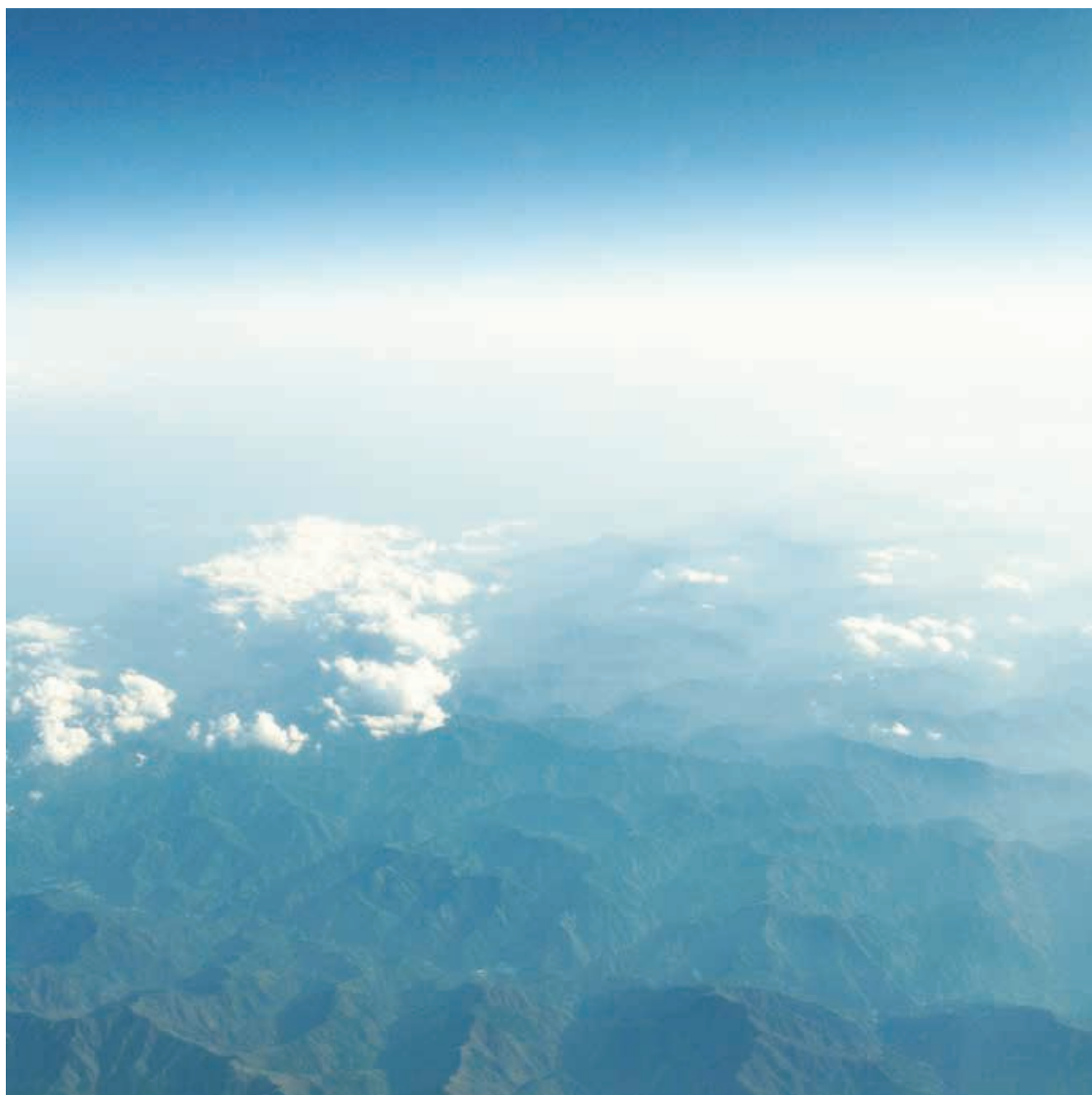


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A s i a n S o c i e t y o f H u m a n S e r v i c e s

## SHORT PAPER

# The Trend of International Research on University Learning Outcome and Quality of Life and Mental Health of University Students

Changwan HAN <sup>1)</sup> , Minji KIM <sup>2)</sup> , Aiko KOHARA <sup>3)</sup>  
Atsushi TANAKA <sup>4)</sup>

1) Faculty of Education, University of the Ryukyus

hancw917@gmail.com

2) Department of Biostatistics, Tohoku University Graduate School of Medicine, Japan

3) Graduate School of Education, University of the Ryukyus

4) Faculty of Education, University of the Ryukyus

## ABSTRACT

This study aimed to research and analyze the precedent studies on University Learning Outcome, which has been given great attention as the indicator of academic performance in the undergraduate course, and Quality of Life (QOL) and mental health of university students in Japan and to compare and analyze the policies for the improvement of academic learning ability of South Korea and China. Even though the higher education has been implemented with devoting all the energy to strengthen knowledge, technology and creative R&D to acquire professional workforce based on pragmatism for the preparation of globalized knowledge-based society and learning society in Japan, the sense of crisis that both individuals and government feel bureau has been heightened, which requires the countermeasures for the problems to cause the sense of crisis. The real problem is that university students have mental and emotional problems that cannot be solved by the education focusing on knowledge necessary for social participation and can be only solved by the implementation of the systemic policy to improve mental health of students for the well-being of students and welfare society. Education and mental health are closely related and university education needs to be carried out in the perspective that the mental health of students should be dealt with as the adaptation to university environment rather than individual personality.

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## I . The Current Situation of University Education in Japan and University Learning Outcome

The provision of high quality of university education is the task that is complex and presented in diverse ways in the globalized society; education is also the public mission to ultimately aim for the happiness of individuals and the entire development of society. After the collapse of bubble economy, Japan has not been freed from serious economic crisis in the situation of the aging and decrease of population, the decrease of the number of students studying abroad, lowered manpower and the lowered national competitiveness. Even though the studies to argue that technological innovation has to be implemented, productivity of industries needs to be improved and the place in international society should be heightened by attempting to cultivate people of ability through undergraduate and graduate courses have been presented, the curriculum of universities to improve academic performance of students in undergraduate course seems to be insufficient. According to the survey on the university faculties (See Figure 1), over 60% of university professors answered that they consider the decline in the scholastic ability, especially the decline of the ability of logical thinking, expressiveness and independence as the problem (Central Council for Education, 2008).

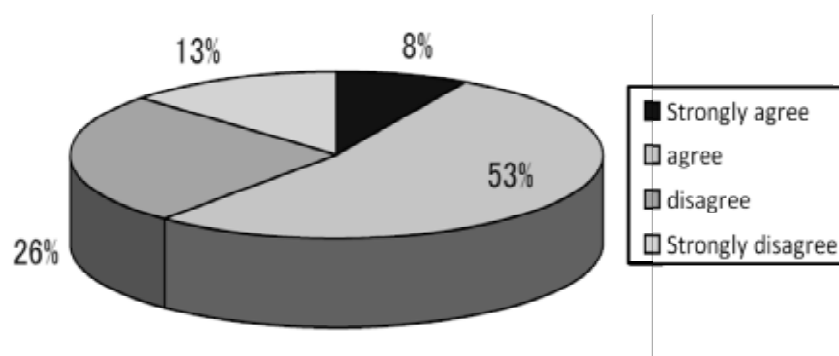


Figure 1. The Awareness of University Faculty for the Reasons of the Decline of Academic Ability

Thanks to the deregulation of the inauguration of university, the creation of university, college and department can be made easy and competitive environment among them has been established, but they have fallen to just a preparatory school to get certificates and tend to put the recruitment of students above all. The government of Japan suggested

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University Learning Outcome to improve the academic performance of undergraduate school by reflecting past and considering the social phenomena according to globalization.

Central Council for Education defined University Learning Outcome as the ability to acquire professionalized skills until finishing higher education; it is largely divided into 4 categories of knowledge and understanding, intellectual(thinking) skills, practical skills(subject-specific) and key/transferable skills(generic); and it also includes 13 items such as the understanding of subculture and multiculture, the understanding of culture, society and nature, communication ability, quantitative skills, information literacy, logical thinking skill, problem solving skill, ability of self-management, teamwork, leadership, ethics, the sense of social responsibility as a citizen, ability of life-long learning and comprehensive use of knowledge.

## **II. The Current Situation of University Life in the Aspects of Mental Health and Quality of Life of University Students**

The desire to learn can be generated from personality of people, but it also can be done from their own situation. The desire to learn tends to be heightened in the schools that have more diverse incentives (UNICEF, 2000).

However, if schools concentrated only on the education and training of knowledge and skills without diverse feedback system, it would erase the aims of the lesson, decline academic ability and the motivation to learn and decrease intellectual energy (Science Council of Japan, 2002).

WHO defined mind as the human quality to govern thinking or feeling – the emotional state of a person, the relationship that he or she established with others and the equilibrium within socio-cultural context) and health as the state that he or she can live a happy life both physically and mentally, which does not only necessarily mean that he or she is not weak or does not have illness. Furthermore, National Committee for Mental Hygiene of the U.S.A. defined mental health as the ability to maintain satisfying relationship as well as the state without mental illness.

During the period of post-adolescence that needs the establishment of self-identity and the independence in mental attitude, adolescents tend to show adjustment disorder such as chronic lethargy, anthropophobia and suicide, which means that their mental health is endangered (Nishiyama A. et al., 2004). According to the White Paper on Student's Health (2005), it was found that the mental state of university students are very unstable; 83.8% of respondents answered that their health condition is relatively good; but 59.7% answered that their future is vague, 50.5% answered that they don't have confidence for where they head for and 44.4% answered that they feel anxiety without reason. Because the adjustment disorder gets serious and negatively affects academic performance as

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they grow, the management of mental health has become important (Nakagawa M., 2006).

Tanaka suggested that the college maladjustment tends to become more serious as they are promoted to the next grade (See Figure 2) (Tanaka T. et al., 2006).

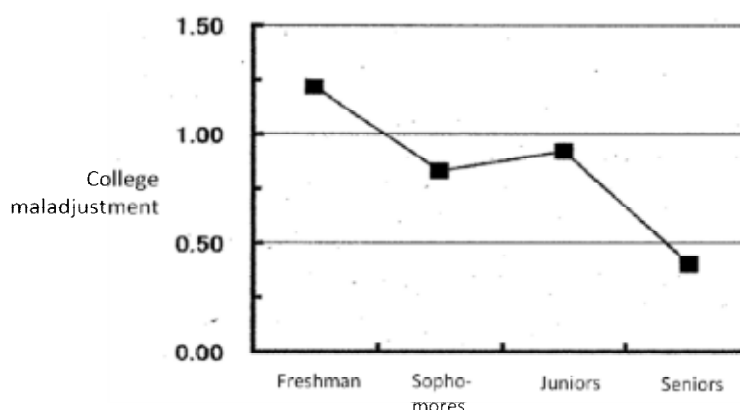


Figure 2. The College Maladjustment by Grades

### III. The Current Situation of University learning outcome in Each Country and International Comparison

#### (1) South Korea

Since 1990's, university evaluation system has been innovated and academic performance evaluation has been developed and implemented; they have focused on the categorization of the factors of educational environment that affect learning experience and academic performance of university students, particularly among them, the factors that affect the systematic or educational measures of university bureaucracy(research results, educational program, the support system for learning, the development of teaching competency, academic performance evaluation system, etc.) (Korea Educational Development Institute, 2011). For instance, Korea Collegiate Essential Skills Assessment (K-CESA) has been developed under the leadership of Ministry of Educational Science and Technology and Korea Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training in 2006; the participants in K-CESA have been rapidly increased from 1,235 students of 9 universities in 2009 and 16,091 of 32 universities in 2010 (石川裕之, 2012).

In South Korea, the limitation and problems of financial supports of government have been found by investigating existing financial supports of government for university, which have contributed to understand the current situation of South Korea and other countries related to the influence of university education (Korea Educational Development Institute, 2011).

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## (2) China

In China, recent educational innovation has demanded the change of school education due to the introduction of socialist market economy system; China government has planed and controlled the production and distribution and has also directly controlled the management of school authoritatively (Yeong-Pyo Choi, 2002). China has grown to newly become one of the world powers in 21<sup>st</sup> century based on the rich human resources; namely China has sustained the innovation emphasizing the importance and necessity of the development of human resources. China has innovated the education system multi-dimensionally; the reinforcement of the management system of compulsory education in rural area, the implementation of compulsory education of children of farmers who moved into cities, the reinforcement of the sustainable development of higher education through the innovation of higher education system, the promotion measures for private schools, the reinforcement of the monitoring of educational expense of higher education, the supplementation of support system for students with economic difficulty, the thorough implementation of educational innovation and the reinforcement of the cultivation of teachers (Il-Gyu Gang, 2008).

## (3) The U.S.A

Figure 3 shows the graduation rate in the higher education institutions in the U.S.A. by degrees. The rate of Bachelor's degree in both public and private universities was the highest, but that of doctor's degree was the lowest. While the percentages of bachelor's (50.1%) and associate's (29.8%) degrees in public universities are higher than those in private universities, which may be because most of community colleges are public schools, the percentages of bachelor's (29.0%) and master's (17.4%) degrees in private universities are higher than those in public universities. These percentages show that most of universities tend to concentrate on undergraduate courses considerably except some research universities (See Figure 3).

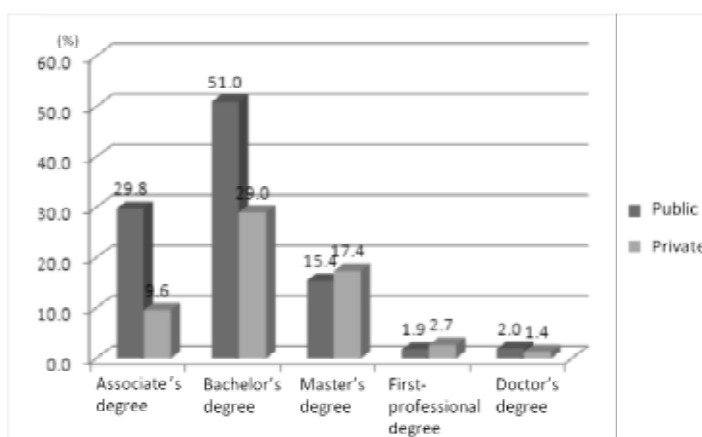


Figure 3. Digest of Education Statistics 2010.

Source: NCES(2010)

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As the financial crisis of state governments has been continued from the late 1980's, university education has not been recognized as public goods or public services and the roles of universities to contribute to the economy and the development of human resources have been emphasized, the responsibility and efficiency of university education have been strongly demanded (Ewell P, 1990). The representative policy to reinforce university teaching competency can be exemplified as Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 (HEOA), which was amended in 2008, and Higher Education Program (HE Program), which is implemented by Office of Postsecondary Education (OPE).

According to the data from JCIPR (Japanese Cooperative Institutional Research Program) that was reported by 山田礼子, even though the university learning outcome of Japan has increased every year, the self-rated gain of learning outcome of students in Japan is still lower than that in the U.S.A. (See Figure 4) (山田礼子, 2012).

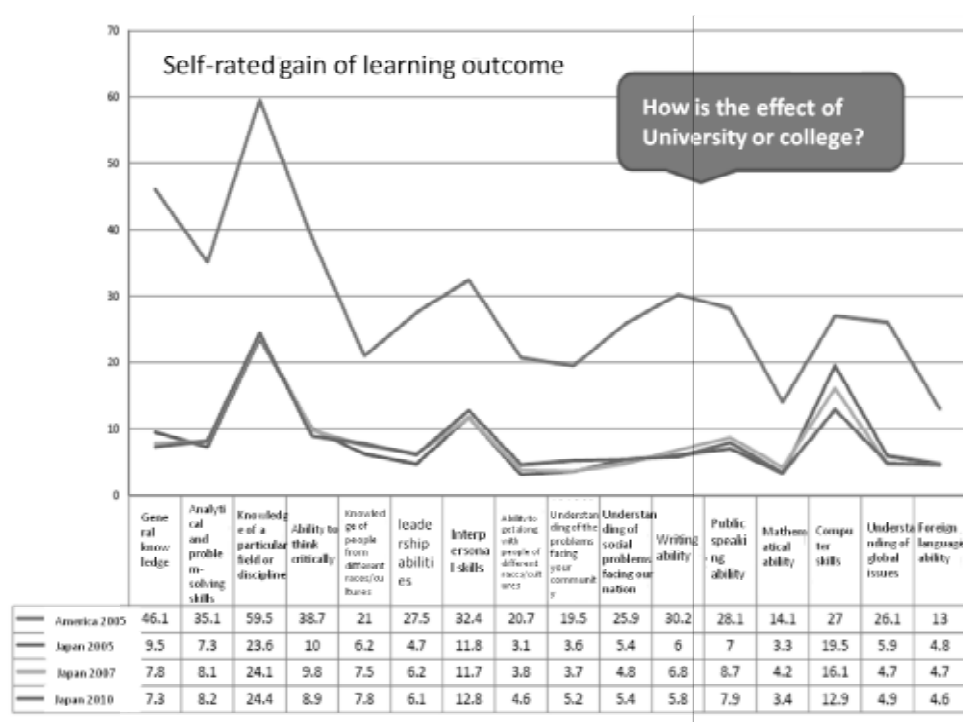


Figure 4. The Comparison of Self-Rated Gain of Students in Japan and the U.S.A.

American universities have provided diverse trainings and educational programs that enable students to live healthy and productive life. The academic ability and success of students are associated with mental health that is related to memory, concentration and learning ability. The programs to encourage students play roles to help make up creative campus community and reinforce the students' ability and social connection (OCHA, 2009).

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OECD is going to implement AHELO (Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes), which assesses the level of achievement to evaluate the quality of university education in the world since 2013.

#### IV. Considerations

The countermeasures to improve university learning outcomes have to be prepared based on the consideration for mental health and quality of life of university students. For the establishment of the support programs for university learning outcomes and the school innovation, the awareness of university teaching staff and school personnel for higher education institutions needs to be surveyed thoroughly. By clearly understanding what they consider as problems of education and students and where they feel the sense of crisis, the executing plan to solve those problems has to be constructed (Benesse 教育研究開発センター, 2007). The improvement of ability of teaching staff and school personnel has to be considered as the important tasks that are associated with university management (See Figure 5) (Central Council for Education, 2008). Based on the quantitative data that are regularly acquired from self-review and self-rated gains of university students, the educational goals need to be reconfirmed and readjusted for the university management. Even though all universities vary from each other and have their own countermeasure for certain situations, they all share the same goal that cultivate student of ability with healthy mind, which is considered as the best way to fundamentally improve the university learning outcomes.

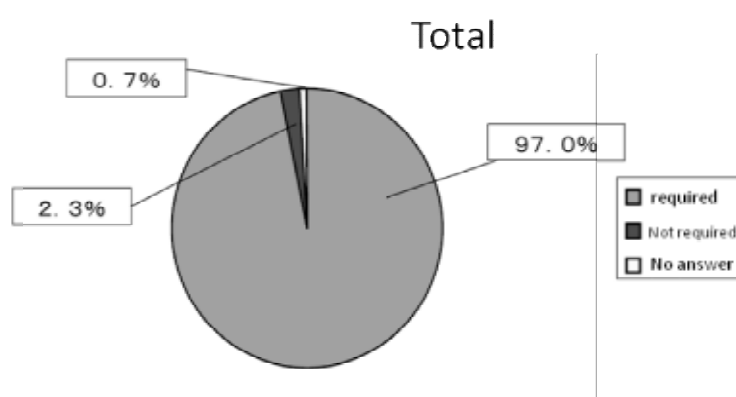


Figure 5. Result of the question of whether university teaching staff and school personnel need to develop their competency

In near future, the educational environment of higher education institutions such as universities and the system to guarantee the competition among universities and the quality of education are going to rapidly and greatly change. Quite a number of students feel stress and fatigue when they don't adjust themselves to the change of educational

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environment. There are just a few comparison studies related to mental health and quality of life of university students who are supposed to carry the future society. In particular, because the comparison study with South Korea and China has not been conducted, this study will be the first one that researched and compared the university learning outcomes and mental health and quality of life of university students in Japan and other countries.

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