



Globalization in Education in Japan

Tony Kung Ming SHING

Keio University, Professor



People asked me if I were in the group of people to support globalization in education. My answer is yes. Perhaps it is attributable to my education and my work experiences, I studied in Hong Kong, in the UK, and in Canada. I had university teaching experiences in the UK, the USA, China, and Hong Kong. And thanks to globalization in education in Japan, I was given the chance to teach organic chemistry in English in Tokyo two and a half years ago. I started teaching foreign students of the international programme at Sophia University. I also helped out a professor there, supervising a group of chemistry Master and PhD students. The professor brought a foreign student into his research group, and by doing so, he created an environment for his Japanese students to speak more in English, not to be afraid of speaking in English, and be happy to interact with people of different culture. To me, this is one way towards globalization in education.

After one year with Sophia University, I moved to Keio University as a professor. The setting at Keio University was totally different from that at Sophia University. My main duty was to give organic chemistry lectures in English to Japanese undergraduate and graduate students. My courses were optional to Japanese students. Exchange students were only allowed to enroll in some of my courses, so I noticed a phenomenon — the number of students would increase a lot in classes where exchange students could attend. I observed that exchange students were keen on taking my lectures, but not Japanese students. Another interesting phenomenon was that exchange students tended to sit in the front and would ask questions whereas Japanese students preferred to sit at the rear and seldom asked questions. My lectures on poster and Power-

Point presentations drew the least attendance of Japanese students. In these lectures, Japanese students needed to speak and to express their opinions in English and they found it difficult to handle, even though their chemistry knowledge is solid and sound.

I have been living and teaching in Tokyo for a long while by now, I have had chances to talk to Japanese students and Japanese friends. I got to know the education system and came to realize that Japanese students started learning English from junior high school, only 6 years prior to university entrance. Unless Japanese students made extra efforts by themselves such as taking extra English lessons at juku (塾), their English proficiency would not reach the level to enable them to comprehend my lectures in English fully. This explained why Japanese students were reluctant to select my courses. I was also told by my Japanese friends that Japanese students were shy and afraid to speak with foreigners in English. I hope the Japanese students will overcome this because the more they speak in English, the better they will become.

I like the idea of globalization in education in Japan and have personally benefited from it. In order for Japanese students who want to prepare themselves to face globalization, my humble advice to them is to first equip themselves with good English communication skills — to be able to read and write English well plus to speak English fluently. One cannot argue that English is the universal language for the time being. Globalization is the trend and is irreversible. Whether globalization is for better or for worse, time will tell.

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