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Homemaking Education at Japanese Schools in the United States

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The facilities for homemaking class and the students' views of this class at The Japanese School of New York and the Chicago Futabakai Japanese Day School were studied through a direct visit and the current state of homemaking education described. Also, a questionnaire was completed by the children about their home life and perception of homemaking contents and homemaking education. The following conclusions were developed from these results.

Many of the children are insecure about the language and new lifestyle, and for nearly 60%, the United States is their first experience living abroad. The children are generally exposed to a well-off social and educational environment.

The overall percentage of children doing chores is low, and in particular, 70-80% never help with clothing-related chores. The majority expressed satisfaction with the food and homes in the United States. The children expressed interest in practical homemaking topics such as cooking, menu arrangement, and sewing machines, but were less enthusiastic about more theoretical topics such as nutrition, washing clothes, and types of cloth.

The children felt that homemaking does contribute to daily life and that both boys and girls should study these skills which are essential to everyday living.

There is a need to establish a network which can provide necessary information related to teaching materials and tools and support the homemaking guidance offered by overseas homemaking facilities.

KEY WORDS : Homemaking Education, Japanese Schools, Chores at Home Life, The United States.

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1. Introduction

According to Foreign Ministry statistics for FY1991, the number of Japanese boys and girls living abroad which are of compulsory school age exceeds 50,000 and is increasing

every year. As a part of research on the education of boys and girls which have returned to Japan, a study on the homemaking education at Japanese schools was conducted.¹⁾ This study revealed that even though Japanese schools were important educational institutions, they were strapped with a wide range of problems and needed to amend the educational situation as soon as possible. In the process of researching the actual circumstances of homemaking education at Japanese schools, it was possible to visit various Japanese schools in the United States. The information contained in this paper was acquired from actual visits to Japanese schools and a first-hand survey of the home life of children and students as well as how homemaking is learned. It can be used as a guide to a preferred approach to homemaking education at Japanese schools and to contribute to teaching homemaking to boys and girls which have returned to Japan.

2. Methodology

In October 1992, visits were made to the Japanese schools in New York and Chicago in the United States and the manner in which children and students learn homemaking and the state of facilities and equipment observed. Furthermore, a survey was conducted of the ways in which home life and homemaking are studied and attitudes toward homemaking education in the United States.

The survey was performed for a total of 202 students including 32 5th graders, 25 6th graders, 69 7th graders, 31 8th graders, and 45 9th graders. By gender, there were 114 boys and 87 girls.

Because of space limitations, the question items covered in this report are briefly summarized below.

(1) Pattern of overseas stays

Experiences living abroad and number of years in the United States, initial feelings about living abroad

(2) State of home life

Chores, level of satisfaction with daily life and point of concern

(3) state of homemaking education

Interest / disinterest in homemaking studies

(4) Perception of homemaking education

Thoughts and opinions on homemaking education

3. Results and Observations

3.1 Overview of Japanese Schools

3.1.1 The Japanese School of New York

The Japanese School of New York was established by the New York Education Council in April 1975 and opened in September of that year with 152 students grouped into two classes each for the third to sixth elementary grades. In September 1992, the school

moved to the former site of the Daycroft School in Greenwich, Connecticut. Located in a peaceful residential area with a large tract of land and Western style buildings, it provides an ideal educational environment.

For the 1992 year, there was a total 370 students with 1 class for the 4th grade, 2 classes for the 5th grade, and 3 classes each for the 6th, 7th, and 8th grades. Looking at the curriculum, homemaking education is not taught in the elementary section and is allotted two hours a week for 7th to 9th graders.

The educational goal of Industrial Arts and Home Economics²⁾ is to identify guidance methods for developing problem-solving skills at the preparation stage as well as skills that can be used in daily life. In addition, it aims to (1) teach students scientific knowledge and technology required at home and in society and develop an ability to innovate and function independently and (2) understand relationships and differences with local lifestyles and technology and develop a realistic attitude.

3.1.2 Chicago Futabakai Japanese Day School

The Chicago Futabakai Japanese Day School was opened in September 1978 with 89 elementary and 12 junior high students. The school grounds are borrowed from a former local junior high school and the 2-story main building has 13 standard classrooms, 17 special classrooms, a gymnasium, and a maintenance office. With substantial space and ornamentation that creates a Japanese atmosphere, it too represents an ideal educational environment. For the 1992 year, there were 210 elementary and 76 junior high school students. Looking at the curriculum, homemaking is required from the 5th grade of the elementary school through the 3rd grade of junior high school.

The educational goals of Industrial Arts and Home Economics³⁾ include (1) teaching fundamental knowledge and skills for everyday life, (2) develop a sense of the importance of lifestyles within cultures and guide students to live as members of international society, and (3) create an awareness of the student's role as a member of a family.

3.2 Pattern of overseas stay experiences

3.2.1 Experiences living abroad and number of years in the United States

Asking about experiences living abroad, 63.4% answered that the current stay in the United States is their first experience and 29.2% answered that they had lived in two different countries. For most, this was their first experience in the United States.

In terms of the number of years spent in the United States, 31.2% had been there for one year or less, 43.6% for three years or less, 17.8% for five years or less, and 7.4% for seven years or less. In other words, many of the children have only spent a short amount of time in the United States with nearly 75% there for three years or less. It is also common that once the children have become familiar with the local culture, they either return to Japan or go onto another country.

3.2.2 Initial feelings

Five items were provided for a multiple response question about the children's feelings when they heard that they would be going to the United States. The 28.7% more positive children that answered "I wanted to go as soon as possible," were matched by 34.2% less positive children which answered "I hoped that we might not have to go." Nearly half of the children expressed concern about "not knowing the language" (55.5%) or "experiencing a different lifestyle and meeting new friends" (47.5%). These results confirm the double-bladed sword facing children who have lived abroad that have anxieties about living in the United States and difficulties fitting into the new lifestyle and at the same time struggle to fit back into Japanese society upon their return.

3.3 State of home life

3.3.1 Chores

To get a sense of how the children felt about helping with chores at home or the necessity to do chores, they were asked to select one of the following four question responses. The results show that 32.2% felt "chores and school studies are equally important," 8.4% that "chores are more important," 10.4% that "school studies are more important," and 48.5% that they "had never thought about it." Although nearly 40% of the children understood the importance of chores, the results of the following question indicate that the actual percentage of children doing chores is rather low.

Table 1 Extent of chores at home (Now)

Extent Type of chore	Extent				Gender		
	Often	Sometimes	Never	N.A.	school year	Maid	
Preparing meals	21.8	48.0	29.2	2.0	*	**	*
Washing up after meals	40.6	41.1	17.8	0.5	**		**
Washing own clothes	1.5	17.8	79.2	1.5			
Sewing buttons	7.9	20.8	69.3	2.0	**		*
Cleaning own room	35.6	56.9	7.4	0.0	**		*
Taking out garbage	19.8	44.6	35.1	0.5			
Shopping	11.4	26.7	58.4	3.5		*	**

Extent of chores at home (In Japan)

Extent Type of chore	Extent				Gender	
	Often	Sometimes	Not involved	N.A.	school year	
Preparing meals	16.3	32.2	44.6	6.9	**	*
Cleaning up after meals	24.8	35.6	33.2	6.4	*	
Washing own clothes	1.0	14.4	77.2	7.4		
Sewing buttons	2.5	14.9	73.8	8.9		
Cleaning own room	18.8	50.0	24.3	6.9		
Taking out garbage	14.9	37.6	41.1	6.4		
Shopping	28.2	43.1	22.3	6.4		

χ^2 evaluation results
 P<0.001 ***
 P<0.01 **
 P<0.05 *

In the question, the children evaluated the extent to which they do chores at home as "often," "sometimes," and "never." As shown in Table 1, for "cleaning up after meals" and "cleaning own room," 35-40% selected "often." Yet, for categories such as "mending holes or sewing buttons" and "washing own clothes," 70-80% responded "never." In other words, the children are almost entirely uninvolved with clothing-related chores. "Shopping" was low at just 11.4%, but this can be attributed to the safety problems related with just going out and shopping.

Since only 2.5% of the children's households hired maids or other help, it is evident that mothers are doing most of the housework for Japanese families living in the United States. The results of an χ^2 evaluation confirmed significant differences in attitudes towards chores depending on gender and school year. As the school year rises, the percentage of children that "never" help with preparing meals increases, and on the other hand, the number of elementary students which never go "shopping" is high. By gender, girls are overall more involved in doing chores than boys. Furthermore, except for "shopping," those children which answered "doing chores is more important" to the question on perception of chores tend to perform various chores "often."

Next, the children evaluated the extent to which they helped clothing, meal, and household chores when they lived in Japan. Other than "shopping," the rate of participation is lower when the children were in Japan. The reason for so many "no response" is that many of the children were too young and had no opportunity to help out. The results of an χ^2 evaluation show once again significant differences by gender and school year. "Preparing meals" and "cleaning up after meals" are chores which mainly involve girls and as the school year rises, the percentage of children who help "preparing meals" drops.

From these results and as indicated in the survey at the Chicago Futabakai Japanese Day School⁴⁾, since the children's awareness of contributing to household chores is low and the actual extent of involvement is also low, it is possible to say that the children do not actively participate in this aspect of family life. This raises the issue of how to teach these children the importance of family life and the necessity of cooperation in homemaking education.

3.3.2 Level of satisfaction with daily life and points to watch

The children were asked to describe their level of satisfaction with life in the United States compared to Japan from one of five variations ranging from "extremely satisfied" to "very dissatisfied." Combining the "extremely and somewhat satisfied" responses in Table 2, 70-80% of the children expressed satisfaction with their homes and the food. On the other hand, nearly 60% expressed dissatisfaction with the extent of "interaction with neighbors." Without neighborhood friends and parents forming closed Japanese societies in addition to the safety problems that make it difficult to go out, the children's anxieties build up. For "food" a significant difference of 1% was identified showing that as the school year rises, the level of satisfaction increases. A significant difference of 1% was also found for "clothes" with girls being more dissatisfied.

Table 2 Level of Satisfaction with home life (%)

Home Life	Extent	Extremely satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	N. A.	School year	Gender
Clothes		29.2	30.2	26.2	11.9	1.5	1.0		*
Food		32.7	37.6	17.8	7.9	3.5	0.5	***	
Homes		51.0	29.2	11.9	4.5	2.5	1.0		
Shopping		15.3	19.3	26.2	24.8	13.4	1.0		
Family communication		26.2	25.2	36.6	6.9	4.0	1.0		
Interaction with neighbors		10.9	11.9	37.1	24.3	15.3	0.5		

The responses are given to a question about what the children are especially aware of living in the United States. These points include general advice such as not going out especially alone and being careful of strangers or closed doors as well as eating practices like not eating food which is discolored or raw, not drinking tap water, and maintaining balanced eating habits. Also, there are items such as check clothes before making new purchases or not creating noise that will disturb neighbors.

Judging from the number of items related to chores or daily living, the children's interest in daily living is low compared to the results of a conducted for parents in 1992.⁵⁾

3.4 State of homemaking education

3.4.1 Current state of homemaking education

At The Japanese School of New York, boys and girls in the 7th grade have homemaking class together while boys and girls in the 8th and 9th grades are separated. "Wood Working 2" for 8th grade boys and "Cooking 2" for 8th grade girls were observed. The 20 boys are learning assembly methods. The technology teacher explained that class projects included importing tools from Japan, comparing them to American tools, and having the students write reports on their results. In the homemaking class, nine girls studied how to read the labels on food additives and processed foods and select processed foods in the homemaking classroom/cooking room. With the small number of students, the children listened closely to the teacher's explanation and were actively learning. Because of the recent move, facilities are still not fully in place, but there appeared to be an adequate supply of cooking and other preparatory utensils. According to the homemaking teacher, some issues to be solved include the difficulty of actual cooking because of the 40-minute class time limit and of activities like making clothes because of substantial differences in the level of knowledge and experience depending on the individual.

At the Chicago Futabakai Japanese Day School, "Clothing 3" for the 3rd grade junior high school students was observed. This class was the first hour of actually crocheting a muffler. It was evident that this was the first time that any of the four girls in the class had ever knitted and by the end of the hour the goal of the class was fairly clear. The homemaking teacher, a local hire, explained that the class was designed to match the living environment in Chicago and emphasized practicality. At the same time, this teacher

pointed out limitations of the textbook which describes living habits out of sync with the realities of Chicago. In terms of facilities and equipment, the homemaking classroom is equipped with the proper facilities for cooking, but that the number and types of utensils is inadequate.

3.4.2. Interest / disinterest in homemaking

The children were asked to put either an ○ to express their interest or an × to express their disinterest next to 15 items taken from the elementary school homemaking textbook for elementary students and next to 18 items taken from the junior high school textbook for junior high school students. As indicated in Table 3, the best liked items in order are "cooking" with 73.8%, "menu arrangement" with 50%, and "sewing machines" with 40.6%. On the other hand, the least liked items in order are "nutrition" with 52.5%, "washing clothes" with 51%, and "types of cloth" 50.5%. These results show that the children tend to dislike theoretical studies, while liking practical, experiential studies.

Table 3 Interest / disinterest in topics (%)

Extent	Interest	Dis-interest	NA
Homemaking topics			
Nutrition	19.8	52.5	27.7
Types of food	27.7	42.1	30.2
Menu arrangement	50.0	23.8	26.2
Cooking	73.8	11.4	14.9
Preparing snacks and party meals	38.1	32.2	29.7
Wearing clothes	29.7	39.6	30.7
Types of cloth	10.9	50.5	38.6
Washing clothes	20.3	51.0	28.7
Making clothes	36.1	34.2	29.7
Sewing machine	40.6	22.3	37.1
Knitting, embroidery	39.1	28.7	32.2
Order and cleanliness	23.3	34.2	42.6
Cleaning	18.8	38.6	42.6
Ways of living	20.8	35.1	44.1
Home and family	29.2	37.1	33.7
Ways of using space at home	18.3	32.7	49.0
Development of infants	12.9	34.7	52.5
Life of infants	16.3	31.2	52.5

3.5 Perception of homemaking education

3.5.1 Thoughts about homemaking

The children were given 12 items expressing opinions about homemaking from which they could select multiple items. As Table 4 shows, "contributes to daily life" was selected by 73.8%, "a subject truly related to everyday life" by 65.3%, "should be studied by both boys and girls" by 63.4%, and "a subject for learning important skills for everyday life" by 55.4%. In other words, there is a recognition that homemaking contributes to one's own life by studying daily activities and that it is a necessary class for both boys and girls.

For the "contributes to daily life," "a subject for making things," and "a subject for learning important skills for everyday life" items, a significant difference of 1% is identified by school year with elementary students given more positive responses. However, the "not necessary to learn" item was especially popular among the 3rd year junior high school students.

Analyzed by gender, a significant difference of 0.1% was confirmed for "should be studied by both boys and girls" and "a subject truly related to everyday life" with girls

being more positive and a significant difference of 5% was seen for the "not necessary to learn" and "a subject for learning manners" items with boys answering more often in the affirmative.

Table 4 Thoughts about homemaking

Opinion of homemaking	%	School year	Gender
Should be studied by both boys and girls	63.4		***
A subject for girls	16.3		
Not necessary to learn	9.9	**	**
A subject truly related to everyday life	65.3		***
Contributes to daily life	73.8	**	*
A subject for learning manners	16.3		*
A subject for making things	33.7	**	
A subject for learning important skills for everyday life	55.4	**	
A subject for learning by get physically intolved	19.3	*	
Should be taught by parents	10.4		
Should be a female teacher	45.5		**
Should be a male teacher	30.7		

3.5.2 Opinions about homemaking

The following opinions were received from the students when asked to write up their own comment.

Positive Opinions

- * Will definitely be of benefit in the future.
- * Should be studied because it contributes to everyday life.
- * An interesting and fun subject
- * Homemaking should not only be a subject for girls. Since more men are living on their own, boys should also study homemaking.
- * Homemaking is an excellent subject because it teaches the basics. Since the skills learned can be used at home and make everyday life go more smoothly, homemaking should be taught from a younger age.

Negative Opinions

- * Homemaking is a subject for girls and should not be required for boys.
- * Should be an optional subject.
- * Homemaking teaches cooking, washing, and cleaning, all things which should be picked up naturally.

As indicated above, homemaking is usually considered valuable by girls and often rejected by boys.

4. Advice for homemaking Education

Homemaking at Japanese schools faces various problems including the number of class

hours, the lack of facilities and equipment, dealing with the diversity of children's knowledge and experience, and the expertise of teachers. The right support must be provided so that these issues are properly understood and guidance conducted without difficulty. For example, the lack of teaching materials and tools is a standing problem and teachers procure these items both locally and directly from Japan. An information center needs to be established so that training materials, videos, and other materials can be easily identified and employed. Also, when children returning from abroad learn homemaking, the Japanese homemaking teacher should be aware of the manner in which homemaking is taught abroad and should not look at the student differently. This holds true generally, but particularly in the case of children returning from abroad, classes should be easy to understand and the importance of children learning on their own respected and class material should be designed taking into account the interests of the children.

5. Conclusions

The following conclusions were acquired from the visits to Japanese schools in the United States and the questionnaire completed by the children about their home life and perception of homemaking and homemaking education.

1. Some of the children are eager about going abroad, but many are insecure about the language and new lifestyle. For nearly 60% of the children, the United States is their first experience living abroad. The children are generally exposed to a well-off social and educational environment.
2. Helping clean up after meals and cleaning own room are done occasionally, but overall the percentage of children doing chores is low. In particular, 70-80% had never helped with clothing-related chores.
3. 70-80% of the children expressed satisfaction with the food and homes in the United States. On the other hand, there was significant dissatisfaction with shopping and the interaction with neighbors caused by the problems of safety and the tendency of Japanese to form into closed groups.
4. The children expressed interest in practical homemaking topics such as cooking, menu arrangement, and sewing machines. More theoretical topics such as nutrition, washing clothes, and types of cloth were least liked.
5. The children felt that homemaking does contribute to daily life and that both boys and girls should study these skills which are essential to everyday living.
6. There is a need to establish a network which can provide necessary information related to teaching materials and tools and support the homemaking guidance offered by overseas homemaking facilities. Also, when these children return home and study homemaking in Japan, the homemaking teachers should be aware of the child's learning experiences abroad and proceed with teaching methods that emphasize direct involvement while taking into account individual differences.

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