Not for Democracy?: Service-learning in Japanese Higher Education as Compared to the United States

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Service learning (SL) in higher education has been developed in various forms, mainly in the US, with an emphasis on linking services and learning, universities and communities. Many people view higher education as a means to a career which, in turn, renders education a subject of private interest. Owing to this, SL is expected to encourage civic engagement, and the value of SL as a practice of public interest has been garnering attention. In Japan, SL is seen in some advanced SL programs as education for democracy. But what about the general trend? This study aims to identify the general characteristics of SL in Japanese higher education, rather than highlighting the characteristics of advanced cases. For this purpose, a comparative study between Japan and the US was conducted using syllabus data available on the Internet. The results were as follows. Compared to the US, in Japanese SL, students were more likely to be involved in volunteer activities, in which case they were expected to adapt to existing society as an individual citizen, separated from other students. Meanwhile, SL that did not include volunteer activities emphasized developing students' skills. In both cases, political interest was low and there was no mention of (re)constructing students' values and philosophies. The word "democracy" was almost completely absent from the SL syllabus in Japan. These results suggest two possibilities in different directions. One is that Japanese SL may have been reduced to a superficial teaching method used only for skill development and "not for democracy." The other is that Japanese SL teachers try to lead students toward democracy by equipping them with democratic skills that overlap with skills required in the workforce, without indicating that they are "for democracy." From the latter standpoint, especially for passive Japanese students, SL for democracy could only be based on a delicate and dangerous balance between public and private goods.

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1. Introduction

Service learning (SL) in higher education has developed significantly, mainly in the US. It is widely accepted as "a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development" (Jacoby 1996, 5). It is also often understood in connection with democracy as: "an active, creative pedagogical technique that integrates community service with academic study in order to enhance a student's capacity to think critically, solve problems practically, and function as a lifelong moral, democratic, citizen in a democratic society" (Benson & Harkavy 2003, 1223). While many people view higher education in connection with a job market that requires well-charted career trajectories for private interest, SL demands more. SL is expected to realize democracy as a way of life to build a better life together, as set forth by John Dewey (Salmarsh and Zlotkowski 2011; Jacoby 2014). Recently, SL has attracted attention as an important educational method in Japan and has been adopted by many universities. This brings us to the question: what are the characteristics of SL in Japan?

Research on Japan's current SL situation has increased, focusing on advanced initiatives. Sakurai and Yamada (2009) studied the extent to which SL-related efforts can be seen among those selected for the Featured Good Practices (*Tokushoku GP*) and Modern Good Practices (*Gendai GP*) by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). Additionally, Fukudome (2019) provided an overview of the SL policy trends in Japan and examined the universities that have made pioneering efforts regarding SL. These studies have revealed that SL is expanding and that initiatives are becoming more organized. Some advanced cases expect SL to be a method of education for democracy (Itsumi, Harada, and Fujieda 2017) and emphasize political literacy to inspire individuals beyond the goal of becoming useful citizens for the existing state and society (Kodama 2017).

Research has also been conducted on the characteristics of Japanese SL, comparing it to the US. Tomikawa et al. (2007) analyzed previous research and several case studies and remarked, "in the US, the emphasis is on social innovation and self-satisfaction," while in Japan, "SL goal setting emphasizes students noticing something on their own rather than building relationships with society." After reviewing SL in the US, Yamada (2016) remarked that Japanese SL lacks reflection on its activities and interest in social innovation aspects. Zeng (2021) revealed that civic responsibility and community service in the US were emphasized for expanding SL, while Japan placed a higher focus on university community service and university education.

However, there is room for consideration regarding the practice of SL and its understanding at a general level. Many studies have focused on advanced cases, and Japan's general situation has not been fully examined. Conducting a detailed field survey of all institutions would be difficult. Therefore, this study examined the characteristics of SL in Japan compared to the US, using publicly available syllabi as the subject of analysis.

2. Survey targets and limitations

For the US, syllabi were gathered in the field of "service learning" from the Syllabi Archive of Campus Compact (https://compact.org/resource-type/syllabi/). A total of 66 syllabi from 2001 to 2016 were thus obtained. There were 48 institutions, including four public two-year institutions, 22 public four-year institutions, and 22 private four-year institutions.

For Japan, syllabi including the words "service-learning" or "service learning" were gathered from the websites of 781 educational institutions for the 2019 and 2020 academic years. Of these, 369 were obtained, omitting lecture courses with SL as one of the lecture topics and duplicate courses with the same name and content. There were 88 institutions, of which 22 were national, nine were public, and 57 were private.

As this study targeted syllabi, it has some limitations. First, the nature of syllabi differs between Japan and the US. While syllabi are created according to the same format for each university in Japan, syllabi in the US are created by the instructors themselves and include a variety of content (Kinukawa 2006). Additionally, target syllabi in the US are collected by Campus Compact, presenting the possibility of bias. However, SL encompasses a wide variety of practices, as noted in Campus Compact publications (e.g., Jacoby 2014). While it is difficult to grasp general trends in the US with these syllabi, they can provide a frame of reference for understanding the trends in Japan. Furthermore, since it is expected that some information—such as the intentions of the instructor—may not be fully included in the syllabus, this study examined the implications of this absence while recognizing its limitations.

3. Syllabus analysis

Table 1 provides an overview of the characteristics of the vocabulary used in the syllabi of both countries. Target syllabi were subjected to text mining and analysis using the KH-Coder[1]. The Japanese syllabi were analyzed in Japanese and then translated into English; the US syllabi were analyzed in English. The 20 most frequently used words are listed in the table. The left half of the table shows the number of times a word was used and the frequency of its occurrence in an entire syllabus, and the right half shows the number of syllabi that use the word in "subject objectives" or similar items.

3-1. Volunteer work

The left half of Table 1 shows that SL courses are associated with the community, local community, and society in both Japan and the US. Learning through experience in society and communities is common to both countries. However, there were some differences in the specifics. In the US, "service" and "project" were at the top of the list, and the specific "organization" was also a feature. Conversely, the word "volunteer" was mentioned only 11 times (0.03%). Some syllabi explained the difference between volunteering and SL (Waynesburg College; California State University, Monterey Bay). Others positioned volunteering as one of the many ways to participate in society (California State University, Fresno; Cleveland State University; Portland Community College). Only seven syllabi mentioned "volunteering" in the sense of participation as volunteer staff.

However, in Japan, while it was apparent that students were working on various issues

Table 1. Frequency of word occurrence

in entire syllabus						in objectives sections					
U.S. (total words=42,398)			Japan (total words=153,882)			U.S. (number of syllabi=66)			Japan (number of syllabi=369)		
word	number	frequency	word	number	frequency	word	number	frequency	word	number	frequency
be	928	2.19%	activity	1,597	1.04%	community	42	63.6%	society	204	55.3%
you	508	1.20%	local community	1,379	0.90%	course	41	62.1%	understand	189	51.2%
community	468	1.10%	society	1,077	0.70%	student	41	62.1%	local community	169	45.8%
student	425	1.00%	problem	773	0.50%	be	39	59.1%	problem	162	43.9%
course	359	0.85%	class	769	0.50%	skill	34	51.5%	activity	154	41.7%
they	262	0.62%	do	702	0.46%	service	31	47.0%	objective	146	39.6%
service	246	0.58%	learning	616	0.40%	they	30	45.5%	issue	130	35.2%
project	189	0.45%	understand	597	0.39%	learn	29	43.9%	solve	129	35.0%
we	189	0.45%	service learning	538	0.35%	that	27	40.9%	communication	109	29.5%
learn	180	0.42%	learn	506	0.33%	develop	26	39.4%	self	105	28.5%
experience	170	0.40%	participate	447	0.29%	objective	26	39.4%	knowledge	105	28.5%
have	168	0.40%	practice	430	0.28%	experience	23	34.8%	acquire	104	28.2%
class	144	0.34%	solve	413	0.27%	how	23	34.8%	practice	95	25.7%
how	134	0.32%	issue	402	0.26%	practice	23	34.8%	learning	91	24.7%
organization	127	0.30%	student	397	0.26%	social	23	34.8%	learn	90	24.4%
that	127	0.30%	experience	390	0.25%	apply	22	33.3%	ability	89	24.1%
issue	105	0.25%	education	377	0.24%	issue	22	33.3%	think	83	22.5%
research	105	0.25%	volunteer	360	0.23%	organization	22	33.3%	culture	76	20.6%
social	104	0.25%	course	353	0.23%	able	21	31.8%	class	74	20.1%
which	99	0.23%	oneself	310	0.20%	Course	21	31.8%	achieve	72	19.5%
						understand	21	31.8%	need	72	19.5%
						you	21	31.8%			

and solving problems, SL courses had a strong connection with volunteerism: 42/86 schools and 99/369 syllabi had descriptions of "volunteerism." None of these explained the difference between volunteering and SL. Furthermore, there were 18 cases where the word "volunteer" was included in the course title. Some regarded volunteering and service as similar things[2].

Thus, a strong connection with volunteering is one of the characteristics of SL in Japan. However, this does not mean that volunteering is a characteristic of all SL subjects in Japan. Since some subjects feature volunteering and some do not, the characteristics of each are discussed. Figure 1 shows the characteristics of each by conducting a co-occurrence network analysis and dividing the syllabi into those that included "volunteer" (v) and those that did not (n). The larger the circle, the higher the frequency of occurrence, and the larger the coefficient, the stronger the connection. The items in the center have a strong relationship with both "v" and "n." The items on the right have a strong relationship with "v," and the items on the left with "n."

Figure 1 shows that syllabi that included "volunteer" descriptions were characterized by "various," "report," "contribute," and "citizen." The students here were aware of the need to learn about social contribution and develop their awareness as <u>citizens</u> by engaging in volunteer activities, meeting <u>various</u> people, and <u>reporting</u> their experiences. Words like "issue," "problem," "understand," and "solve" are common to both "v" and "n." Thus, it does not mean that SL with volunteering did not have a sense of problem-solving. However, it can be said that in SL with volunteering, there was a strong awareness of how students as individuals face society and how they can <u>contribute</u> to it.

Conversely, characteristic of the syllabi that did not include the word "volunteer" was the use of "acquire," "communication," "culture," "group," "investigate," "implement," and
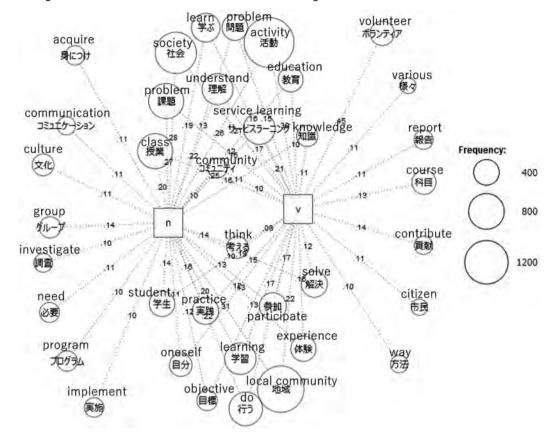
Figure 1: Co-occurrence network of service-learning courses with and without "volunteer"

"program." Three things differentiated volunteer courses from non-volunteer courses: working in a group, planning and implementing a program to solve a problem, and acquiring skills through this process. In many volunteer courses, students themselves look for and select activities rather than having a course instructor assign them activities. The relationship between volunteer activities and students is individual. Conversely, in non-volunteer courses, students work in student groups to investigate and examine issues related to local and distinct cultures. They then plan and implement programs to resolve these issues. The emphasis is not on contributing to the community as a citizen but rather on acquiring communication skills and the abilities necessary for planning and implementation through SL.

Moreover, "citizen" is strongly associated only with "v." In SL with volunteering, the relationship between society and community can be directly related to the individual student. Alternatively, the student will be directly connected to society as a part of an existing group. In SL with volunteering, individual students are separated from other students and become "citizens." "Careful crafting" (*tsukurikomi*) is essential to incorporate volunteer activities into educational activities (Sakurai and Yamada 2009), but it is expected that there are many courses where this is not sufficiently done.

3-2. Lack of political initiatives

Another major concern is a lack of political interest. This point supports the findings of

previous studies.

Of course, political initiatives are not always mainstream, even in the US. According to Robinson's (2000) survey of 599 institutions of higher education, a majority of the SL programs were direct service programs, comprising food and clothing drives and blood drives. Only 1% of programs were related to political advocacy, such as working with community groups to negotiate with government offices.

In this survey as well, no US programs were found which involved political advocacy. However, there were 19/66 programs that included "political" or "policy" in some form. The descriptions of these programs showed people from diverse positions negotiating with each other:

> "... popular education pedagogy enrich reflection upon and analysis of other topics, including: individual and community empowerment; public policy at the grassroots; urban politics; ...." (Swarthmore College, emphasis added)
>
> "... leading up to the goal of gathering all residents together for a congress aimed at setting the political agenda, from the grass-roots, into the next century." (Providence College, emphasis added)

Additionally, it is often assumed that specific policy recommendations and adjustments will be made to realize them. This overlaps with previous studies (Tomikawa et al. 2007). In fact, in the US, the importance of critical SL oriented toward social change has also been remarked on (Mitchell 2008).

Conversely, in Japan, programs on political advocacy are not central. Only three syllabi included the word "politic[s]" (*seiji*), and even those only mentioned politics as one of a variety of perspectives[3] With the exception of one example[4], there were no cases of policy proposals. In Japanese syllabi, "policy" (*seisaku*) is often simply an object of understanding. For example, the following description can be found:

> "...to promote service-learning by going into the field as much as possible to talk to local government officials and businesspeople about their awareness of the problems they face in creating and implementing policies...."(Shukutoku University, emphasis added)

This can be seen in the right half of Table 1. The word "understand" was one of the most frequently used words in Japanese syllabi. Although "understand" was also emphasized in the US, it was suggestive that more than half of the syllabi showed "understand" in Japan. Even if politics is the topic of the course and the program is planned and implemented, the emphasis is on understanding the nature of politics, not on the students themselves becoming political actors. The dynamism in US SL is lacking in Japanese SL.

Even more noteworthy was the absence of the word "democracy" in Japanese SL syllabi. In the US syllabi, "democracy," "democratic," or "democratization" were found in 12 of 66 courses (18.2%). Of course, this number is by no means large. However, as Jacoby (2014) points out, there are a variety of forms of SL. Notably, while SL is recognized as an effective educational activity with a strong positive effect on personal aspects such as learning outcomes and deep approaches to learning (e.g. Kuh 2008), the US syllabi included a number of democracy-conscious SL courses. In Japan, there was only one such subject[5]. In post-World War II Japan, "democracy" was an important philosophy of education. However, the concept of "the formation of democratic citizenship" has been downplayed in Japanese

higher education in recent years (Science Council of Japan 2010). This is directly reflected in SL as well. As mentioned above, some claim that SL supports democracy. Nevertheless, "democracy" is not found in the Japanese SL syllabus. The political concerns of people with different positions and opinions working together to build a society are absent in Japanese SL syllabi[6].

3-3. Emphasis on communication and low self-improvement

The third point worth noting was the lack of interest in (re)constructing one's own philosophy. Previous researches have pointed out that in Japanese SL, while the emphasis is on students noticing something on their own, there is a lack of reflection (Tomikawa et al. 2007; Yamada 2016), and the findings of this research overlap with this point.

The right half of Table 1 shows that the emphasis on acquiring various skills through interactions with the community and society is common to both Japanese SL and US SL. Noteworthy was the particular emphasis placed on communication in Japan. In the US and Japan, 11 out of 66 syllabi (16.7%) and 109 out of 369 syllabi (29.5%) respectively listed "communication" in the objectives sections. This implies that collaboration is more important in Japan. However, what is the purpose of communication? In Japan, there were many statements about the need for collaboration and communication skills. In the Japanese SL syllabi, the perspective of (re)constructing one's own philosophy is weak.

In the US programs, goals and initiatives related to students' own values, philosophies, perspectives, and identities are often presented (34 out of 66). For example, the following goals were stated.

> "To help students define their own values, goals and roles as current and future donors and philanthropists and relate this to their own philosophies of service and to their responsibilities..." (Providence College, emphasis added)
> "Apply their knowledge of the nonprofit sector and its interrelationships with government and business to frame their perspectives on social issues" (Portland Community College, emphasis added)

Not only was the (re)construction of philosophy listed as an objective on the syllabus, but students may have also been asked to explain themselves as part of an essay or discussion assignment:

> "Who am I? What are my values? What have I learned about myself through this experience?" (Indian River State College)
> "The essay should conclude with a self-reflection in which you discuss your growth/development/change throughout this course...." (University of Southern Maine at Lewiston Auburn College)

In Japan, however, there was no mention of philosophy. Although there were descriptions of values, they had certain characteristics. For example, Japanese syllabi were characterized by the following statements:

> "...find the current situation of diverse values, diversification, and multicultural society..." (Kanto Gakuin University)
> "...without rejecting the different values of foreign people..." (Nagasaki Wesleyan Uni-

versity)

"Understand the health, lifestyle, values, and health promotion needs of people receiving health care services" (Chiba Prefectural University of Health Sciences)

Thus, there was an emphasis on recognizing values different from one's own. However, there was little mention of reconstructing one's own values through the experience. It can be said that students have fallen into the relativism of "you are you and I am me." Moreover, if one's own values and philosophies are not formed, and one has only to conform to those around oneself, the generations born later would just be conforming to the existing society. In either case, it would mean a deviation from democracy—a key idea of SL.

4. Discussion: What the current situation of the SL syllabus in Japan means

An examination of the syllabi of the two countries has drawn attention to the characteristics of the Japanese syllabi. What is the background to this, and what can it mean?

One possibility is that while SL and active learning type classes have increased opportunities for students to express their opinions, they have remained superficial and have not led to the values and philosophies that are fundamentally necessary for expressing opinions; consequently, they have not been conducive to democracy. The development of citizens is reduced to a question of conformity to the existing society or the development of skills to survive in a competitive society.

The contrast between the SL syllabi of Japan and the US regarding describing oneself is consistent with previous comparative studies. From primary and secondary to higher education, it has often been noted that students in Japanese classrooms rarely express their own opinions and are trained to be silent (e.g., McVeigh 2002).

However, given the recent situation, there is another problem. According to the Cabinet Office (2014), young Japanese people are less likely to be involved in social issues or to be aware of their own social participation. The Nippon Foundation (2019) pointed out that the percentage of young people who believe they can change their country or society is 18.3%, significantly lower than the 65.7% in the US. According to Furuichi (2017), as they cannot imagine a happier future than their current one, Japanese youth have no choice but to answer that they are satisfied with the status quo. They tend to confine themselves to their own small world; a culture of resignation and adaptation to the status quo is prevalent among Japanese youth.

So, what issues are at the root of the unchangeable "status quo?" One potential answer is the competitive society or neoliberalism. According to Giroux, neoliberalism is "a philosophy which construes profit making as the essence of democracy and consuming as the only operable form of citizenship" (Giroux and Letizia 2012). SL is sometimes regarded as an attempt to protect democracy in the face of the competitive society. However, SL itself has become embedded in neoliberal society. Bailey (2020) argues that SL allows "neoliberal political and economic changes while masking their damaging effects." According to Bailey, neoliberalism is changing the relationship between public and private, and while SL facilitates community-university partnerships, these partnerships are based on neoliberal principles, thus reinforcing the neoliberal system of control. Raddon and Harrison (2015) point out that

neoliberal SL links student civic engagement with state interests, making students and universities willing to bear the cost of caring for their communities, a cost that used to be borne by the state. In this context, students see SL as an opportunity for a competitive advantage.

This may be more relevant for Japanese students. They resign themselves to the fact that the competitive society is inescapable and try to survive without falling into the loser's bracket by using the skills they can acquire in the process. Or they try to overcome job hunting by preparing an answer to "*Gaku-chika*" (i.e., "<u>Gaku</u>*sei jidai ni* <u>chika</u>*ra o ireta koto* [What were you most involved in as a student?]) with the evidence of their participation in volunteer activities. To such students, the message of making society a better place by themselves will not appeal. Hence, Japanese SL does not seem to be about democracy as far as the syllabus is concerned.

However, the SL syllabus is different from SL itself. Thinking about the value of what is not written in the syllabus gives a hint to the unique possibilities in Japan.[7] Another possible interpretation of the results of this survey is that there are hidden political agendas of teachers. That is, rather than explicitly stating goals to students who have lacked opportunities to be exposed to communal and political initiatives or to formulate values and philosophies consciously and who want to avoid falling into the loser's bracket in the neoliberal society, SL teachers are encouraging the formation of democratic values and philosophies by deliberately hiding their goals.

SL is embedded in neoliberalism, but there is room to resist it. It is also clear that SL has been building new relationships among universities, students, and communities. For a constructive debate, discussion of the public good is needed while recognizing and balancing the private good (Brackmann 2015).

How can a balance be struck? One possibility might be not to specify a democratic goal for students but to aim for it. Hammond and Keating (2018) compared global citizenship education programs in Japan and the UK and found that both were aware of employability and the creation of a global workforce and that the corporatization of higher education was underway. However, they also pointed out the possibility of providing "a space for the development of globally-aware, empathetic and engaged citizens." Of course, critical thinking with regard to democracy is not equal to critical thinking needed to pursue private success in the status quo. However, citizens and workers are not exclusive. There are possibilities for the two to overlap.

Furthermore, the asymmetry between faculty and students should be considered. With the popularity of active learning, the importance of sharing educational goals is emphasized. However, only providing what students want makes difficult to achieve public purposes. In order to get students to focus on the public purpose, it is necessary to satisfy their private interests. The idea of student consumerism, of getting the highest possible results at the lowest possible cost, is common to both Japan and the US, but passivity is particularly strong among Japanese students (Matsushita 2002). Furthermore, according to the Benesse Educational Research and Development Institute (2017), in recent years, more students place more importance on being able to earn credits effortlessly than on interest, and also want support and guidance from universities in both learning and living. To meet these students' demands, what would be desirable are subjects that would help them acquire the ability to survive in a competitive society effortlessly. However, it is possible to instill in them the democratic principles of building a better society together while also helping them acquire such abilities.

Syllabi are what students refer to when they choose their courses. If the course is avoided by students because of the mention of democracy and politics in the syllabus, it will not achieve its democratic purpose. Additionally, even if there are democratic skills that are completely different from those required of workers, it would not be possible for students to acquire only those skills. Thus it could be assumed that the democratic objective would not be put forward, and the overlapping parts would be written in the syllabus. What is seemingly "not for democracy" can become "for democracy."

5. Conclusion

The examination of syllabi in Japan and the US indicates that Japanese SL is characterized by the development of citizens through volunteer SL, emphasis on skill development through non-volunteer SL, lack of political interest, and weakness in (re)constructing values and philosophy. SL may still employ a superficial teaching method for skills, but it may be trying to lead students toward democracy by not daring to label itself "for democracy." This strategy may have to be adopted for the Japanese youth who do not like to be unsuccessful but lack the confidence to change society.

With the increasing economic influence on colleges and universities, SL is likely to play a role in education for democracy. However, colleges and universities do not exist in isolation from society; it would not be meaningful to discuss SL in isolation from its economic aspects and private goods. While an uncritical assumption of neoliberalism is problematic, there is also a problem with arguments that fail to consider neoliberalism altogether. Although it is important to think about democracy and other values that are easily overlooked in neoliberalism, it is also important not to overlook neoliberalism itself.

The discussion on whether Japanese SL teachers deliberately hide their political agendas in their practices is beyond the scope of this study. However, democratic objectives can be achieved only through this dangerous tightrope walk, even in SL, especially with regard to passive Japanese students.

Notes
1) The KH-coder is freeware developed by Koichi Higuchi (https://khcoder.net).
2) For example: "In service learning, students broaden their perspectives and deepen their learning through experiences in community and social contribution activities (volunteer activities = service) and related learning" (Osaka International University). This trend may be related to the fact that SL was introduced to Japan as a conceptual framework for volunteer education (Sakurai and Tsudome 2009).
3) For example: "To understand basic human views...in psychology, sociology, economics, political science."(J. F. Oberlin University).
4) Shukutoku University has a course that provides "policy-making experiences based on group learning:" however, this is limited to experiences in "a fictional administrative organization" setting.
5) Yokohama University of Commerce "Project Research E" has as its objective "to explain citizenship education to produce rational citizens who are the bearers of democracy." There were other courses in which the word "democracy" or "democratization" can be found, but these were descriptions of situations in other countries. For example, "Myanmar, where democratization and economic reforms are progressing rapidly...." (Sophia University).

6) Although outside the scope of the syllabus examined here, some courses address community issues within a political context without using the term "service learning." Tokai University offers a Public Achievement style of education that aims at "nurturing the motivation of citizens alongside the skills they need to build a democratic society" (Horimoto and Ninomiya-Lim 2020).

7) While this study focused on the syllabus descriptions and the culture of Japanese youth, other historical and cultural contexts not apparent from the syllabus still need to be explored. Further comparative study of the background supporting SL should be conducted.

Acknowledgment

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