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Methodologies for Comprehending University Students' Views on Volunteer Activities in Japan

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Abstract

This paper aimed at examining the methodologies used to understand university students' opinions on volunteer activities in Japan. A promising methodology is proposed after examining previous studies of university students' participation in volunteer activities. The methodology that this paper puts forward focuses on changes in students' views on volunteer activities. Indicators of the views are degrees of altruism and egoism. These two indicators may minutely reveal university students' images of volunteer activities. A number of examinations are conducted during a series of volunteer activities. Information on students' views are obtained by students' reports on volunteer activities, the researcher's participatory observation, and interviews with staff members in organizations that accept students as volunteers.

I. Introduction

It is an interesting task to reveal how young people in Japan perceive volunteer activities. The Cabinet Office of the Japanese Government clarified a distinction in young people's interests in volunteer activities between Japan and other countries through analyses of survey results. In 2013, surveys were conducted with people between the ages 13–29 years old in South Korea, the US, the UK, Germany, France, Sweden, and Japan. Among the seven countries, Japan possessed the lowest percentage of respondents who were interested in volunteer activities (Naikaku fu 2014, 1 and 83).

The questionnaire asked another question to the respondents who were interested in volunteer activities. The question "Why are you interested in volunteer activities?" required each respondent to select multiple answers.

The answers chosen by many respondents in Japan are as follows: “I want to help people in trouble” (65.4%), “I want to meet diverse people” (49.6%), “I want to improve the community or society” (48.4%), and “I want to acquire new skills and capacities or to accumulate experiences” (37.3%) (Naikaku fu 2014, 84). The first and third answers are altruistic, whereas the second and fourth ones are egoistic.

How can we interpret the finding that Japan is ranked the lowest in percentage of respondents interested in volunteer activities? The percentage of the US (61.1%) is the highest among the seven countries. Sweden’s percentage (42.8%) is the third lowest but higher than Japan (35.1%) and France (42.6%). Germany (50.4%) is located between the US and Sweden (Naikaku fu 2014, 83). Esping-Andersen (1990) designated Sweden, Germany, and the US as social democratic, conservative, and liberal countries, respectively. This order signifies the extent of the government’s roles of each country in providing welfare services. Therefore, based in the survey results of the three countries, it can be construed that a country in which the government plays significant roles in social welfare tends to arouse little interest of volunteer activities among its people. However, this tendency does not apply to Japan, whose welfare regime Esping-Andersen categorized as conservative or liberal (Esping-Andersen 1990, 52 and 74).

Why are young people in Japan less interested in volunteer activities than those in the other countries? This question gives rise to a research design to reveal Japanese youths’ views on volunteer activities. Studies on volunteer activities of students at universities or junior colleges have been gradually accumulated in accordance with the increase in universities’ and junior colleges’ programs that contribute to communities. Universities and junior colleges provide opportunities to participate in volunteer activities for students, who will step into the real world after graduation from their studies. Devising a methodology of understanding the students’ views on volunteer activities may contribute to advancement of volunteer programs at universities and junior colleges. This paper aims at devising a methodology to comprehend students’ opinions about volunteer activities by examining previous studies.

II. What Should Be Revealed?

What should be the focus in the examination of university or junior college students' volunteer activities in Japan? Previous studies have clarified results of surveys that were conducted to a number of students using questionnaires. A fundamental result of the surveys is the percentage of students who have participated in volunteer activities.

Itaba and Shutō (2016) conducted a survey among university students who were training to be teachers or childcare workers (*hoikushi*). For the question, "Have you participated in a volunteer activity?" 195 students replied "Yes" and 101 students answered "No." Four students did not respond to the question (Itaba and Shutō 2016, 37–38). If percentages are calculated using the number including students who did not respond, 65.0 percent of the students had experienced volunteer activities and 33.7 percent had not volunteered. Arai (2016) conducted a survey to students at four universities. Among 542 respondents, 467 students had volunteered and 52 students had not (Arai 2016, 87–88 and 90). Whereas 86.2 percent of the respondents had participated in volunteer activities, 9.6 percent had not.

While the two surveys explained above were conducted to university students, there are disparities in the percentages of students with and without volunteer experience between the two surveys. Whereas reasons for the divergences in these survey results are not evident, plausible reasons for the distinctions in the results of the surveys are influenced by encouragement by universities, faculties, or departments to participate in volunteer activities. Other factors for the disparate results of the surveys may be the students' grades and regions in which universities are located. The percentage of students who have or have not volunteered changes according to students at whom the surveys were directed. Therefore, a novel research design should not focus on only percentages of students who have or have not volunteered.

Itaba and Shutō's (2016) survey revealed the frequency of university students' participation in volunteer activities. The respondents who had participated in volunteer activities responded to the question about the

frequency. Among the respondents, 11 percent constantly participated once per week, 8 percent constantly participated once per month, 3 percent participated once in two or three months, 67 percent participated inconstantly, and 8 percent selected the alternative “Others” (Itaba and Shutō 2016, 38). “Inconstantly participate in a volunteer activity” obtained the highest percentage. The respondents who answered that they inconstantly participated in volunteer activities may encompass students who had experienced volunteer activities only once or a few times. A survey result that shows a percentage of respondents who have volunteered should be premised on a fact that there exists a varied frequency of participation in volunteer activities.

Walsh and Black (2015) indicated that the UK and Australia share a common feature in volunteer activities. The shared attribute in volunteer activities is that a number of people who have participated in volunteer activities do not regard themselves as volunteers. A survey result revealing a percentage of volunteers may display a lower percentage than the actual percentage (Walsh and Black 2015, 13). While Walsh and Black highlighted the situation in the UK and Australia, their indication may correspond to the situation in Japan.

The above findings and indication imply that a survey aiming at revealing only a percent of students who have volunteered is not momentous and that a survey of other aspects of students’ volunteer activities may obtain significant results.

In the survey explained above, Itaba and Shutō (2016) also inquired the students about the fields of volunteer activities that the respondents had experienced. The questionnaire enumerated 17 fields of volunteer activities. The respondents answered whether they had or had not experienced each volunteer activity listed on the questionnaire. The enumerated activities encompassed cleaning, aiding students in studying, playing with disabled children and their siblings, aiding workers at welfare facilities, recycling, and assisting people in playing sports. All of the 17 fields had respondents who had experienced volunteer activities (Itaba and Shutō 2016, 38).

Okahana (2013) disclosed that university students participated in diverse fields of volunteer activities and that the students’ perceptions of volunteer

activities differed according to the volunteer activities in which they participated. A survey was conducted to students at 10 universities. A question in the questionnaire inquired the respondents about which fields of volunteer activities they had experienced. The questionnaire held nine fields of volunteer activities, such as community activities, events, social welfare, environmental protection, and artistic activities. All of the fields of volunteer activities had respondents who had participated. The respondents who had participated in activities in communities, aiding event implementation, or activities concerned with social welfare possessed a more negative view on volunteer activities than the respondents who had participated in disaster relief. The former group of respondents tended to regard volunteer activities as difficult to do (Okahana 2013, 69–70 and 72–73). Volunteer activities in diverse fields possess varied characteristics and provide participants with various impressions.

These two previous studies revealed that university students' volunteer activities are wide-ranging and that each volunteer activity induces a dissimilar image. The findings of the studies appear to recommend that the characteristics of students' volunteer activities be comprehended by examining a particular field of volunteer activity rather than varied fields of volunteer activities.

The survey results in Okahana (2013) demonstrated that while 54.8 percent of the university students had experienced volunteer activities in the past, only 12.4 percent continued volunteering until the date of the survey. Okahana interpreted these results as signifying that university students in Japan are not energetic in volunteer activities (Okahana 2013, 68 and 70–71). Okahana's survey result denotes that while more than a half of the university students have experienced volunteer activities, most of them do not continue participating in volunteer activities. Therefore, it is significant to reveal the factors that give rise to the continuation of students' participation in volunteer activities or the reason students tend not to continue volunteering.

III. How Should Continuance or Discontinuance Be Examined?

Continuance and discontinuance of students' volunteer activities may be sig-

nificant focuses. If this is the case, the subsequent task is to consider how continuation and discontinuation of students' volunteer activities are examined: Previous studies have suggested suitable methods to analyze them.

Tashiro et al. (2015) conducted a survey of university students who had completed the course, "Volunteer Course (*Borantia kōza*).” The students who attended the course belonged to the faculty of nursing and nutrition. The course comprised lectures, seminars, visits to facilities, and volunteer activities. After the end of the course, questionnaires were distributed to those who attended the course. The questionnaire enumerated 14 reasons underlying the respondents' desire to attend the course. The respondents selected one option from five. The five options ranged from "Not applicable at all" to "Very applicable.” Each choice was given a score. The scores from one to five were assigned to the five options according to the degrees of applicability. The choice, "Not applicable at all" was scored one and "Very applicable" was scored five points. The average score of each reason for the respondents' attendance of the course was calculated. The reason, "Because I wanted to be of use to someone" obtained the highest average score (4.9). The questionnaire also inquired the degree in which the respondents desired to continue with the volunteer activities. The respondents selected one option that corresponded with their opinions. The options ranged from "Not applicable at all" (one score point) to "Very applicable" (five score points). The average score was 4.3. This result demonstrates that many respondents selected affirmative options for the question. Tashiro et al. (2015) interpreted these results of the survey to imply that the students' interest in volunteer activities was profound before the course started and that the students continued retaining their interest after the end of the course (Tashiro et al. 2015, 26–29 and 31).

The students who were interested in volunteer activities decided to attend the course. They tended to have the desire to participate in volunteer activities after the end of the course. These are significant findings. However, we may be able to grasp minute changes in students' attitudes to volunteer activities if we inspect the students' views on volunteer activities at several points of time during a series of volunteer activities. Tashiro et al. (2015)

conducted the survey after the end of the course. Surveys or inspections conducted at different times during a sequence of volunteer activities can gather accurate opinions on volunteer activities.

Itō (2011) discussed previous studies on motives to volunteer, which revealed that the motives to volunteer change through experiences of volunteer activities. While some people started their volunteer activities to aid others or to contribute to the society, they continued such activities to their own advantages rather than for the benefit of others or the society. Inversely, other people who commenced their volunteer activities to seek benefit to themselves would later on decide to pursue the activities because of their desire to aid others or to contribute to the society. Itō also noted that many previous studies have employed a particular methodology to obtain views on volunteer activities from respondents or interviewees who would recall the reasons they started volunteer activities and continued participating in volunteer activities. The previous studies did not tend to employ time series surveys to continually obtain volunteers' opinions on the subject over a span of time (Itō 2011, 46–47 and 50–51).

Research that aims at comprehending minute changes of students' views on volunteer activities is significant if motives to conduct volunteer activities can alter. As Itō (2011) indicated, a series of investigations concerning students' views on volunteer activities on a number of occasions can grasp more detailed changes of the views than a single investigation after the conclusion of a volunteer activity. Moreover, it is practical to employ two indicators that can grasp students' views. Itō (2011) classified the reasons to conduct volunteer activities into two categories: (a) to aid other people and (b) to receive benefit. The former is a motivation for others or the society, whereas the latter is a motivation for the volunteers themselves. Several previous studies have suggested that these two motivations are useful in aiding the understanding of students' views on volunteer activities.

As explained above, Itaba and Shutō (2016) conducted a survey among university students who were training to become teachers or childcare workers. The survey inquired about the students' motives to participate in volunteer activities. The respondents replied to an open-ended question on their motives. According to Itaba and Shutō's classification, the most

respondents (21%) entered the response “To profit myself,” followed by “To willingly aid someone” (17%) (Itaba and Shutō 2016, 37 and 39). To aid other people and to benefit volunteers may be the principal reasons underlying the participation of students in volunteer activities. These reasons are regarded as suitable indicators for observing the changes of students’ views on volunteer activities.

Shintani (2016) recounted the growth of a university student through experiences in volunteer activities. Information on the student’s views regarding the volunteer activity was obtained using the following means: (a) reports completed by the student each time of the volunteer activity, (b) Shintani’s participatory observations on the student, and (c) interviews with officials and committee members belonging to an organization that received the student as a volunteer. The student’s reports were verified by either Shintani’s observations or statements from the officials and committee members (Shintani 2016, 45–46 and 48). As such, students’ reports on their volunteer activities at each time, the researcher’s participatory observations on students, and interviews with staff members who have accepted these students as volunteers may be of use for comprehending changes in the students’ opinions on volunteer activities. Reports from the volunteers and third party observation are an appropriate combination of sources of information on volunteers’ views.

IV. Conclusion

This paper aimed at discussing the methodologies used to derive an understanding of university or junior college students’ views on volunteer activities. One promising methodology is to gather detailed changes in students’ opinions on volunteer activities in a particular field during their participation in the activities. Information on students’ views can be obtained through students’ reports, the researcher’s participatory observations, and interviews with staff members in organizations that accepted the students as volunteers.

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