

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

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# Introduction



# Introduction 1

- 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

	National	Local Public	Private	Total
Universities	86	89	604	779
Junior Colleges	0	18	328	346

## Number of Freshmen

	National	Local Public	Private	Total
Universities	100,631	30,940	485,936	617,507
Junior Colleges	0	3,098	57,900	60,988

## Enrolment Rate in Universities and Junior Colleges

	Male	Female	Total
Universities and Junior Colleges	56.4%	56.6%	56.5%



# 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 backgrounded by increasing academic, mental, and financial problems due to the extreme diversification of university students.

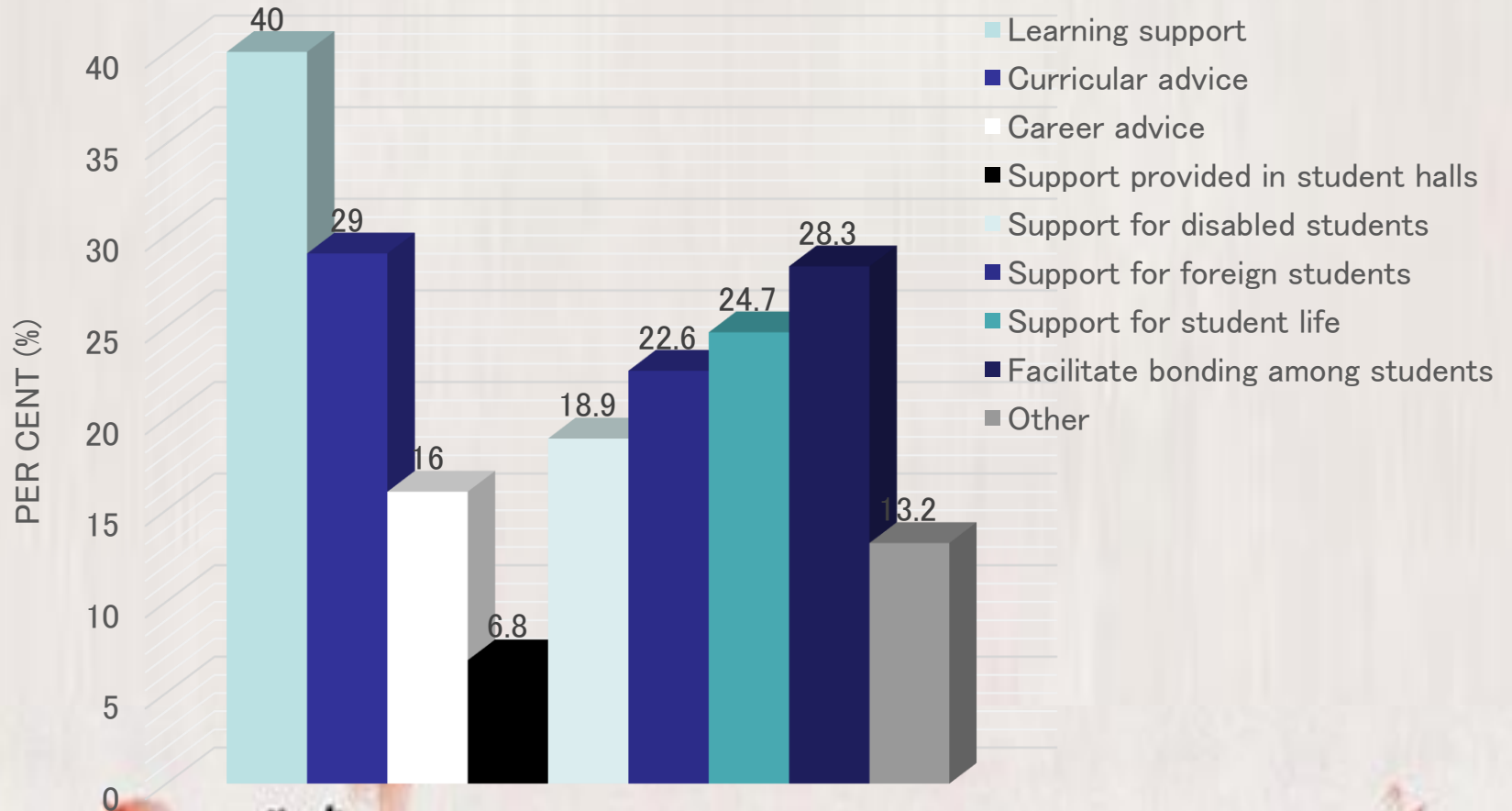
# Figure 1: The implementation of student mutual support system such as peer support (by university type)



Source: Compiled by the author based on the Japan Student Services Organization's (2014) 'The survey on the implementation of student mutual support in universities, 2013: Report on aggregated data (simple aggregation)', p. 25, and Japan Student Services Organization's (2011) 'The survey on the implementation of student support in universities, colleges and specialised high schools, 2010: Report on aggregated data (simple aggregation)', p. 75.



## 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



# Hironaka Report

- 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)

# Student FD (2)

- 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





# Conclusion (1)

- 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



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