

How Japanese High Schools Can Reform to Prepare Students for the Future

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Introduction

This article aims to explore the routes Japanese high schools can take to reform so that individual students will be capable of dealing with the challenges of the coming decades. In order to find out the best strategies to utilize in exploring those routes, it is crucial to understand what these future challenges will be. I am looking into this topic from a few different angles and perspectives, including students' ability to engage in conceptual and critical thinking, cultural and language learning, the development of individuality and their ability at adapting to technology.

Emerging Problems & Possible Solutions for Japanese High Schoolers

How Individual Opinions Could Play a Bigger Role in Classroom Settings

With the introduction of 5G and artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, the future that seemed to be so distant even a decade ago now appears more real to us than ever before. The Japanese high school system with its strict emphasis on memorization of technical knowledge will no longer serve students well in an age where robotic machines are capable of storing more data than human brains. It is therefore crucial for the education system to be able to adapt and evolve so that young people will be able to function successfully in the future, as traditional education is going to fail to meet the upcoming demands in skills and capabilities. Individuality and personal opinions are going to be even more important in providing new insights and will add another layer of depth and color to the world.

Given that the future is going to be less predictable and changing at a faster rate, it is important for students to innovate and provide solutions to problems utilizing new insights. High schools would thus be an important stage to help students realize this and to promote individual thinking. In current Japanese high schools, teachers normally are the authority figures who don't allow students to provide different points of view from the ones they provide. In addition, there are standardized tests with standardized answers that don't allow students to justify their own answers, which in turn mold

students to think alike. Japanese high school classrooms don't promote teacher-student interaction. The lack of discussion makes students less aware of the existence of different opinions and deprives them of the opportunity to see problems from their own points of view and to address problems on their own. There are still some Japanese high schools, however, able to do a better job in helping students develop individual opinions by forging discussions and debates during class. The establishment of a channel for teachers and students to engage in conversations and dialogues will help students not to shy away when trying to express their own thoughts and provide teachers with a better understanding of what their students are like.

How Technology Could Facilitate Learning

Since it is well known that the future is going to be even more dependent on technology, which also seems to be an irreversible trend, it is therefore essential for students to bring technology into their learning in order for them to stay ahead of the curve and ahead of others who aren't willing to adapt or don't have the access to crucial technologies. By utilizing technology, students can access the information they need to conduct research more effectively. Although there are numerous other applications unrelated to studies that pupils could access, the merits of bringing technology into the classroom outweigh the demerits, given that it is also a good opportunity for students to exercise self-control and discipline. The current Japanese high school system, however, doesn't allow the usage of technology as schools see it as a distraction in class. Gauging the seriousness of the problem, the government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is starting an initiative to encourage the use of technologies in classrooms, despite some opposition from parents who believe the ability to pass tests and exams is more important and practical than utilizing technologies which might potentially distract their kids from studying. But in order for Japanese students to get ahead of the learning curve and be prepared for a much more technologically-integrated future, it is critical for high schools to evaluate this proposal objectively.

How Japanese High Schools Should Prepare Students for Globalization

Globalization is said to be another trend that is irreversible with the bringing in of faster transportation, more interconnected transnational business networks and increasing time for leisure due to the utilization of AI. It is therefore important to understand other points of views with regard to differences of culture, in addition to learning international languages. In Japanese high schools, English teaching is focused heavily on reading and grammar as opposed to oral skills and cultural understanding. Though students might gain a general understanding of the language and some can score very high on their exams, their conversational abilities are actually very weak. Besides their inability to communicate in English, their intercultural and international experiences are quite limited as well. Due to the fact that there aren't a lot of international students studying in Japanese high schools, Japanese students generally don't have any friends who come from a different country or a different background. Opportunities to study abroad are also very limited due to the fact that not everyone can apply and only a few are accepted after application. The current Japanese high school system does not promote awareness of foreign cultures enough, with the result that an average Japanese high schooler only has a limited understanding of the outside world. Nonetheless, most Japanese high schoolers seem open to forming friendships with people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds and all they need are opportunities in their school systems. Therefore, it will be useful if Japanese high schools hold more classes on other cultural practices so as to make their students more familiar with encountering differences. It will be of great benefit if Japanese high schools could coordinate with each other to establish "buddy programs" between foreign exchange students and local Japanese students so that they will be able to develop friendships and better cultural understanding. Such a program would help to boost communication between people of different backgrounds and lead to greater knowledge sharing, enhancing cultural ties while improving English oral skills for the Japanese high school students.

How Standardized Answers Should Be Replaced by Creative Solutions

The ability to conduct research on their own will be essential for students to compete in a future environment of constant change, where they might have to face situations and conditions that have

never appeared before. Japanese high schools, instead of teaching students how to solve problems, are still very focused on memorization and technical abilities when it comes to students' exams. Due to the fact that daily grade point averages are not counted toward getting into Japanese public universities, the ability to memorize and show technical skills in their tests becomes more important to Japanese students and families than gaining actual real-life capabilities. Instead of encouraging students to learn something on their own, Japanese society places enormous pressure on them to go to *juku* (private cram schools) after school to boost their test scores in the university entrance exams.

Given that the future is unpredictable, the only individuals who will be able to lead society forward will be those that are able to think critically and creatively. The traditional Japanese high school system that seeks standardized solutions will thus be put under an enormous strain by society, knowing that this system might not be producing leaders capable of offering productive solutions to complicated problems that have never arisen before. In addressing this problem, I suggest Japanese high schools come up with programs to spur creativity by encouraging students to solve problems on their own. I believe Japanese students will become more confident and pragmatic in their ability to solve problems with the establishment of such programs in their high school years.

Conclusion

The future will present numerous challenges as well as opportunities. What the Japanese school system does to prepare its pupils for the future is going to determine whether or not Japan can remain a lively and competitive nation. I have suggested a few directions in which Japanese high schools could move forward, including a greater adoption of technologies, integration in the global environment, emphasis on personal opinions and encouragement of innovative and conceptual thinking. I believe with the adoption of such reforms, Japan could have a brighter future with its talented young leaders playing a key role in advancing the country toward greater development.

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