

A brief analysis of Japanese educational values, the status of English usage in Pakistani and Japanese societies

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1. Introduction

This article is a brief review of my educational experience in Japan. I have analyzed my six objectives in detail in an attempt to find future implications for Pakistan in order to ameliorate its deteriorating educational conditions. My objectives of research and study in Japan were as follows:

Objectives

1. To learn about the Japanese education system over all
2. To study the value system and the roles of education system in the implementation of its social values in Japanese society.
3. To learn about the role of the English language in Japan, the extent of its importance and what is the future of English in Japan.
4. Culture, identity and status surrounding English in Japanese society
5. To understand the notion of success, industrialization and role of English for its realization.
6. Globalization and the English language, and their impact on Japanese society.

These objectives have great significance for me as a Pakistani student of English education and my country shares some things in common with Japan: both are eastern countries with their own value systems and norms, English is taught in both countries and the notion of culture and identity are very strong resisting forces against the usage of English. I think the sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset's words have great relevance with my experience in Japan as he said, "To know one's own country, one must know another country." As I came here on my quest for exploring the educational society, Japan provided me a chance to not only observe her methods of inculcating social values through education and building of whole person, but also gave me a chance to experience those values in everyday life. In Japan social values

are very important--they are not bookish material but are part of day-to-day life like politeness, kindness, honesty, truthfulness and respect for rules, which are Japanese characteristics.

I would agree with Merry White, the author of *The Japanese Educational Challenge: A Commitment to Children (1987)*, that we should hold Japan up as a mirror not as a blue print, and this exactly was what I wanted to do and in course of my learning I observed, learned, experienced and here is my reflection on my learning experience in Japan.

2. Observations

I observed teaching at Japanese kindergartens, elementary schools, junior high schools, high schools, and at Iwate University. It was a very wholesome experience. I will touch on the most significant features of these institutions which I personally noticed and experienced.

2.1 Collectivism

Collectivism is a strong Japanese characteristic and its roots are very deep in the Japanese education system as play and friendship are all that teachers seems to care about in kindergarten. Catherine C. Lewis (2003) writes in her book, *Educating hearts and minds*,

Japanese kindergarten centers on free play, not academic instructions. Japanese kindergartens spend almost four times as much time on free play as their American counter parts. (p.1)

She further writes about the significance of social values in Japanese elementary schools, “Japanese elementary schools emphasize kindness, and collaboration and persistence not test scores. Without ability grouping and tracking, Japanese children cooperatively master a challenging academic curriculum.”

The concept of society as one unit starts from the very beginning and its roots are deep down in Japanese education system as Catherine C. Lewis (2003) writes, “Small groups are the heart of elementary school life.” Japan is

a homogenous society as contrast to Pakistan which is a multicultural, multilingual, and multi-ethnic society. Social values come from religion in Pakistan and religion is a binding force among so many diverse social groups; personally I never noticed any strong effort to build society with emphasis on care and friendship, I never heard any teacher talking about these issues, education is competitive from day one; but in Japanese elementary schools children learn to help each other to succeed, while the concept of group is very new in Pakistan. I was teaching in quite a modern style school where teacher training and ideas of teaching are borrowed from the west, particularly from England, and are implemented on the strictly eastern society without much realization of culture difference. There, you could notice the obsession with this idea of the group, you could see children sitting in groups but if you watched closely you would instantly notice them being busy in individual work.

In Japan, as a student and as an English team-teacher, I often experienced working in groups at different levels and could fathom the depth and significance of this very idea in bringing up an individual and connecting him/her in mainstream society. Pradyumna P. Karan (2005) in his book *Japan in the 21st century: Environment, economy and society*, writes that:

Japan's education system produces students who perform far better on international examinations than Americans do. And Japanese students are indisputably among the best in the world in solving arithmetical equations....youngsters are well-behaved, studious and law abiding; Japan's low crime rates are well known and widely envied around the world. But what is more striking than the lack of crime is the overwhelming civility; graffiti and vandalism are rare, and school sports teams not only bow to each other before a game but also rush over to the opposing team's stand after the game to pay their respects.

2.2 Moral education

Moral education is an important part of Japanese schools. According to Chirstopher Hood (2001), moral education has a long history in Japan. During

the Meiji period, Motoda Eifu, an emperor's private tutor, argued for the need of moral education based on Confucianism. He elaborates that:

The Japanese concept of moral education is far from being vague or formless but includes various themes. These include the importance of order, regularity, cooperation, thoughtfulness, participation, manners; endurance, hard work and high aspirations; freedom, justice, rights, duties, trust, the individual's place in a group, such as the family, school, nation and the world; harmony with appreciation of nature, and need for rationale and scientific attitude towards human life. On top of this, school identifies a few, central goals in moral education to be emphasized during the year. (p.76)

2.3 Discipline

Discipline is another important part of the Japanese society and education system. Children at elementary schools clean their school building and arrange lunch these are part of their training and children learn keeping their desk contents and surroundings neat and clean, often children reflect on accomplishment of some responsibility like had they completed all chores. Did they bring all stationary items from home, or forgot something? This discipline does not end at school; Children are trained to help their mothers even at home with small chores. This discipline becomes more crucial in junior high and high school, students wear uniforms, and they are taught to follow rules, as Thomas P. Rohlen writes,

Japanese high schools teach a button- down sense of time and space, unlike what one finds in military. Compared with American schools there is less free time at each day, less vacation time and more home work. (Rohlen, 1983, p.316).

2.4 Care and appreciation for nature

Pets like rabbits and fish are common in Japanese schools and quite often you can see Japanese schools have their small fields where children grow

vegetables or flowers, and it is also quite common to see very small children helping farmers and experiencing fish farming as a part of their education. That is how Japanese children learn to care and appreciate nature. This caring attitude has a strong role in today's very neat and clean Japan where everything seems Eco-friendly from cars to recycled shopping bags. Japan is beautiful and very clean and Japanese make sure to preserve nature by all means.

2.5 Imparting tradition and culture

Imparting tradition and culture is also one of the strong features of Japanese schools. Japanese students from kindergarten to university level actively participate and celebrate in all national traditional festivals like Sansa Odori, Nebuta Festival and for the New Year celebrations, particularly, schools arrange special traditional meals for children and children learn from their grandparents to prepare the traditional food and enjoy it together.

2.6 Social equality and Japanese education system

Thomas P. Rohlen (1983) argues in his book *Japan's high schools* that social equality has a very strong link with schooling. He further explains,

Until the ninth grade nearly all Japanese children are enrolled in public schools based on residential criteria. Curricular, teaching facilities, resources and students abilities across the spectrum of elementary and middle schools are far more uniform than the United States or Western Europe, where tracking begins earlier. This establishes a solid base of relatively equal opportunity.

In contrast to this, the Pakistani education system is hierarchical. There are a number of different types of schools. In Pakistan, there are international schools, military schools and academies, privately-run schools, missionary schools, semi governmental schools, public schools or government schools and religious schools. All schools have different curriculums and different levels: the more expensive, the better the education. This system starts from the day one. Poorer children end up in public schools and generally

these schools are of much lower quality than private and international schools. Therefore, in the job market, poorer students cannot compete. Thus it is very difficult for these students to break this vicious circle of poverty. Poverty is one of the great challenges for Pakistan and its roots are in its unequal education system.

2.7 The status of a teacher in Japan and Pakistan

Japanese people use the word “Sensei” for teacher, just as in Pakistan teachers are addressed as “Ustaad,” “Moalim” or “teacher,” so in the both societies social respect from teacher or teaching profession is high. In Japanese society the influence of Confucianism is very strong on educational values and respect from teacher comes from Confucianism as Confucius was a teacher himself; this can be compared to the case of Pakistan, Islam is the dominant religion with 97% Muslim population and Muhammad (PBUH) was a teacher too. The difference is in their economic status: Japanese teachers are well paid, often even better than company workers; they can live decent lives with their salaries. But Pakistani teachers are paid based on hierarchical system of education: rich teachers are paid better wages as they work in elite schools and poor teachers end up in public schools where salaries are extremely low and teachers' life is difficult, which is a strong demotivating factor and results in poor performance of teachers sometimes.

The role of Japanese teachers is not limited to school but teachers monitor students private lives after school also through journal writings and visiting students' homes. In contrast to this, the role of a Pakistani teacher is limited within school walls and he/she is supposed to monitor academics in some modern schools. Moral education is forbidden, as the school where I worked at, the motto was “teach not preach.” This approach is a product of westernization of some schools and these schools have robbed teachers' authority and empowered students to an extent where at times students can bully teachers. This condition is making classrooms imbalanced and learning difficult. Furthermore, this is deteriorating educational values in society in general.

2.8 Significance of play and physical activity

As I have mentioned earlier "Play" has an important role in Japanese education system. It is used as a strategy to inculcate the friendship and create strong social bond at all educational levels from kindergarten to university. Students have strong network of clubs or after-school activity, and every day Japanese students spend plenty of time in different club activities which range from sports to music and dance. It is a common scene in Iwate University to see a group of students practicing some music, dancing or playing some sports after finishing their classes. Even in snowy winters students continue their club activities. In contrast to this, Pakistani students have far less time to play, generally clubs are formed but their role is limited or they are not very active. Only selected students perform music or dance at school festivals, and the same is the case with sports.

3 The English Language and globalization in Pakistani and Japanese context

3.1 A brief historical perspective of the English language in Pakistan and Japan

Japan falls in expanding and extending circle as far as English Language is concerned but Pakistan is in outer or extended circle as David Crystal mentioned in his book *English as a global language* (2003, p.60) also mentioned by David Graddol (2000, p.10) in his book *The future of English?*. The role of English language is different in both countries based on their history, geography and need. Japan is an insular nation and they have much fewer external influences as compared to Pakistan, which was a British colony for almost 100 years and was invaded by many nations. Therefore, this area was always going through cultural transitions, and at different times different languages made their mark on the sub-continent. For example, Arabic and Persian became official languages which are a complete foreign influence, and obviously British colonization paved the path for the English language and locals accepted it quite naturally.

According to David Graddol in *The future of English?* (2000), we can trace the roots of English as a world language back to the 17th century, by the same time many European powers were expanding like the French, Dutch, Portuguese and Spanish became established colonial languages

outside Europe but in the 19th century the British Empire with its distinctive mix of trade and cultural politics consolidated the position of world English, creating a language on which the sun never sets.

3.2 The English Language and globalization in Japanese context

Japan's case is different. It is a homogenous society with only one language "Japanese," with strong sense of uniqueness. Though English has been around Japan for more than two centuries, it failed to make any strong appearance on this small island nation, as Japanese people were so self-sufficient as a result of strong cultural bonds that resisted outside influences to a great extent. But the connection between Japan and the English language is quite complex, as it involves inner social changes and external global changes. According to Giddens (1990, p.64),

Globalization can be defined as follows: the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa. (cited in Block, 2004, p. 75)

In terms of language education, Imura (2003, cited in Graddol, p.75) expresses a similar view, saying that

Foreign language education and social events in the world are closely related to each other. The history of English education in Japan is, however, not the exception to this inter-connection between world, 'macro' events and the effects they have had on local education, the 'micro' looking back in history, some researchers think that the clearest effects of globalization started in the 15th century "when Europeans began to map colonize the world.

This process of colonization was accompanied by the globalization of the English language which Phillipson (1992) terms as "linguistic imperialism."

However, Brutt-Griffler (2002) recently contradicts this connection between colonization and the enforced spread of English:

...colonial language policy was not necessarily related to language spread, and that the spread of English was just as much a product of the struggle against imperialism (Brutt-Griffler, 2002 as cited in Park, 2004, p. 87).

Taking this alternative stance, the history of English language education in Japan may be viewed as being partly based on Brutt-Griffler's idea of a "struggle against imperialism." So far, we could see that the journey of English language began almost at the same time in both countries, but somehow Japan's resistance against English language continued till the present day. Japan has its one national language and in the near future there is no chance of English emerging as a second language. But in Pakistan, English has been used as a second language since its independence in 1947, more than 60 years ago. In Japan, Japanese is the sole language of media, communication at all levels is done through Japanese, almost all foreign books are translated into Japanese, and the medium of education is also in Japanese till higher education. In addition, conferences, seminars and other social and cultural activities are usually held in the Japanese language.

3.3 The English Language and Pakistan

In contrast, in Pakistan 72 languages are spoken. Out of these 72, at least 6 are strong regional languages. According to government data shown in Wikipedia ("Pakistan," 2010), "Pakistan has two official languages: Urdu (which is also the national language) and English. In addition there are five major regional languages: Punjabi, (44.15%) Pashto, (15.42%), Saraiki (10.53%), Sindhi, (14.1%) and Balochi (3.57%)." There is a strong feeling of insecurity as far as the future of these languages is concerned. The ever-expanding influence of English in Pakistani society, regardless of practical constitutional efforts to increase the usage of Urdu and local languages, English use continues to grow more widely in Pakistani society. English has become the dominant language of print and electronic media,

school education, and the source of official and general communication for Pakistanis at large. As far as the reason for this rapid expansion of English is concerned, it has a strong historical, geographical and cultural background. English became a status symbol during the British colonization period and, possibly, a sense of an inferiority complex runs through Pakistani society. “Need” is a key factor explaining the strong presence of English in today's Pakistan. Job requirements include “good communication skills” or both written and spoken fluency in the English language. Higher education, the Pakistani armed forces, the bureaucracy and courts all require good English language skills. English language skills can open opportunities for higher education leading to better jobs. These better jobs promise a higher living standard which is what most people are striving for in any part of the world. In general, success in Pakistani society is strongly linked with the English language. In Japan there is no such “need” to learn English; as I have mentioned earlier, Japanese is the language of education, most jobs do not require English language skills, and the average Japanese can live a happy life without English.

3.4 The English language and globalization

There is an interesting point of culture and identity related with language, and it is very interesting to see how far Japan has become westernized without English, and how far Pakistan has become westernized with English. First of all, there is no doubt that English was and is considered a threat to Japanese and Pakistani cultures, as there is a strong sense of culture and language related to each other. Sometimes it is far more complex than is apparent. Japan is as modern as any western country, with skyscrapers, bullet trains, with international brands available in even very small cities in Japan, international food chains selling hamburgers and French fries all over Japan. Green tea is not the only drink available in today's Japan: Pepsi cola, Coca cola and other international sodas, coffee and tea brands are available in shops and convenient vending machines at every nook and corner of Japan. Modern Japanese architecture is quite influenced by the west. Japanese TV is not behind in following international trends: from fashion to sports, everything is up dated. Japan is not lacking behind in any aspect, pop music is

just a complete international import. Japan is a technology hub most probably one step ahead than the west in this particular area. You would not see Japanese wearing kimonos any more in day-to-day life and Samurai warriors are no longer walking down the streets carrying their swords. Japan has westernized indeed, that is one side of the coin, we will see the other side after analyzing how far Pakistan is westernized with a lot of working English.

Pakistan has painful memories attached with the English language as a result of colonization, and it brings the memory of defeat, deception, hatred and inferiority complex generated by the colonial rulers who treated locals as inferior creatures and robbed them off their integrity and honor, and wounds are still bleeding. The Pakistani nation has kept the memories of turmoil and torture afresh and revives it every year at the Independence Day celebration. There have been practical movements against the English language and the Pakistani constitution holds a clause of reducing the use of English and empowering Urdu, since 1956 when the first Constitution was formulated till the present day. In Pakistan it was not only culture which was threatened, but it was religion which was also endangered by the English language as British came: they brought Christianity and missionaries were using education and injecting Christianity in the Muslim society. Pakistan is the only religiously ideological state; therefore, the resistance against English and westernization was very strong, but Pakistan today is not as westernized as Japan, as people wear Pakistani traditional clothes; western clothing, especially for women, is still taboo, pop music is on the rise but it is rare to see woman pop singers. Pakistan is a developing country with a high rate of illiteracy and war history; therefore, the standard of living is much poorer than Japan, technology is all borrowed but western food chains and drinks are taking root fast in Pakistani society, international brands are available in the big cities. There is a strong sense of national pride and many people would disregard the expanding role of the English language but everybody wants to learn it, everybody wants to speak like a native speaker with natural accent, there is no practical effort for translating English books into Urdu, and speaking English is “cool”— you are considered educated and refined if you can speak fluent English. Ridiculously at some educational institutions fluency in English is regarded more than the teacher's grip on the subject. Pakistani society is still confused and

practically hypocritical as far as English is concerned.

Let's flip the coin and see the other side of Japan and English language and culture. In Japan, the strong sense of *Japanese-ness* is predominant, it is like the sky which covers the whole earth. The same is the case of Japan: every western import is Japanized.

Katakana, Japanese letters which are used for foreign words, are the biggest example. Japanese wear western clothes but the style is Japanese. Japanese adopted western architecture but "Tatami" is there, sliding doors are there and kappa sushi is there to beat one dollar package foreign food chains. It is hard to see Japanese wearing kimonos in everyday life but Japanese celebrate their traditional festivals with such enthusiasm that "Sansa Odori" becomes the biggest communal dancing festival in the world. Japanese are fighting westernization as Pakistanis are but their strategy is different, much more logical and balanced.

Japan is very Japanese at soul but it is keeping pace with the world that is the state of balance: I visited a Japanese kindergarten at the eve of the New Year. New Year is a special event in Japan and Japanese people make "Mochi" rice cake and celebrate the New Year. The ages of children ranged from 1 year to 6 years in the kindergarten. Grandparents of the students and us, Pakistani, American, and Korean students from Iwate University, were invited to celebrate the new year with them. Grandparents taught all of us how to make "Mochi" and we made our "Mochi" with children, we played, and ate together and we used the English language to communicate with children though their English was just at a very beginner's level. This one small event shows how Japan is imparting Japanese culture to its upcoming generations very carefully and equipping them with tools to meet the challenges of a new world with positive mind and healthy acceptance of other cultures and religions. This is what we call globalization and culture and identity in present day Japan which I experienced myself.

4. Future of the English language in Pakistan and Japan

Now the question is what would be the future of English language in Japan and Pakistan.

As far as Pakistan is concerned, English is emerging as a strong language

and would continue to strengthen-- there is no coming back so far. But is hard to predict the future of Urdu and other regional languages, and there is a lot of work to be done to preserve and update these languages. As far as Japan is concerned, Japanese people are learning English, government is focusing on communicative English and for sure English would make its mark in Japan but it would take maybe 20 more years. Now the next question is, will Pakistan lose its culture or become westernized with more use of English in everyday life? My answer is a clear "no." I am a fluent speaker of English, I wear western clothes when I am outside of Pakistan, but I look Pakistani, I act like Pakistanis do, and my heart and soul is Pakistani, my professor is a Japanese fluent English speaker, a graduate from American University but she is Japanese and will be Japanese no matter what. My fellow students from Russia, France, Italy, India, Bangladesh, and China, most of them can speak English but still all of them carry their own cultures, their own values and the irony is their English even reveals their nationalities when they speak with heavy French, Russian or Italian accents. Therefore, according to my experience and observations I can say we should not consider language as a danger to our social norms and cultures, but as a tool which can make lives easy and reduce misconceptions and misunderstandings on individual and international levels.

I think overall my educational experience in Japan gave me answers to many complex issues related to my subject and work, and as I said I could hold Japan as a mirror to a better understanding of Pakistani case scenarios and find future implications for Pakistan.

5. Future implications for Pakistan

After analyzing all points regarding the educational conditions in both countries briefly, I would move on to implications.

Create balance between tradition and modernization

- Inculcate social values and acceptance for variety
- Basic equal educational opportunities for all
- Focus on discipline and organization
- Improve economic and social status of teachers
- Care and appreciation for nature

- Respect for rules and care for fellow human beings and animals
- Create the habit for diligence
- Introduce the notion of communal efforts and strong social ties to build better future as a nation.
- Pay attention to play, physical activity and creativity

Pakistan is a developing country with great challenges of poverty, increasing crime and social disorder. The root cause of many problems is its poor education system which is unable to equip the Pakistani nation with the tools to meet the challenges of the modern world.

First of all, Pakistan needs to ensure equal educational opportunities to its people at least till high school to reduce the ever-increasing rich-poor gap. One curriculum, same facilities and resources throughout the national educational system can help to create harmony as well as unity among people.

The second important step could be creating balance between tradition and modernization through education. As I have mentioned earlier there are multiple types of school systems working in Pakistan and sometimes their educational approaches are contrasting to each other which creates friction in society and results in social disorder in the long run.

Third, it is difficult to create perfect harmony like that found in Japan in such a diverse nation as Pakistan, but if social values are emphasized as in Japan, this will help to inculcate the value of acceptance for variety which would result in a peaceful society. Fourth, discipline needs to be focused more particularly in so-called modern schools. Fifth, care and appreciation for nature is a missing factor in the Pakistani education, and I think it is time to pay attention to this area. Care and appreciation should also extend to fellow human beings to create a strong communal bond among various groups in society. Sixth, diligence needs to be recognized as an important factor in achieving specific goals and should be a part of training in school education, as is found in Japan where “Ga n batte” means keep on trying, works as important educational philosophy and has worked as a magic word for rapid Japanese progress in all areas of life.

The final point is regarding play or physical activity at school. I noticed the strong role of physical activity in Japanese society where it is not only used as

a technique to create friendship and strong social relationships among children, but it also allows them to vent their energies in positive and healthy activities. Most probably it is one of the most important factors behind low crime rates in Japan. Sports and after-school club activities keep Japanese students fairly busy not only during school days but also on holidays, and this helps them to refrain from negative activities.

6. Conclusion

Japan is an educational society with almost a 99 percent literacy rate therefore it proved to be a perfect educational laboratory for me. As I could study, analyze and practically experience educational theories in practice. I could see education forming a whole society, a society which is striving towards common goal of success while helping each other to succeed on individual level. Thus, I can say that in Japan education is not only in theories but it is part of every day life as the role of school and teacher extends far beyond school walls. In addition to this I can say particularly about my research experience in Japan that it has been very rewarding as I could find the answers of complex questions regarding education and the role of the English Language in Pakistani society. As I mentioned earlier, I held Japan as a mirror to see Pakistan in clear perspective, analyze and reflect on the Pakistani education system and find solutions for further improvements.

In the end, I would like to say there is no perfect education system in the world. Each one has its merits, demerits and limitations. Therefore, one educational model cannot serve the purpose of another society completely, but we can always learn from each other and strive for a better future together to make this world a better place, and this research is an outcome of this effort.

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