universities, the influence of student unions is weak.
  – Student demand for representation at the macro-level is relatively low.

• However, in the early 1970s many universities attempted to introduce student engagement at the macro-level.
Student Revolts

- Student revolts in Japan took place frequently during 1965 and 1972.
- In the revolts, ‘the university itself became the object of students’ struggle’ (Osaki 1999: 240).
  - students ‘demanded university teachers to be more student-oriented’ (Amano 1997: 68) due to their perception of the teachers’ disinterest in their education.
Reform

- The universities that experienced student revolts initiated two major types of reform.
  - One type of reform aimed to improve education by enhancing small-size seminar teaching and making curricula flexible.
  - The other intended to empower students with the right to select Vice Chancellors and important section/department heads of the university (Osaki 1999).
Support or Not

• Those who supported the idea that students should participate in the selection process of Vice Chancellors:
  – The Science Council of Japan, which represents scientists
  – Left-wing political parties, such as the Social Democratic Party of Japan and the Japanese Communist Party
  – the Japan Association of National Universities

• Those who opposed the idea:
  – the Association of Private Universities in Japan, the Japan Association of Private Universities and Colleges, and the Japan Association of Private Junior Colleges
  – The Liberal Democratic Party of Japan, which was in power
  – The Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture (MEXT)
Result

- Due to the culmination of most student revolts in 1971 and the cessation of student interest in university governance, almost all universities finally accepted the MEXT’s guidance.

- Therefore, while ‘numerous reform plans were drawn up, the majority of them were never implemented and remained something that were just “written” as plans’ (Kitamura 2001: 56).
  - As a result, with an exception of a very small number of private universities, student engagement at the macro-level in Japanese universities has yet to be realised.
Student Engagement at the Micro-level
Peer support

• Student engagement at the micro-level refers to the individual student’s participation in various learning activities, including peer support.

• Peer support has rapidly spread across Japan since 2000.
  – This is背景下 by increasing academic, mental, and financial problems due to the extreme diversification of university students.
Figure 1: The implementation of student mutual support system such as peer support (by university type)

Figure 2: Areas of support in universities

Source: Compiled by the author based on Japan Student Services Organization (2014) ‘The survey on the implementation of student mutual support in universities, 2013: Report on aggregated data (simple aggregation)’, p. 27.
Student Engagement at the Meso-level
In June 2000, the MEXT published a report entitled *Enrichment of Student Life in Universities* (the Hironaka Report) to reshape universities in a more student-centred way.

This report advocated the “importance of appropriately reflecting the students’ wishes and opinions in the management of the university” (MEXT 2000).

More specifically, it proposed:

1. Conducting student surveys
2. Hosting round-table discussions with students
3. Incorporating student engagement.
Okayama University

• In June 2001, Okayama University established the Student-Staff FD Task Force, which includes students as official participating members.

• Creation of this committee is an actualization of suggestion #3 in the Hironaka Report.
  – Other national universities attempted to create similar committees but were unable to sustain them long-term.
Student FD (1)

- The ‘student FD’ model (realisation of suggestion #2) later became more widespread among private universities.
- According to Kino (2012: 91-8), student FD includes:
  - round-table discussions between students and faculty members (forums)
  - course introductions presented by students
  - proposals made by students to improve course content
  - proposals made by students to improve the living and learning environment
  - PR for the student FD (including public advertisement to recruit student participants)
A unique characteristic of the student FD is that its participants are publicly recruited student volunteers rather than official executive members of the university.

There are some of the advantages of involving volunteer members:

1. Participating students demonstrate a high level of awareness
2. Student autonomy is respected
3. Existing committees made up of faculty members need not be reorganized.

However, student volunteers do not have decision-making power (voting rights).

- Furthermore, the student FD “needs to be fun” (Ozaki 2012: 143) in order to keep attracting volunteers.
Criticism of Student FD

- Oki (2013) categorises the student FD model as a type of PBL (project-based learning) or active learning course.
- Umemura (2012) also admits that the student FD may not be successful as an FD activity.
- However, Umemura (2012: 193) contends that personal growth in the participating students has been phenomenal, and adds:
  - “I believe that personal growth in each individual student will serve as an agent of change for the classes and, ultimately, the university”.
Conclusion
In Japan, there has hardly been any movement by students to demand their right (or duty) for student engagement at the macro-level to the university since the end of student revolts.

However, cases in which students are co-opted into FD activities, which have been conventionally carried out by the teaching staff, have started to emerge.

– They constitute a form of student engagement at the meso-level, which is peculiar to Japan.
Conclusion (2)

- Still, students are normally not given the autonomy and authority to realise their reform agenda by themselves.
- Therefore, it may well be the case that any information gathered through student FD is intended to reinforce information gathered through conventional student surveys from the university’s perspective.
  - We may need to ask students if this is what they want.
Many thanks for listening
References


