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Previous Studies on Why University Students Embark on and Continue Participating in Volunteer Activities to Aid Children in Japan

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Abstract

This paper outlines previous studies on the volunteer activities of university students to aid children in Japan. Recently, an increasing number of young people and students participate in volunteer activities to aid children. This paper attempts to reveal the reasons behind the increasing number of student volunteers. The rising number signifies the increase in volunteers who began participating in volunteer activities and who continue to do so. Several previous studies examine university students' feelings after participating in volunteer activities to aid children. This paper enumerates the findings of these studies, which may be useful in research on why young people and university students embark on and continue participating in volunteer activities.

I. Introduction

Since the early 2000s, Hiromoto (2016) has highlighted the trend of participating in volunteer activities to aid children by young people and students in Japan. While the percentages of individuals aged 15–24 years and of students who participate in volunteer activities with the elderly have declined since 2001, the percentages of those engaged in activities to aid children have risen.

Programs initiated by universities and junior colleges to benefit children and their parents may promote the trend of participating in volunteer activities. In the 2000s, universities and junior colleges educating students to become childcare workers (*hoikushi*) at day nurseries (*hoikusho*) or teachers at kindergartens began implementing programs to aid young children

and their parents.

The total fertility rate remained low during the 1990s. Consequently, in June 2004, the Cabinet of Japan decided on the Outline of Measures against the Declining Birthrate (*Shōshika shakai taisaku taikō*). The Plan for Supporting Child and Childcare (*Kodomo, kosodate ōen puran*), which was the strategy to implement programs along the outline, was established in December 2004. The strategy emphasized assistance from residents and organizations in issues related to childrearing in communities. Since the plan was implemented, day nurseries and kindergartens have played a momentous role in aiding parents who are rearing children.

Universities and junior colleges have also begun providing aid to parents rearing children since the 2000s. Specifically, universities and junior colleges with faculties or departments educating students to become childcare workers and teachers at kindergartens or elementary schools have attempted to aid children and parents through their professors, facilities, and students. It is beneficial for students who want to become childcare workers or teachers at kindergartens or elementary schools to participate in volunteer activities provided by universities or junior colleges to children and their parents. These students can acquire the skills needed to care for children during their volunteer activities.

Many programs provided by universities and junior colleges for children and parents are implemented as classes taken by students. Professors grant credits for these subjects to students who participate in volunteer activities. It is not necessarily correct to say that students volunteer because they want to help someone. They may volunteer because they desire credits for the subjects. Therefore, this paper focuses on programs that research papers do not report to grant credits to students who participate in volunteer activities.

Moreover, this paper outlines the results of a questionnaire survey on university students. A previous study did not specify whether the university had implemented a volunteer program. In the questionnaire, students were asked about their experiences and interest in volunteer activities. The questionnaire included questions on welfare volunteer activities, not those activities that aid children. Nevertheless, this paper outlines the

results of the survey, because welfare volunteer activities include volunteer activities that aid children; thus, the survey results are relevant to this study as well.

II. University Students' Participation in Volunteer Activities

Many previous studies on participation by university students in volunteer activities report on their opinions and feelings regarding the activities. This section describes four of these studies, which may hint towards novel research concerning the reasons university students start or continue participating in volunteer activities to aid children.

Kyushu Women's University

A volunteer program is provided by the Course of Human Development (*Ningen hattatsu gaku senkō*) at the Department of Human Development (*Nigen hattsu gakka*) in the Faculty of Humanities (*Ningen kagakubu*) at Kyushu Women's University (*Kyūshū joshi daigaku*) (Harutaka et al. 2014). The course educates students to become childcare workers at day nurseries and teachers at kindergartens, elementary schools, and special support schools (*tokubetsu shien gakkō*).

While students enrolled in the course want to be childcare workers or teachers at kindergartens or schools in the future, they have few opportunities to spend time with young children before undergoing their practical training at day nurseries, kindergartens, or schools. As such, they are unaccustomed to dealing with young children. The course aims to provide students with opportunities to spend time with children. Thus, it implemented several volunteer programs. A program in which students training to be childcare workers or teachers at kindergartens are dispatched to day nurseries and kindergartens commenced in September of Fiscal Year (FY) 2012.

Students dispatched as volunteers to day nurseries and kindergartens aid children to actively play, ensure their safety, and clean rooms at the facilities. More sophomores participated in the program than freshmen, juniors, or seniors. Sophomores receive practical training at day nurseries or kindergartens at the end of the fiscal year. They tend to want to experience contact with children to learn how children conduct themselves and how day

nurseries or kindergartens are managed before embarking on their practical training.

Harutaka et al. (2014) conducted anonymous surveys on volunteer students using a questionnaire after the volunteer activities in each semester. They clarify the results of the surveys conducted on students who participated in the volunteer program for the first time in FYs 2012 and 2013.

Of the respondents, 80% answered yes to the question, “Did you have your own aim in conducting the volunteer activities?” Students who have their own aims may tend to want to participate in volunteer activities. The survey reveals that 22% of the respondents answered “sufficiently” and 76% answered “to a certain extent” to the next question, “To what extent have you accomplished your own aim?” Of the new volunteers, 23% responded that they thought they had sufficiently obtained practical skills, while 73% responded that they had obtained practical skills to a certain extent. Another question asked, “Will your experience as a volunteer be useful in your studies after the volunteer activity?” To this, 82% of the respondents answered “sufficiently” and 18% indicated “to a certain extent.”

Kurume University

University students participate as volunteers in a program implemented by the Institute of Comparative Studies of International Cultures and Societies (*Hikaku bunka kenkyūjo*), an organization affiliated to Kurume University (*Kurume daigaku*) (Ōnishi and Hosaka 2013). The institute implemented the program in FY 2012, and since then, university students aid children at day nurseries and elementary schools. Student volunteers develop children’s physical strength at day nurseries by providing physical exercises and play with elementary school students during recess after lunch. They also assist in helping children with developmental disabilities to study.

Student volunteers responded to interview surveys after completing their volunteer activities. Ōnishi and Hosaka (2013) provide results on the opinions and feelings of student volunteers on their activities as outlined above. According to the results of the survey of seven student volunteers who instructed children in physical exercises at day nurseries and played with elementary school students, all the respondents indicated that they had con-

tinued to participate in the volunteer activities. They noted that when they volunteered to aid children at day nurseries or elementary schools, the children displayed pleasant facial expressions.

Student volunteers aiding elementary and middle-school students with developmental disorders were also surveyed through interviews. One student volunteer replied that he/she was happy if his/her activities were useful to someone. Another student volunteer indicated that the stronger the relationship of trust developed with the children, the more questions they asked.

Hokkaido University of Education at Kushiro

In September 2006, this university of education (*kyōiku daigaku*) launched a volunteer program to aid children residing in a foster home (a facility for orphaned, neglected, or abused children or *jidō yōgo shisetsu*). Students at Hokkaido University of Education at Kushiro (*Hokkaidō kyōiku daigaku Kushiro kō*) aim to become teachers at elementary or middle schools after graduating. In the program, university students tutor elementary and middle-school students living in the foster home. The tutors assist children in doing their homework and studying with handouts they create. Students also provide recreation activities for elementary-school students at the foster home (Toda, Mimori, and Ninomiya 2010).

University students participating in the program were surveyed through semi-structured interviews to determine their reasons for continuing to volunteer with the children. Results of the survey disclose three reasons for their continued participation in volunteer activities. The students continue to participate because they consider their activities worthwhile, they want to contribute towards enhancing the children's lives, and they delight in the children's development.

One of these reasons is concerned with university students' perception that they participate in worthwhile activities. They gradually construct relationships of mutual confidence with children through volunteer activities. When starting to volunteer, the children at the foster home ignore and are sometimes abusive towards the university students. However, the children begin looking forward to the students' visits to the foster home in stages.

The university students maintain that they can establish relationships of trust with the children after a number of visits to the foster home.

Musashino Women's University

In FY 1998, Hamano et al. (2000) conducted a questionnaire survey on freshmen belonging to the Faculty of Contemporary Society (*Gendai shakai gakubu*) at Musashino Women's University (*Musashino joshi daigaku*). The questionnaire asked students about their views on and experiences of volunteer activities.

Of those students who had not participated in volunteer activities when they were at elementary or middle school, 47.7% responded that they wanted to participate in a welfare volunteer activity. Of those who had volunteer experience a volunteer activity at elementary or middle school, 62.8% wanted to participate in a welfare volunteer activity. In addition, 45.5% of students who had not participated in a welfare volunteer activity wished to participate, while 74.5% of students who had experienced a welfare volunteer activity wanted to engage in one. These survey results imply that students' past experiences in volunteer activities may promote their further involvement.

III. Discussion

This section reviews the findings of the studies outlined in the previous section. The reviews in this section illustrate possible incentives for university students to engage in volunteer activities to aid children.

Students aiming to become childcare workers at day nurseries or teachers at kindergartens, elementary schools, or special support schools participate in the program implemented at Kyushu Women's University. The volunteer activities in the program provide valuable opportunities for the students to practice dealing with children. If the students participate in the volunteer programs before they are employed or undergo practical training at day nurseries, kindergartens, or schools, they supposedly tend to establish their aims for the volunteer programs. The results of the questionnaire survey revealed that 80% of the students established their own aims for the volunteer activities, while 98% accomplished their own aims in the volunteer activities sufficiently or to a certain extent. Furthermore, 96% of the students

obtained practical skills in the programs sufficiently or to a certain extent, while 82% sufficiently regarded their experiences of volunteer activities as useful in their studies after volunteering.

University students consider as attractive volunteer activities that are related to their prospective occupations and current studies. A possible reason university students participate in volunteer activities is that these activities are useful for their future occupations or studies. If university students are induced to participate in various types of volunteer activities that are not related to their future opportunities or area of study, more students may engage in more volunteer activities.

The student volunteers at Kurume University responded to the interview survey that they continuously participated in volunteer activities at day nurseries and elementary schools, and that they perceived the delighted facial expressions of the children. It is not demonstrated that the children's delight brought about continued participation in volunteer activities by university students. However, a relationship of cause and effect may exist. A plausible reason why university students continue to engage in volunteer activities to aid children is that they perceive the contribution of their activities to the children. If university students benefited from the assistance of other people in their childhoods, they may easily understand that their assistance can delight children. Therefore, university students' experiences in receiving assistance from other people through volunteer activities in their childhoods may awaken their expectations that their volunteer activities can delight children.

The volunteer program conducted by Hokkaido University of Education at Kushiro indicates that student volunteers and children gradually construct relationships of mutual confidence. One possible reason university students continue to participate in volunteer activities to aid children is that while the children appear to dislike student volunteers at the outset, the volunteers are able to construct relationships of trust with them over time. If university students learn through their experiences that volunteer activities provide people with mutual confidence, then the students may be willing to participate in volunteer activities.

The survey conducted at Musashino Women's University indicates that

university students who experienced volunteer activities tend to be more willing to participate in them than students who have not been engaged. Experiences of volunteer activities in the past may promote participation in activities in the future.

IV. Conclusion

This study attempts to enumerate possible reasons why university students embark on and continue to participate in volunteer activities to aid children by examining previous studies on students' volunteer activities. Previous studies imply that university students are inclined to participate in or continue with volunteer activities if these are useful for their desired occupations or in their studies, if they perceive that their activities bring enjoyment to the children, if they realize that they can construct relationships of trust with the children, or if they had previous experience with activities. These reasons are concerned with the present views of university students and their past experiences.

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