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Comparison of Motivational Factors between Japanese and United States High School Students

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To the citizens of Japan, whose children showed me how to be a better person, I dedicate this work. It is your country's strong senses of ethics, integrity, and humanity that inspire me to inspire others to be better people. I am forever grateful.

~Domo arigatou gozaimasu

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ABSTRACT

Spanning multiple subjects and age groups, U.S. students rate poorly while Japanese students rate highly when subject to international testing. Japanese children complete twice as much homework as their U.S. counterparts and sometimes attend school on Saturdays. The literature review looks at motivation in both U.S. American and Japanese students and considers what methods in the Japanese culture and system of education might support motivation of high school students in the U.S.

A subject matter expert in both Japanese and U.S. education was interviewed and supported the notion of high academic motivation amongst Japanese students. Their main focus is on education since it is the precursor to flourishing career prospects. U.S. students' main focus is not on education, as evident in their internationally ranked low scholastic merits. U.S. students are often content with minimal effort while Japanese students' content relies on earning the highest scholastic objectives attainable.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

I was chaperoning a United States American school's field trip to the Tama Zoo in Japan. While waiting for the zoo to open, the students ran around, wrestled each other, shouted random thoughts, and generally caused mayhem until re-direction occurred. There were several Japanese schools (with children of various ages) also awaiting the zoo's opening. These children were quiet, seated on the ground in rows, patient and orderly awaiting further instruction. I noticed the Japanese children gazing curiously, yet scornfully. I was embarrassed.

Over a three year period, I chaperoned several field trips of U.S. American students living in Japan. Many of these field trips were to Japanese schools. I noted that the Japanese children followed their teachers' directions without question, assisted each other respectfully, and were polite. My own experience of teaching Japanese students in Japan provided similar observations. The students were always on task, studying and striving for mastery.

Japanese people in general seem to be *motivated* to attain academic success. The Japanese children work hard in order to scholastically achieve. The Tama Zoo event led me to pause for reflection about why the two cultures' students have seemingly very different (academic) motivations.

Statement of Problem

In my experience, as well as in the experience of other educators, school children in the U.S. tend to do the bare minimum just to stay afloat while immigrant

children tend to step well above the minimum. Welsh (2006) compared his own high school students amongst themselves. Within his classrooms are students who were born and raised in the U.S. and immigrant students. Consistently, Welsh saw the same results in his classroom ─ the immigrant children usually outperformed those who were U.S. born, "many of the American kids… did not have…the motivation, self-discipline or work ethic of the foreign-born kids" (para. 5). Furthermore, the rapid advances of media technology seem to be competing with schools for children's time. Fifty-five percent of people aged 12 to 17 have created personal web pages, based on a 2007 study conducted by Pew Research (Bauerlein, 2008). The same (or better) media technological advances are present in Japan, yet paradoxically the Japanese students' academic motivation does not seem as challenged by this distraction. Despite the technological gaming prevalence in Japan, Japanese students remain on academic task.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is threefold. The first is to examine some factors leading to a general lack of motivation amongst U.S. high school students. The next is to determine some of the factors that contribute to motivation in Japanese high school students. The third is to provide recommendations as to how the application of Japanese motivation-building techniques can improve U.S. students. It is my assumption that if the Japanese schools' motivational-building techniques can be harnessed and applied to the U.S. school system, the U.S. students (as well as employers and society at large) have much to gain.

Research Questions

What causes a general lack of motivation to achieve academically in U.S. high school students? What are some factors that contribute to Japanese high school students being motivated to succeed academically? How can these findings improve the quality of education in the U.S.?

Theoretical Rationale

Modern motivational theory, as it relates to education, partially stems from the late social psychologist David McClelland as well as current educational psychologist Martin L. Maehr. McClelland's theory is that motivation is based on the needs for achievement, power, and affiliation. Maehr scaffolds upon McClelland's theory by including social aspects as they relate to the students' psychological needs (Nelson & DeBacker, 2008).

McClelland attested that motivation is "an important factor in the social change and evolution of societies" (David McClelland, 2005, para. 2). The Japanese achievements in technology alone are a testament to this statement. In virtually every home or office, one will see Japanese technological advancements such as combination washer/dryers, compact, hand-held language translators for scores of languages, and new automobiles complete with GPS and television screens with maps. Granted, the latter two items may be available in the some parts of the U.S., but not with as much regularity, commonplace usage, or sophistication as found in Japan. Tokyo is one of the largest cities in the world, with a significant portion of it dedicated to technology only. In the technology district, there you will find businesses and retailers catering to the technology field. In part because of its technological savvy and swift entrance into industrialization,

the U.S. State Department itself described the Japanese culture as a whole as having "transformed itself to a wonder economy, the envy of the globe" (United States State Department, 2001, para. 3) in only about sixty years. The latter is what was textually explained to diplomats by the U.S. State Department. Regardless of Japan's looming recession (as of November, 2008 and caused in part by other countries' recessions), it maintains second place in the category of world's largest economy (Amato, 2008).

One of the ways Japan has emerged as a powerful country is how it grooms its school children. "Motivation is taught in the Japanese schools not only [to] teach the value of effort but [to] teach children to make an effort" (Peak, 1992, Appendix A, para. 3). Early on in both homes and schools, Japanese children are taught to make an investment into themselves, and that hard work and genuine effort matter.

Maehr's Theory of Personal Investment, developed in 1984, deduced that a student's motivation to learn is based upon personal goals (pending achievements), sense of self, and perceptions of general classroom actions (Nelson & DeBacker, 2008). Maehr's studies revealed that motivation to achieve academic goals are largely influenced by socio-cultural goings-on in the classroom (Nelson & DeBacker, 2008).

Assumptions

The Japanese are a people conditioned to be academically motivated. The Japanese school systems mold the intrinsic motivation that already encapsulates the students. In Japan, attending high school is an honor available only to those who have performed admirably on entrance examinations. Assumptions for the U.S. high school students include a different attitude towards high school than the Japanese have towards high school. As high school is mandatory (in Japan it is optional), the U.S. students are

bound to feel and think differently about it. Therefore they are likely to have differing attitudes and motivations regarding the success and/or completion of high school.

Background and Need

This research might contribute to U.S. American children becoming more achievement motivated. The Japanese students often attend after-school classes that provide further practice with academic mastery. Also, Japanese students are humbled and ready to legitimately learn whenever they make a mistake. Though students in the United States seem to want success to a certain degree, they do not seem to want to work as hard as the Japanese students.

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education reported that the U.S. was "a nation at risk" (Bennett, 1992, p. 42). A portion of the report as written in Bennett's book states, "The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people" (Bennett, 1992, p. 42). To probe the matters raised by this report, another study was completed (Walton, 1983) involving the academic performance of 600 6th graders of eight countries. Overall, U.S. students rated poorly while Japanese students rated highly. In fact, Japan rated higher than the U.S. in all tested categories but one (geography). The test was sponsored by the *Dallas Times Herald*. The test was developed by professional test designers from local universities and supervised by prominent professionals of their respective fields. The assistant managing editor of the *Dallas Times Herald* who was in charge of this project, Ray Herndon, was confident about their sampling methods, "All of the testing people and educators that we dealt with said the sample size was adequate" (Walton, 1983). The test was administered through the assistance of the other countries'

embassies, governing bodies, and newspapers. The newspaper published a series of articles regarding this test. The goal was to inform the public and to put pressure on the government to promote reforms that would improve the educational system in the U.S.

Westbury, 1992 analyzed former Japanese/U.S. American students' comparative studies and published his analysis. Westbury brought up points that were perhaps previously overlooked. True, the comparative studies listed Japan as the higher academic performer; however, Westbury suggested that researchers were studying the wrong thing. Even though countries are concerned with rankings, Westbury suggested that researchers should be searching for the reasons behind the international differences. Westbury believes that it is important to consider factors affecting underlying academic performance (Baker, 1993). David P. Baker used Westbury's analysis as a stepping-stone towards his own analysis regarding curriculum equality between Japan and the U.S. Baker's findings were that Japanese students actually learn 60% worth of a year's teachings, while U.S. students only retain 40% (Baker, 1993). While there may be many variables that sway these results, I assume that motivation is one factor influencing these results.

Undeveloped nations are motivated to study Japan's educational ways. These countries have taken a keen interest in how Japan educates its youths. In 2006, *The Japan Journal* writes:

> The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has conducted the Youth Invitation Program since 1984, as a form of technical cooperation with developing countries, inviting prospective leaders in their twenties and thirties to broaden their experience in various fields. During their three-week stay, the

young people attend lectures on Japanese culture and history, participate in field trips and camps with young Japanese, and experience everyday life with their Japanese host families. The number of people that have participated in the program is about 28,000, representing more than 120 countries (Kamahori, 2006).

If a good portion of the rest of the world sees fit to study Japanese education, perhaps The United States stands to learn from Japan as well. I believe that U.S. Americans have much to learn from the Japanese, and agree with Schiller and Walberg (1982) that "Americans know too little of Japan, the Japanese, and in particular their educational system, one that in many respects deserves study and possible experimental adoption in our own and in other nations" (Conclusion).

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Relevant topics found in the literature include factors contributing to (a) the general lack of motivation among United States high school students and (b) the general presence of motivation among Japanese high school students. The literature exposes the overall weakness of the U.S. student and the strength of the Japanese student.

Academic Motivation Lacking in US High School Students

Duckworth and Seligman published in 2005 their study about the underlying cause of U.S. American students' school failures[1]. Basic poor self-discipline was found to be the main factor (Welsh, 2006). Additionally, students shun personal academic responsibility, often blaming the teacher for their failure (Welsh, 2006). Chemistry teacher Dave Roscher affirmed, "Kids have convinced parents that it is the teacher or the system that is the problem, not their own lack of effort" (Welsh, 2006, Asian vs. U.S. students [sic] para. 3). Some U.S. American parents have indirectly taught their children to expect at least a B if they put forth minimal effort and complete some work (Welsh, 2006).

Social Factors Upon Academic Motivation

A portion of Maehr's Theory of Personal Investment indicates that academic motivation is influenced by desires for social approval (Nelson & DeBacker, 2008).

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[1] Original Duckworth/Seligman study cannot be located, despite exhaustive efforts to find it. Welsh did not provide a full citation in his article.

High schools across the U.S. are plagued with peer pressure and cliques, which often negatively impact personal academic success. If the popular kid thinks it "uncool" to ask the teacher for help, then the easily swayed peer is unlikely to ask for help, fearing negative branding.

Another portion of Maehr's theory is that academic motivation is influenced by the learner's ability to link meaning or relevance to the particular lesson at hand. In order to be motivated enough to truly learn, the student must know its personal academic goals, have a sense of self, and be perceptive of the classroom goings-on. Students must be able to link the teacher-provided lesson to their personal goals (such as passing the next history test) while staying focused amidst classroom activities that are out of his control (Nelson & DeBacker, 2008).

In search of support of Maehr's theory, Nelson & DeBacker (2008) created and modified several scales to assess how social contexts affect individual motivation. They used myriad scales to capture several aspects of students' thoughts and emotions regarding social contexts in school. Some examples of the used scales were about social responsibility, sense of belonging, and resistance to scholastic norms. These researchers' examinations strongly support Maehr's theory that social aspects absolutely play a large part in high school students' academic success.

Social Factors within Historical Context

Another study that supports Maehr's theory is titled *Monitoring the Future*. This is an important and ongoing longevity study that began in 1975. It is conducted by the Institute for Survey Research at University of Michigan. From the years 1975 – 1991, annual surveys had been given to 15,000 seniors from 125 high schools (the high

schools varied yearly). Since 1991, eighth and tenth graders have been annually surveyed in addition to seniors.

The study samples students with consideration to vast demography. Each year a random sample chooses particular regions to target. Within those regions a random sample of high schools is selected. Within senior classes of more than 400 students, a random sample occurs to achieve 400 participants per school. For smaller schools, the entire senior class is asked to participate.

Both a bias and an assumption stem from the same root. As the study is conducted on high school seniors, and is meant to serve as an all-encompassing student body, high school dropouts are obviously not included. Yet, their responses are arguably as relevant as those of the graduating seniors. The authors of the study assume that this particular bias has a minimal affect on the outcome. They propose that the significance of the overall study outweighs any impact that one particular (and small) group may have. Another bias is that high school students residing in Alaska and Hawaii are excluded for unspecified reasons.

Since the particular high schools chosen differ each year, it would seem like trends could not be monitored effectively. However, within each senior class, random sampling occurs for follow up surveys to be administered every two years. This research design allows for trend spotting within a certain demographic or region.

While the majority of the survey's questions ask about drug and alcohol use, scores of other questions directly relate to students' attitudes about school, lifestyles, jobs, and personal priorities. The answers to these questions would logically lie parallel to the U.S. students' overall disinterest with educational success.

David Boesel of Northwestern University was one of the analyzers of the seniors' surveys. Boesel (2001) noted that since 1976, high school seniors in the U.S. have steadily declined their positive attitudes towards school. He noticed a paradoxical trend in that over the years the seniors realized the relevance of a college education in order to find successful employment, yet the seniors were becoming dissatisfied with their education and found it to be minimally meaningful. They knew they had to go to college but they did not feel that they were being prepared sufficiently and thus became discouraged.

Boesel also noticed a rise in seniors wanting to cause trouble in the classroom. Over the years of the survey, the students who felt discouraged were more likely to become classroom clowns or troublemakers, or to encourage their friends to do so (Boesel, 2001). These links support Maehr's theories that social aspects can have an affect on academic motivation. If a discouraged student is prompting a classmate to start trouble, the students in question are sure to consider social ramifications before (non)acting.

Other Factors to Low Academic Motivation

Other factors involving U.S. students' academic motivation include the general school setting. Extensive budget cuts have resulted in poor conditions, such as crumbling infrastructure and the lack of decent materials like textbooks. The mediocre school district has become the norm (Bennett, 1992). Students see these conditions and may wonder why they should care about attending school.

In the U.S., curriculum is developed to produce effects that lead to a particular goal, rather than being developed to produce *effort* (Haysom & Sutton, 1974). A Butler

study revealed that students are held accountable for *ability* rather than *effort* (Zappe, Sonak, Hunter & Suen, 2002). Since students are the owners of their academic motivation; effort must not be taken for granted and it must be honed in the classroom (Haysom & Sutton, 1974).

Ways to Improve Student Motivation

Studies have shown that there are ways to improve motivation in the U.S. classroom. Brophy and Evertson concluded that a subject-centered teaching style is apt to produce motivated students (Hirsch, 1996). Butler and Winne studied how feedback can be a natural motivator (Zappe, et al., 2002). In an experiment, Zappe, et al. (2002) found that feedback improves students' academic motivation to succeed. The Graham and Golan study recommends that "for the most effective learning to occur, teachers should utilize grades in ways that track individual learning effort, focus on self-improvement…" (Zappe, et al. p. 7). The literature shows that the Japanese teaching style is often subject-centered, utilizes techniques that reward effort and hard work, and also provide feedback.

Academic Motivation Present in Japanese Students

In Japan, high schools are not part of the compulsory system. High school is paid for by the student's family provided that the student can pass the rigorous entrance examination. Future livelihoods are largely dependent upon whether the children are accepted into a top-notch high school. This is ingrained into society; students are motivated to perform well on those entrance tests (Constitutional Rights Foundation,

1992). To that end, students do what is necessary for achievement, mostly extensive studying and practice.

When compared to U.S. students, twice as many Japanese students said that they study hard, when asked about their strategy for succeeding in math (Welsh, 2006). Twice as much homework is given to Japanese children than to U.S. children (Peak, 2002). Additionally, since teaching is a very respectable profession in Japan, students look up to teachers and naturally want to perform well to please them (Wieczorek, 2006).

Early Preparation

Although the entrance examinations are not administered until after middle school level, the preparations begin in first grade. There is a natural progression, beginning in elementary school that builds students' motivational levels as well as abilities. By the time they are ready to test for high school entrance, students have the necessary tools for achievement. To support the students in their endeavor for superior entrance examination results, Japan as a whole has adopted a national curriculum. Teachers throughout the country utilize the same materials, the same curriculum, and generally the same teaching methods (Pflanz, 1990). Subject-centered whole class instruction is a typical Japanese teaching method. Teachers and students collectively strive towards the day's lessons' goals with the teacher providing a thorough summary at the end (Hirsch, 1996).

The students sometimes work in small groups, with the faster learners assisting the slower ones. This fosters unity and strong classmate relationships; the teacher ensures that the class as a whole is running at the same pace (Wu, 1999). While there is individual practice, the majority of instruction is done in large groups, often with the

children leading the way. This style gives power to the students, encouraging them to generate ideas and critique each other. The students' interests are engaged and they are harnessing a sense of ownership (Hirsch, 1996). Nelson and DeBacker (2008) concurred with past studies performed by Anderman in 1999 and Goodenow in 1993 that a sense of belongingness, being a true contributor and part of a classroom has a significant impact on an individual's motivation to participate and to excel at the activity at hand. By the time a Japanese child is ready for high school, an internal and strong academic motivation has already been developed and put to practice. By this time, the typical Japanese child is poised for secondary academic (and future employment) success because he/she is motivated, tries hard, is self-disciplined, and focused.

Social Factors Upon Academic Motivation

To reinforce that sense of belonging and sense of community, lunch is wheeled in on a cart and the students eat together in the classroom, with students assigned to be the servers. They clean up after each other just as efficiently. Students additionally are often required to clean the entire school. In high school, the teachers move to the next grade along with the same group of students, thus reinforcing the community dynamics (Javora, 2000).

As Japanese high school students are molded to be part of a group and to be functioning members of the society/school/classroom as a whole, they are not bound by their friends or social life. While certainly Japanese teenagers have friends and a social life, it does not necessarily dictate their school careers. My hunch is that Maehr's theory describing how in the U.S. social aspects affect academic motivation has little relevance

in a Japanese classroom, as the same social aspects are not present. I wish to explore this further in my research.

Japanese high school students have few social distractions from studies. The majority of their time is spent on school-related activities. They cannot drive until age eighteen, they typically do not date until after high school, and most of them do not hold part-time jobs. Their focus is mainly academia (Javora, 2000).

Honoring Effort

As has already been stated, hard work, effort, and achievement are thoroughly recognized by Japanese teachers (Wu, 1999). Ceremonies honoring students' high effort, rather than ability, are commonplace (Peak, 2002). These events aim towards maintaining the Japanese students' academic motivation. The country overall has deemed education to be on a plateau of critical values (Pflanz, 1990). Culturally, as well as in the classroom, it is edified that anyone can succeed if a strong enough effort is made. "Effort is so consistently portrayed to the children as the key to success that ability is rarely mentioned" (Peak, 2002, Appendix A, para. 2).

Now recognized as a world power, Japan has enjoyed the fruits of its labor. The Constitutional Rights Foundation (1992) stated, "The apparent superiority of Japanese schools is one of the factors that has made Japan a powerhouse in the world economy" (Teaching to the Test in Japan, para. 2). These schools have produced people who have learned more in less time. The average Japanese high school graduate knows as much as the average U.S. college graduate (Constitutional Rights Foundation, 1992).

Educational Reforms in Question

Despite the successful results of Japan's education system, some Japanese government officials saw the need for change. In 2002, the country slowly began to implement some reforms designed to lessen what some thought was immense pressure on children. Part of the plan was that drills that previously instilled self-discipline and concentration would be minimized. Activities that encouraged creative thinking would be maximized (Foreign Press Center, 2007).

The 2006 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) administered test evaluated how the students of Japan's restructuring curriculum fared. The test, written by Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is given to 400,000 15 year olds from several countries every three years. The test measures ability to apply knowledge and logical thinking (Foreign Press Center, 2007). In 2000, Japan was placed amongst the top three countries (Wieczorek, 2006). In 2006, a few years after the reforms began, Japan's students scored considerably higher than the other G-8 countries (G-8 countries include: Canada; England; France; Germany; Italy; Japan; Russia; United States) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009) yet Japan's rankings declined in mathematical and scientific literacy as well as reading skills as compared to its 2003 scores. The local newspapers saw these test results as the beginning of the end and questioned Japan's future as a world power if similar test results continue (Foreign Press Center, 2007). If Japan is to change the system that has produced academic greats such as 2002 and 2008 Nobel Prize winners in Physics, it might lead to a decline in motivation for academic success.

Additional International Statistical Relevance

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) prepared a comprehensive report regarding the educational practices of the aforementioned G-8 countries. The most recent report, titled "Comparative Indicators of Education in the United States and Other G-8 Countries: 2009" documents findings from large studies that were conducted within the past few years.

In the March, 2009 document, NCES reported on children of all ages, including three and four-year olds. In 2006, 80% of Japanese children of those ages attended pre-school while only 48% of U.S. students of the same ages attended pre-school. This underscores the intense importance that Japanese households place on education. Children are molded from a young age to revere education.

An often overlooked statistic is student behavior. Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) reported in 2007 that eight percent of Japanese school principals said that there was at least one classroom disturbance per week. Rather than cause trouble in the classroom, Japanese students are diligently working. In the U.S., 55% of principals said that there was at least one classroom disturbance per week (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). The reader will recall that in the *Monitoring the Future* study, a trend was noted that U.S. high school students are more often causing trouble in the classroom. These statistics support the strong focus that Japanese children have on their education and the less strong emphasis held by the U.S. students.

Summary of Major Themes

The research indicates that high school students in The United States, as a whole, have lower test scores and are not as academically motivated as Japanese high school students. The underlying causes vary, ranging from peer pressure to teaching methods. The U.S. students view high school as less meaningful than the Japanese students view high school. The Japanese view it as a privilege and a critical step towards securing a future livelihood. The U.S. students often feel less responsible for poor scholastic achievement while the Japanese students take pride in their efforts for mastery. Social factors that influence motivation are prevalent in the U.S. while minimal in Japan. The U.S. tends to reward ability. Japan tends to reward effort. Japan's schools create a sense of community, a sense of ownership and a sense of belonging.

How Present Study Will Extend Literature

Of the aforementioned factors affecting academic motivation, two are more prominent. They are behavioral and social in nature. Behaviorally, the students react to the teachers' teaching methods. Socially, the students react to their friends' actions while in the classroom. Research can further be pursued by evaluating the outcome of an experiment involving both aspects. Students' behavioral changes when teaching methods are altered can be observed and examined. Within this experiment, social aspects amongst peer groups can also be observed and analyzed.

Theoretically, when the U.S. high school classroom is modified to replicate Japanese teaching methods, the academic motivation of the students should increase. As a side effect, social interactions amongst the peers should change. While it may be impossible to replicate the social atmosphere of a Japanese classroom, it would be

important to note how the U.S. high school classroom's social atmosphere changes when teaching methods have become Japanese style.

CHAPTER 3 INTERVIEW

Sample and Site

The sample is a Japanese citizen, living near Tokyo. Mutsue Kurishita is fluent in English and is serving as a subject matter expert. Kurishita-san is employed as a private tutor of the Japanese language as well as in a retail shop located on a United States military base. Kurishita-san is well versed in Japanese educational systems and has ongoing and frequent encounters with United States high school students. These encounters occur daily through her provision of Japanese lessons and through providing customer service during her normal working hours on the military base. Kurishita-san provides a fair perspective on the Japanese educational system, Japanese high school students' academic motivations, and academic motivations of United States high school students who are taking her Japanese lessons.

Access and Permissions

This study conforms to all ethical standards of research as determined by the American Psychological Association. This project was reviewed by the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board and assigned IRB Approval Number 7089. Kurishita-san agreed to be a participant in this study.

Data Gathering Strategies

I submitted a list of questions to Kurishita-san via the delivery method of her choice, which was email. She submitted her answers to me via email by the deadline specified. Additionally, I have been searching for a Japanese study that is comparable to

the aforementioned University of Michigan's *Monitoring the Future* study or the U.S. government's *A Nation at Risk* report. This is proving difficult, as the Director of the Educational and Social Survey Research Center in Japan, Shingo Katsuno, explains, "…the current situation in Japan does not lend itself to ready use of individual data collected by individuals and institutions" (2005). Japan has only recently begun to delve into the analyzing and evaluating of its previous educational research. While there have been empirical educational studies done by Japanese researchers regarding Japanese education, the studies have not been processed for the public or other researchers' use. To date, the bulk of the studies reviewed has been conducted by non-Japanese researchers. It would prove invaluable to review a topical study that was actually conducted by a Japanese researcher.

Data Analysis Approach

The information obtained from the subject matter expert was qualitative in nature, as the questions were designed to glean such results. This information was used to mostly support the literature regarding the Japanese high school students' academic motivations to succeed.

Potential Risks to Subject

The subject matter expert's native language is Japanese. The interviewer's native language is English. While the subject matter expert is fluent in English, there may be possible language barriers to overcome. Certain words or terminology may be unfamiliar and may need to be translated.

Minimization of Potential Risk

The interviewer is familiar enough with the Japanese language to translate as needed. The subject matter expert has been made to feel at ease. The subject matter expert incurred the cost of an airmail stamp upon returning the signed IRB. Kurishita-san was offered a reimbursement for the cost, to which she denied.

Interview with Subject Matter Expert

Summarily, Kurishita-san supported the literature regarding the academic motivation of Japanese high school students. She explains, "If they can study at [a] good high school, they can go on to the good University. And they can get a good job and a good future" (M. Kurishita, personal communication, April 5, 2009).

Underscoring the literature regarding the intensity of Japanese students' academic motivation and how imperative it is for Japanese students to attend a good quality high school, Kurishita-san says, "Some 97% of Middle school graduates go on to High school. Students put much effort into studying for high school entrance examinations. They go to private 'crame [sic] schools' after regular school. Entrance examinations are very competitive and difficult to pass" (M. Kurishita, personal communication, April 5, 2009).

In Japan, students are not compelled to attend high school. It is not part of public education and therefore the families must pay for their children to attend high school, assuming they pass the rigid entrance tests. If a family cannot afford the best quality high school, even if the children pass the exams, there are options called "metropolitan schools" which carry a much lower prestige. It is in the children's best interest to ace these entrance tests so they can attend the good quality high schools, and

subsequently the good quality universities (M. Kurishita, personal communication, April 5, 2009).

Another factor towards academic motivation is family support in the form of monetary allowance. The average allowance for high school students is 5,300 yen per month, about $53.00. This money is spent on karaoke, arcades, DVDs, CDs, and the like (M. Kurishita, personal communication, April 5, 2009).

When asked about her impression of U.S. high school students, the reply supported the gap in the literature that is discussed in the next section. Kurishita-san's opinion of U.S. high school students is that it is easier for them to obtain information than it is for the Japanese students. She theorized that U.S. students must feel relieved at the fact that it is so easy for them to conduct research since the U.S. schools and households offer ample internet availability in English. Kurishita-san reasoned that since most informational websites are in English only, it is more difficult for Japanese students to get the information they need (M. Kurishita, personal communication, April 5, 2009). The next section examines the reality of Japanese research.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited in the fact that there was a sole interviewee. However, this individual presented abundant knowledge and experience of the topics. This study was also limited because of a gap in the literature that is next discussed.

Gap in Literature

It is important to note an impressive gap in the literature regarding Japanese high school students' academic motivation. As noted earlier, it is only since 2005 that

Japan as a whole is delving into the educational research field. Educational and Social Survey Research Center "is the first organization for the collection, sorting, and publication of empirical data related to education in Japan" (2005).

Students do not normally conduct research; it is not a critical learning experience as it is in the U.S. Consequently in adult professional life, the research field is generally lacking. In many cases, what research is conducted is often not archived for future use.

Compared with the U.S., there is far less information available (of Japanese origin) regarding high school students' academic motivations. With regard to Japanese students' educational lives, I have had to rely on mostly empirical research conducted by Westerners. A critical bias would exist if the particular empirical researcher was not fully appreciative or knowledgeable of the overall Japanese culture. An ideal study for comparison would be a Japanese version of the *Monitoring the Future* or *A Nation at Risk* studies. Had there been such literature produced by Japanese researchers and available in the English language, this study's scope would have been broader.

CHAPTER 4 SUMMARY & IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Summary of Major Findings

Analyses have consistently reported that Japanese students reach higher scholastic achievements levels compared to students of other countries. Concurrently, U.S. students demonstrate lower scholastic achievements levels compared to students of other countries.

To meet these ends, Japanese students' major focus is on their education. When this focus is coupled with sound teaching methods that encourage student ownership of learning and responsibility, Japanese students take their learning seriously and apply it to future endeavors.

As a general rule, U.S. students' do not equate a prosperous future with scholastic achievement. U.S. students' educational goals are often just to maintain a passing grade, rather than aspiring for more.

Implications for Future Research

Further research should absolutely include empirical evidence as noted by native Japanese observers in Japanese high schools. Moreover, optimal interviewees sought should be individuals who have been educated in both the U.S. and Japan's schools. Regardless of country of birth, these people would bring a natural comparison to the forefront and would likely provide information and opinions that distinguish them from other interviewees.

Japan's emergent Educational and Social Survey Research Center should be monitored for germane studies, which should then be translated to English as needed. As

similar research organizations presumably develop, these should also be scanned for appropriate studies.

CHAPTER 5: A PROPOSAL

I propose that high schools in the United States follow Japan's lead. At minimum, teachers in the U.S. could adjust their teaching styles to mimic the styles practiced in Japan. These include subject-centered teaching, putting more learning ownership directly upon the students, and rewarding for effort and hard work rather than only for achieving a certain grade. Japan uses a model of consistent teacher alignment, whereas the teachers move to the next grade along with their students. One teacher instructs one group of students in one subject for a few years; tenth graders would typically have the same science teacher until graduation. The U.S. educational arrangement could certainly withstand an experiment to determine the feasibility of this latter practice.

The literature has reported that the above acts are partially responsible for promoting Japanese students' motivation for high scholastic achievement. Also partially responsible for their motivation is the fact that attending high school is an earned privilege, not an assumption. While I am not suggesting that the U.S. system remove high school as a compulsory component, I am suggesting that the U.S. system do more to increase awareness of education's importance. The current program in place defines the importance of earning a high school diploma but fails to address the criticalness of high scholastic achievement.

Japan's high scholastic achievement has not gone unnoticed throughout the world, as less developed countries like Afghanistan want to know Japan's secret to their educational proficiencies. The U.S. should take notice. The U.S. should contemplate how Japanese children are raised and are taught in school to respect education. I propose

that if the U.S. government wants to maintain its place in global affairs and wants to decrease the myriad issues that result from a largely under-achieving society, then they should take more notice of Japan.

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