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Lifelong Learning Review in Contemporary Japan

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Abstract

In the era of the Meiji Restoration, social education for adults in Japan has taken shape to make up for the lack of school education. After World War II, social education in Japan focused on compensation education and vocational training for young and adult women. With the promulgation of the Basic Education Law and the Social Education Law, "social education as the legal right of Japanese" was clarified. Governments were encouraged to develop and operate public social education facilities. From the late 1940s to the mid-1980s, "social education" included adult education activities in addition to primary and secondary schools and higher education institutions. Since the 1960s, UNESCO's propaganda activities have promoted the idea of "lifelong education" in Japan, and the official acknowledged that domestic demand for lifelong education had become more apparent. In 1971, the Central Education Committee issued a report recommending that "from the perspective of lifelong education, comprehensive adjustments of the entire education system are required." In 1981, the Central Education Commission of Japan submitted a lifelong education report to MEXT, which emphasized the necessity and importance of "lifelong education" and marked the beginning of the transition to lifelong education in Japan. Since the mid-1980s, "lifelong learning" has become the most common term in Japan for adult education activities. In the 21st century, with the support of local and national governments, people can freely choose formal, informal, or non-informal learning opportunities at any time, and relevant institutions would offer appropriate certificates.

Keywords: Lifelong Learning, Lifelong Education, Social Education, Japan

1. The Evolution of Lifelong Learning in Japan

1.1 Meiji Era: The embryonic form of Japanese social education

Since the Meiji Emperor issued the Education Order in 1872, Japan has always emphasized the role of school education in catching up with the United States and other Western countries. Throughout the Meiji period (1868-1912), the official affirmation was that "the development of school education will contribute to the prosperity of the glorious country." Given this, school and popular education are complementary, but school education has always been considered mainstream. Subsequently, "mass education" was renamed "social education," social education was seen as an auxiliary to school education. Starting from the second half of the Meiji era, especially after the end of the Russo-Japanese War (1905), to make up for the lack of school education for young people and truly carry out social education for adults (Kawanobe, 1994).

1.2 After World War II: "Legislative Implementation" and "Positive Practical Promotion" in Japanese Social Education Area

Before World War II (around 1941), social education had been widely carried out in Japan. After the end of World War II (after 1945), the focus of social education in Japan was on compensatory education and vocational skills training for young and adult women, and a series of "youth classes" and "women's classes" were created accordingly. After the war, Japan was under Allied occupation and attempted to adopt a bottom-up approach to social formation, utilizing grassroots efforts to establish new communities, rebuild depleted countries, oppose militarism, and establish an emerging democratic country. Social education was a powerful tool to connect civic activities and created new communities (Kawanobe,1994). The idea of the first Citizen Hall was proposed in 1946, supposed to serve as an activity center and hub for residents. As the infrastructure and permanent institution for social education, it was viewed as the central link for community education, leisure interaction, administrative promotion, industrial promotion, and youth place (Makino, 2017).

Subsequently, the Japanese Ministry of Education and Culture (MOESC) established the Citizens' Public Halls (Kominkan in Japanese) as a representative of social education during this period, encouraging the public to use social education facilities such as the citizen culture agency, library, museum, and sports hall to promote youth and adult education within specific communities. As a form of national rights, social education had gradually been liberated from the national spirit mobilization system centered around war before and during World War II. It had become an educational activity that all citizens participated in independently and spontaneously (Akira & Makino, 1991).

The Basic Education Law on Japan's Educational Purposes and Principles, enacted in 1947, discussed the rightful status of "adult education" in Article 7: "National and local public institutions should encourage family education and other education in workplaces and other social settings. National and local public institutions should strive to achieve educational goals by establishing libraries, museums, civic centers, and other institutions, utilizing school institutions and other appropriate methods (Thomas, 1985).

The Japanese government promulgated the Social Education Law (shakaikyōikuhō, しゃかいきょういくほう) in 1949, to support grassroots informal learning activities and clarify the concept that "social education was a legitimate right of Japanese citizens" (Akira & Makino,1991) and advocated that the national and municipal governments should make every effort to develop and operate public social education facilities so that all citizens can improve their quality of life by improving their self-cultivation. Encouraged municipal authorities to achieve educational goals through the establishment of civic centers, libraries, and museums. Conversations were conducted on the roles of government at different levels (Kawanobe,1994). Article 20 of the law explicitly stipulated: "The purpose of the Citizen's Hall was to carry out educational and scientific undertakings, provide cultural experiences for citizens through various activities. To carry out educational activities suitable for daily life and increase the social welfare of the community."

1.3 From the 1980s to the late 1990s: Promoting a positive shift towards "lifelong education" and "lifelong learning"

Since the 1960s, UNESCO has promoted lifelong education, and "lifelong education" has spread within Japan. The Japanese government acknowledged that the demand for lifelong education in the country became more apparent. In 1971, the Central Education Commission, a consulting agency of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), published a report suggesting that "from the perspective of lifelong education, a comprehensive adjustment of the entire education system was needed."

In 1972, UNESCO released the "Learn to Survive - Today and Tomorrow of the Educational World," advocating the concept of lifelong education and lifelong learning, which profoundly impacted the development of social education in Japan. In 1981, the Central Council for Education (CCE) of Japan issued a report emphasizing the necessity and importance of lifelong education and submitted a report on lifelong education to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT), marking the beginning of the shift towards lifelong

education in Japan (Kawanobe, 1994). In 1982, the Central Education Commission discussed the original concepts of "lifelong education" and "lifelong learning" clarifying the interrelationship between the two. In fact, in Japan, from the late 1940s to the mid-1980s, "social education" (shakai kyouiku) referred to organized educational activities for adults and young people, except for primary and secondary school or higher education institutions (Kawanobe, 1994).

Although participation in these educational activities might not necessarily be related to obtaining specific vocational or professional technical qualifications, participants' motivation was to satisfy curiosity and improve their quality of life, obtain or experience pleasure (Miharu, et al, 1992). "Shougai gakushu" encompassed learning at all stages of life, whether formal, informal, or informal learning in school or daily life, covering all types of social education activities (Kawanobe, 1994). "Social education" and "lifelong learning" were the most used terms to describe adult education activities then.

In 1984, the Ad Hoc Council for Educational Reform was established as the Special Advisory Committee of Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone. Its members included outstanding leaders from education and other fields and were assigned to long-term education reform. The Education Reform Special Committee lasted for three years and conducted a general review of the current education system in Japan. It submitted four recommendation reports, including a shift towards a lifelong learning system, a focus on individuality, and an emphasis on internationalization. In the summary report, it pointed out that the concepts of "lifelong education" (Shougai kyouiku in Japanese) and "lifelong learning" (Shougai gakushu). Those terms became popular in Japan in the late 1960s and were elaborated in detail during the period of rapid economic growth (Kawanobe, 1994).

The National Education Reform Special Committee aimed to systematize various opportunities for lifelong learning and create a "lifelong learning society" (Shougai gakushu shakai in Japanese), responding to social and economic changes in Japan. It advocated to improve youth issues caused by excessive competition. Advocating that future education should be based on lifelong learning as the basic premise, emphasizing the transition to a lifelong learning system, and changing the current situation of dividing the education system into school education and social education. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT), known for its conservatism, stated at its end that the most basic idea of current education reform would promote the transition to a lifelong learning system actively (Miharu, et al., 1992).

From 1987 to 1988, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports carried out a ministerial-level restructuring based on the proposal of a temporary committee established by Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone. It established a Lifelong Learning Bureau, responsible for leading the administrative department of lifelong learning reform and attempted to introduce specific policies and measures to create a "lifelong learning society." The domestic education system in Japan at that time was mainly composed of the "school education system" and the "social education system," integrating the concepts of school education and social education from a theoretical and vision level would form a lifelong learning system. However, the general idea in practice and society was that "the expansion of the social education system was a lifelong learning system"(Kawanobe, 1994). Therefore, in 1988, in order to promote the lifelong learning policy, the Ministry of Education and Culture carried out institutional reforms and reorganized the former "Social Education Bureau" into the "Lifelong Learning Bureau," which is still on par with the "Primary and Secondary Education Bureau" and "Higher Education Bureau," responsible for the formulation and promotion of specific policies and measures for the "Lifelong Learning Society" (Makino, 2012).

Subsequently, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology and the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MITI) collaborated to develop the Law on Establishing an Implementation System and Other Measures to Promote Lifelong Learning (abbreviated as the Lifelong Learning Promotion Law). This bill was promulgated and implemented in July 1990 to support the mechanisms and methods of promoting lifelong learning in various countries. Specially designated communities formulate introductory planning provisions for lifelong learning development. Implemented the primary conditions of a lifelong learning society, especially by establishing a national lifelong learning committee and individual lifelong learning committees at the county level, would improve the framework for lifelong learning at the prefecture level (Kawanobe, 1994). As a result, how to coordinate and align the governance goals and policy directions of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science

and Technology (MEXT) and other ministries, as well as how to apply the systems and facilities of other ministries to lifelong learning, were complex and practical. For instance, The Ministry of International Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Education jointly formulated the "Promotion of Lifelong Learning Law." They established a Lifelong Learning Policy Office within the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (Kawanobe, 1994). The Ministry of Labor planned to develop lifelong learning policies through worker centers, youth work homes, and women's work homes (Kawanobe, 1994).

According to the Lifelong Learning Promotion Law requirements, the National Central Advisory Committee for Education (NACLL) released in August 1990. Its discussed further promotes and implementation of lifelong learning policies, which would be included in the Central Council for Education (CCE) (Kawanobe,1994). The Central Committee researched essential matters related to promoting social education. The Lifelong Learning Branch was subsequently established within the Central Committee to focus on lifelong learning issues (Ogden, 2010). Shortly after that, in the same year as 1990, the Law on the Implementation System and Other Measures for Promoting Lifelong Learning (or Lifelong Learning Promotion Law) was simultaneously introduced, which stipulated the establishment of lifelong learning councils at the national and regional levels to support the promotion of lifelong learning in local areas, and the provision of lifelong learning in designated communities to investigate and evaluate the learning needs of residents. In the same year, the Council of the National Commission for Lifelong Learning approved a report entitled "Measures to Promote Lifelong Learning to Respond to Emerging Social Trends," which listed four special issues that needed to be urgently addressed: promoting regular education, promoting and supporting volunteer programs, enriching youth out of school compensation programs, and strengthening learning opportunities to address contemporary issues and human rights, aging, international cooperation, environment, food, and other issues (Ogden, 2010).

In 1990, the Japan Central Education Commission accepted the "Development of a Lifelong Learning Infrastructure" report (Kawanobe, 1994). Considering that "the foundation of lifelong learning was rooted in the voluntary will of the people, infrastructure construction was set as an urgent and important issue." It advocated for the following five steps of planning. At the national, regional, and municipal levels, a liaison and coordination structure should be prepared for the general provisions of lifelong learning (Kawanobe, 1994).

Since its establishment in 1990, the National Commission for Lifelong Learning has proposed the report "The Promotion of Measures for Lifelong Learning which corresponded to the Future Directions of Society" in 1992, calling for establishing a lifelong learning society. In 1996, the Measures to Improve Opportunities for Lifelong Learning were proposed. In 1998, the "A Future Non-Formal Education Administration that Responds to Social Changes" was proposed. In 1999, the report "Measures to Make Best Use of the Achievements of Lifelong Learning" and "Experiments in Daily Life and Nature Cultivate the Minds of Japanese Children: Measures to Enrich the Environment of Local Communities Vital for Fostering the Zest for Living of Young People" were proposed. In 2000, Measures to Promote Lifelong Learning Utilization of New Information Communication Technology was proposed (Yamada, et al., 2003).

Since 1988, Japan's economy has fallen into a "long-term depression," also known as the "lost decade," and the situation lasted until 2002. The significant reform of lifelong learning also occurred during this period. Japan's lifelong employment system has been disrupted in these ten years, and the tradition of internal employee training has lost its foundation. Subsequently, to emphasize the social responsibility of continuing education and training, the concept of lifelong learning began to take a leading role (Gordon, 1998). In contrast, the previous community education system (Shakai Kyoiku) was limited to adult education. In 1988, the Social Education Bureau under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology was renamed the Lifelong Learning Bureau (Kawanobe, 1994). With the promulgation of the Lifelong Learning Promotion Law in 1990, various sectors in Japan gradually accepted the idea that "lifelong learning should include various social education activities." Lifelong learning activities could be conducted in companies, formal schools, community centers, libraries, museums, or many other types of facilities, including formal, informal, and informal learning. "Shô gaigakusha" (lifelong learning), the most used term in Japan to describe adult education activities since the mid-1980s, is still frequently used today.

1.4 Lifelong Learning as the Main Focus of Japanese Education Policy Formulation in 21st Century

Since the 1990s, the concept of lifelong learning has been increasingly understood in Japan. In a national opinion poll conducted in Japan in 2000, 74% of respondents were already familiar with the term. In 2001, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology was reorganized at the ministerial level and subsequently established the "Lifelong Learning Policy Bureau." Today, the bureau remains the central organization is responsible for coordinating and promoting lifelong learning policies. It required to plan and formulate relevant policies, conduct research and analysis on Japan's domestic and international education situation, and promote information technology reform (MEXT, 2009).

In December 2006, Japan first revised the Education Basic Law promulgated in 1947 received revision. Chapter 3 explicitly mentioned the concept of lifelong learning and added the Japanese word "shōgaigakushū" (生涯学習) translated directly into English, it corresponded to "lifelong learning" and proposed that "every Japanese citizen should establish their personality, live a prosperous life, and make appropriate use of learning achievements in order to achieve social development." Summarize the concept of lifelong learning developed by Japanese people since the late 1960s, the focus of attention shifted to "how to transform the concept of lifelong learning into specific policy measures under current socio-economic conditions" (MEXT, 2006).

In the first decade of the 21st century, lifelong learning opportunities have received support from governments at all levels. According to relevant statistics, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology alone allocated 8.5% of its budget for lifelong learning in 2007, equivalent to 452.5 billion yen (MEXT, 2007). Achieving a lifelong learning society - Japan was steadily moving towards the goal of achieving a lifelong learning society where everyone can have the opportunity to participate in learning at any time, achieve success, and gain recognition. To achieve this goal, developing and promoting comprehensive and diverse learning opportunities was necessary. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) stated that this would contribute significantly to human resource development and the overall development of society and the economy. Promoting social education and supporting family education were mentioned (Ogden, 2010).

In order to implement the lifelong learning concept advocated in the revised Basic Law of Education, the Lifelong Learning Department of the Central Education Reform Commission submitted a report titled "Measures to Promote Lifelong Learning and Create an Innovative Era: Aiming to Create a Knowledge Oriented Society" to the Ministry of Education in February 2008. The report simulated three social development predictions: a knowledge-based society, an independent community, sustainable social development and a knowledge circular (Chukyoshin, 2008).

In 2009, the Ministry of Education and Culture redefined "lifelong learning," stating that it included two main aspects: "a comprehensive review of the concepts of various systems, including education, to establish a lifelong learning society and connect learning concepts at all stages of life." Lifelong learning included not only structured learning through school and social education, but also learning through everything (MEXT, 2009).

In August 2009, the former ruling party of Japan, the Liberal Democratic Party, lost its position in the House of Representatives (Lower House) during the general election, while the Democratic Party won a majority of seats and became the ruling party. The Democratic Party attempted to promote the process of policy-making democratization by inviting ordinary people to participate in policy discussions, known as "deliberative democracy." The Democratic government conducted a thorough screening program to reduce the national budget and focused more on employment policies and childcare (Makino, 2012). During this period, the budget for promoting lifelong learning was further reduced, directly resulting in the focus of lifelong learning being limited to vocational education and training.

In June 2010, the Japanese Cabinet approved the "New Growth Strategy: Revitalizing Japan" and set seven strategic goals to be achieved by 2020. The "Education and Lifelong Learning Goals" involved increasing the number of adult students in domestic universities and professional universities to 90000 and 150000, respectively, and increasing the number of self-employed individuals engaged in self-directed learning (Makino, 2012).

In June 2013, the Japanese Cabinet approved the "Second Basic Plan for Education Promotion" while debating the education administrative network and attempting to provide a detailed explanation of the concept of "network management in a lifelong learning society" proposed by the National Commission for Lifelong Learning in 1998 (Committee for Lifelong Learning of Central Education Council, Ministry of Education, 1998), in which social education would deviate from the conventional category, Linking with the policies of the market and various administrative regions, and reconnecting with the boundaries of school education and family training within existing education administrators (Dai 2-ki Kyoiku Shinko Kihon Keikaku, 2013).

In December 2015, the Ministry of Education and Science simultaneously released three reports from the Central Education Commission: The Community School Cooperation Report, the Team School Report, and the Educator Skills Improvement Report, all of which contained basic value (Sub-committee for Curriculum Planning in Elementary and Middle Schools of Central Education Council, Ministry of Education, 2015)

A report led by Hir Hase, then Minister of Education of the Ministry of Culture, Culture, Science and Technology in February 2016, also known as the "Hase Plan," called for cooperation between schools and communities on common goals for children's development. The plan utilized the school guidance committee to involve regional residents in school operations and placed the education coordinator to be responsible for coordinating with the local community. In addition, extracurricular activity coaches and teaching supervisors could be recruited from the community (Central Education Council, Ministry of Education, 2015a). Integrated into active learning, making the school full of learning fun, and transformed into a vibrant place (Central Education Council, Ministry of Education, 2015b). Schools would become the central focus of children's growth, rather than just providing children's education in schools, but widely engaging with residents. Providing children with diverse experiences also influenced local citizens - all residents were responsible for the local (Central Education Council, Ministry of Education, 2015c).

In August 2019, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology revised the Implementation Regulations of the School Education Law, granting credits and providing training certificates for courses related to "return to education." In 2020, Japan officially launched a portal website that supported learnings, providing courses and lectures for graduates. Universities and specialized schools implemented "return to education" promotion projects with the goal of employment and career transition. In December 2021, Japan established the "Education Future Creation Conference" with the primary purpose of "cultivating talents who shoulder the future of the country." The conference aimed to enhance the diversity and flexibility of the connection between education and society. It called for the construction of a lifelong learning society for all generation and "lifelong ability development." Starting in 2021, the Japanese Cabinet Office, the Ministries had held relevant provincial liaison meetings on promoting "return to education." The fourth edition of Japan's Basic Plan for Education Revitalization, released in 2023, to discuss and coordinate the further act (Liu, Zhang, 2024).

2. The Path of Local Community Education and Lifelong Learning in the 21st Century

2.1 Universities and Student Volunteers Entering Communities: A Case Study in Takasaki City, Gunma Prefecture

The Takasaki Citizen Hall, located in Kura Buchi District, Takasaki City, is nearly a 40-minute drive from the city center. It is essential for communication and cooperation between universities, students, local farmers, and the Takasaki City Government. The urban government and the industrial department serve as promoters community integration. Universities and undergraduates serve as researchers and volunteers to organize workshops for local farmers and policymakers. There is a Cafe, which student and community volunteers manage daily. It provides community interaction space and publishes job information within the area (Sawano, 2012).

2.2. Multi-Generational Community: A community in Kashi, Chiba Prefecture

A community in Kashiwagi, Chiba Prefecture, is a suburban development in Tokyo. Establish a community café as a center for multi-generational community formation, operated by residents and included in the plan to create a

community liaison and interaction center. The launch of a multi-generational community guidance committee to involve local elderly people. Prepare seminars on elderly development. Increase interaction between children and the elderly and set this as the first step in restructuring local interpersonal relationships. Residents in the café can chat and take a drink. Volunteers regularly post job information. Children can come to take a break and do homework before and after school. Elderly people also play the role of traffic policer (Makino, 2017).

2.3 Knowledge Recycling and Reuse in Regional Citizen Universities and Community

To establish a knowledge-circular society through promoting lifelong learning, balancing individual and social needs, coordinating social and economic values, and promoting the circular utilization of knowledge within the community would further activate the flexibility of existing knowledge systems. The sustainable development system of the entire society needs to be built within local communities. The local Japanese community contains many practices of knowledge recycling (Makino, 2017).

3. Construction and application of lifelong learning facilities in Japan

3.1 Forms of lifelong learning in Japan

The forms of lifelong learning can be divided into three categories: formal, informal, and non-formal. There are various types of informal lifelong learning, include ① Continuing education program, night courses, and correspondence courses, provided by higher education institutions for adults. ② The company implements employee training programs, and also entrusts the education of its employees to specialized vocational education and training institutions to provide learning opportunities (Kawanobe, 1994).

3.2 Lifelong learning providers in Japan

Overall, the attributes of lifelong learning opportunity providers in Japan can be divided into four categories: public education institutions such as schools and higher education institutions, companies and vocational education institutions, civic education public places and social education centers, and private education institutions (such as cultural centers). Lifelong learning facilities funded by the Japanese government include citizen museums (Kōminkan), libraries (Toshokan), museum (Hakubutsukan), sports centers (Taiikukan), Lifelong Learning Center (Shōgaigakushūsentā), Women's Education Center, and Open University of Japan (Hōsōdaigaku). Private lifelong learning service providers (Karuchāsēntā) also exist. Most cultural centers operated by newspaper publishers and department stores primarily aim for housewives. In addition, many non-profit organizations established under the so-called NPO law promulgated in 1998 chose "social education" as one of their areas of activity when registering, and most of these social education non-profit organizations are funded by local governments.

3.2.1 Japanese civic universities

The development history of Japanese civic universities can be divided into four stages. The first stage occurred from the late 1970s to the 1980s, during which there were only a few civic universities, including Kiyomigata Daigakujuku in Okayama Prefecture, Kichijoji Zatsugakujuku in Tokyo, and Kamakura Shimin Akademia in Kanagawa Prefecture. The scale and number of participants in these schools are tiny (Sawano, 2012). The second stage began in the first half of the 1990s, when Japan had just experienced the collapse of the economy, leading to deflation and unemployment. During this period, civic universities such as TAMA Shiminjuku and Sumida Laaningu Gaaden in Tokyo, Japan, focused on trivia, and the Daikoukai Seminaa at Asunaro University in Kanagawa Prefecture established during this period. The number of participants is also increasing with the increase in civic universities. Many learners who have previously completed regular lecture participated in (Sawano, 2012). The third stage began in 2000, when many civic universities were established independently of local governments. These included the Adachi Rakugakukai Society in Tokyo's Ashikaga Ward, the Hachiouji Gakkai Society in Tokyo, and the Shibuya Network University in Tokyo. Most of them were operated by non-profit organizations

(NPOs). The number of citizen universities in Japan continued increasing, and the growth rate in this stage was no longer as rapid as in the second stage (Sawano,2012). According to 2010 statistics, there were approximately 150 civic universities in Japan, which were informal educational institutions that regularly offer various lectures and courses. The fourth stage is nowadays when citizens of all ages can participate in these universities. They may have names as urban (rural) universities, community colleges, civic colleges, civic tutoring schools, community universities or free universities, some of which are organized by local governments, and some are private funded (Sawano, 2012).

3.2.2 Online transmitter of lifelong education

According to the methods of providing lifelong learning opportunities, there are mainly face-to-face courses and on-site activities, as well as some correspondence courses (tsūshinkyōiku, including courses based on cable TV and the Internet, which are mainly provided by the University of the Air (originally named the University of the Air, later renamed the Open University of Japan, OUI, 放送大学), the Education Information Satellite Communication Network Institute (EL-NET).

The University of the Air, founded in 1983, accepted student registration in 1985 and is open to all without the need for regular entrance exams. Students can register for non-degree or degree courses on public television, radio and internet. As of 1991, 35000 students had registered, and as of the second semester of 1990, there were 1951 graduates. The number of registered students in 2007 was 89422. In 2007, it was renamed as an Open University in the English language and transformed into a four-year undergraduate degree-granting institution, allowing students to receive courses anytime and anywhere. The master's program was established in April 2013, and the doctoral program was established in October 2014 (Ogden,2010). Students of the Open university of Japan are from both domestic Japan and foreign countries. The Open university of Japan focuses on expanding cooperation with domestic and foreign universities (Zhao & Ji, 2022). The Open University of Japan and The Aomori University Sign a Credit Exchange Agreement in 2019. As of 2020, The Open University of Japan has signed credit exchange agreements with 401 domestic universities in Japan, with cooperative institutions accounting for over 35% of the total number of domestic universities in Japan. After revising the School Education Law, The Open University of Japan collaborated with vocational colleges. Currently, there are 50 specialized schools have signed a memorandum of cooperation with The Open University of Japan. The Open University of Japan and The Karatsu Business College signed a memorandum of cooperation in 2021.

The College of Education Information Satellite Communication Network (EL-NET) was established in 1999 and broadcasts various information related to education, culture, and sports nationwide. EL-NET provides training for educators, children's education programs, and university promotion courses (The Open University of Japan, n.d.).

4. Lifelong Learning and the Revitalization of Society and Local Communities

In the context of significant social and economic changes, lifelong learning becomes increasingly important at various stages of life. Increase a lifelong learning society, increase opportunities for lifelong learning both online and offline can withstand the risks of fewer children, aging, and a sharp decline in population dividends, maximizing everyone's skills and personalities, improving education levels, and enhancing human resource utilization. This is crucial for Japan's economy and society (Gender Equality Learning Division, Lifelong Learning Policy Bureau, n.d.).

In addition, considering citizens' independence and coexistence, lifelong learning activities are links between local areas, residents, businesses, and non-profit organizations. Meanwhile, with the arrival of an aging society, expanding lifelong learning is an essential livelihood project for the well-being of the elderly (Gender Equality Learning Division, Lifelong Learning Policy Bureau, n.d.).

Globalization brings rapid changes in industries and employment. Workers need to master and refresh vocational skills lifelong (Lifelong Learning Promotion Division, Lifelong Learning Policy Bureau,n.d.).The wealth gap and

poverty issues become prominent due to the increasing informal employment and corporate bankruptcy. Lifelong learning can expand education and training, support individuals in acquiring knowledge and skills, and help them achieve economic independence (Gender Equality Learning Division, Lifelong Learning Policy Bureau, n.d.).

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