



Challenges and Possibilities of EDU-Port: From Research Results

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Interview data #1 (former MEXT International Division Staff)

Speaking of Mr. K, a high-ranking MEXT official instrumental for his interest in establishing EDU-Port,

“I believe that Mr. K was hoping that EDU-Port would offer a view of Japanese education seen from abroad. That is, to make visible those practices that had been taken for granted in Japan, including the so called strengths of Japanese education, which was accepted without evidence.”

“He was also of the view that Japanese education was stuck in the status quo, in that we were not trying anything new and different.”

Interview data #2 (former MEXT International Division staff)

“I think it might have to do with a sense of remorse about cultural imperialism (of Japan’s past). MEXT tends to refrain from any attempts to promote strengths of Japanese education overseas, let alone anything to do with influencing foreign countries’ education through cultural means, though I am not too sure about politicians.”

Interview data #3 (former MEXT International Division Staff)

“What I have always stressed to the EDU-Port grantees is that ‘education is so deeply entangled with the tradition and culture of the country, so, please don’t think that copy and paste of Japanese education will work. This is absolutely crucial.’ I know there were some grantees who simply thought of transplanting Japanese practice as is to other places. But perhaps that is not really what Edu-Port should be about. It is about grasping the essence (of Japanese education) which can be applicable to other countries. It is a mistake to think that EDU-Port is about how wonderful Japanese education is. Unless it helps us understand what it is that makes Japanese education work, the goals EDU-Port aren’t really achieved.”

Interview data #4 (former MEXT International Division Staff)

Speaking of the purpose of EDU=Port:

“My current understanding is that we are doing this (EDU-Port), because it merits Japan in the end. However, initially I thought that EDU-Port was simply about promoting Japanese education overseas because of international reception. But then I realized that it is not that meaningful. It is the feedback (to Japanese education) , generated in the process, that is important.”

Interview data #5 (EDU-Port Steering Committee Member)

“But education is a bit different from trains or bullet trains. It is very sensitive, not something to be imposed upon (others). And MEXT officials do not even think about making money by exporting Japanese education. Whether it is good or bad, they have no idea, nor any taste, for business. Besides, they find a project like this (EDU-Port) troublesome; it cost them too much work with little return for them. They are not interested in the infrastructure export, while the Prime Minister’s Cabinet Office and Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry are. As I worked at the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, I have the business sense. So I think I can appreciate the both.”

Interview data #6 (EDU-Port Steering Committee member)

“If I say, ‘because Japanese education is superior, you should do as told,’ then it is the attitude of cultural imperialism, isn’t it? (This is not what EDU-Port is about.) When Japanese education gets tried elsewhere, it acts like a mirror, where we get to observe what is great or otherwise about Japanese education. So seeing others trying Japanese education allows us to rethink what Japanese education is. And I believe this is the aspect of EDU-Port that is most important for MEXT, and it is precisely why I decided to get involved.”

“It is only very recently, however, that this view is being shared among the EDU-Port core members.”

EDU-Port (in MEXT's view) ≠ Cultural Imperialism

- ▶ ≠ Imposition
- ▶ To rethink/unlearn what is taken for granted about Japanese education (Self-learning through the eyes of Others)
- ▶ Mutual learning (Assistance → Collaboration)
- ▶ Compatibility with corporate foreign market access & Prime Minister's Cabinet Office Infrastructure export strategies??

× Export & Advance

EDU-Port Video : No Branding, on-average description of ordinary days in Japanese schooling

To rethink/unlearn?

Three goals

- ▶ To internalize Japanese education (MEXT)
- ▶ To increase pro-Japan population (Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
- ▶ To contribute to Japanese economy (Ministry of Economy, Trade & Industry)

Achievements

- ▶ 25 projects in 24 countries supported. 15,000 non-Japanese participants in 2017,
- ▶ Major achievements, including projects that are included as part of national curriculum,
- ▶ The areas now include Asia, Middle East, South America, and Africa. Consortium grant available. 2.8 times more applications than in 2017.

“Humility” in Japan’s international cooperation in education

- ▶ Request-driven (as opposed to value-driven)
- ▶ “(Japan’s humility) might have something to do with the country’s failure with colonial operations and the war” (Kuroda, 2010, p. 93)
- ▶ “It seems to look refreshing for people in Africa who have developed ambivalence towards former colonizers” (Kuroda, 2010, p. 93)

Humility: MEXT's 'tradition'

“(If Japan decides to offer educational assistance), our assistance must take into full consideration the situation and intent of the counterpart, and hence be humble. We learned valuable lessons from the postwar educational reconstruction. Fundamentally, a country’s education belongs to the people of the country, as it has everything to do with the spirit of the nation. It is only with the fullest acknowledgement of this fact that we must make effort to provide assistance, whenever possible.” (Isao Amagi, the director of the international division of Ministry in 1962, quoted in Saito (2019).

Saito, Y. (2019). Japan’s international education cooperation policies before 1990s: A history of hesitation and trials & errors. Minoshima, N. and Kuroda, K. (Eds) Japan’s international educational cooperation. University of Tokyo Press (In Japanese)

Ethics of international cooperation in education (Hashimoto, 2019)



Education & Aid: Asymmetry and normative judgements: → Need for strong reflexivity

Self understanding through Others

1. Unified/Bloated Self → Imperialistic/Unreserved expansion
2. Disrupted Self → Others within Self → Self doubt & humility

Highlights “negativity”/undesirables: What gets excluded from “Japanese education”

Positivity & Negativity: two sides of the same coin.

Unified/Bloated Self: Grantee A (Private corporation)

“I have come to realized that Japanese education is the culmination of all the efforts made by the generations before us beginning from the postwar era of material shortages to today. Home economics, school lunch (kyushoku) and national course of study are all integrated around the concept of education through/around food (shokuiku). I was just struck how remarkable it is to have such a well developed system.”

“I have come to realize that Japanese teachers have the teaching skill sets that are truly the world standard.”

Absolute conviction about the universal value of Japanese education
→ Unreserved drive to promote Japanese education globally.

Self in 'minor doubt' : Grantee B (University)

To introduce Japanese physical Education practice in Country U in Africa

- ▶ Less regulation, more freedom, individuality in Country U
- ▶ African bodies “undeveloped”
- ▶ Self awareness→ Japanese physical education: Strong regulation, collectively focused
- ▶ Negativity of Self via Others: 1) Lack of attention to individual differences, 2) Use of music in preparatory gymnastics

Japanese 'superiority' largely intact, self only slightly disturbed

Raised awareness around strong disciplinary nature of Japanese PE

Disrupted self, Others within Self, & Collaboration : Grantee C (NPO)

Japanese community center (JCC, Kominkan) in Egypt

Attempt to transfer JCC to Egypt
→To reclaim what Egypt used to have.

Negativity of JCC: Lack of substance, out of touch, & stuck in status quo.

Describing a response from an Egyptian counterpart to whom the grantee had just explained about the decline of quality in some JCC.

“‘It is not just a problem for Japan. We are looking up to Japan. We want Japan to be a exemplary for other countries.’ When he told me all this, I felt like I had my heart shot through. We cannot possibly be slacking off when other countries are looking up to Japanese Community Center. They say ‘unless you keep up good work, there won’t be any that we can use as a model.’ When I heard him say this, I felt like he had given me some homework to do...I said to myself that Japan must have a hard look at JCC and remodel it in a way that is suitable for the contemporary time. And we must let it grow so it can be a useful resource for other countries.”

EDU-Port 2.0: Japanese 'model' of international cooperation in education

1) Strong ethics (Reclaim MEXT's 'tradition')

Mutual learning, Rethinking, Unlearning, Negativity, Disruption, Others

2) Educational cooperation as a 'learning' project

- ▶ Establish mechanism to promote and document EDU-Port grantees' reflections (unlearning)
- ▶ Achieve wider distribution of EDU-Port unlearning experience throughout domestic educational systems