

## Values Education and Teaching Zest for Life: Japanese Experience and New Ukrainian School Reform

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### **Abstract**

*This paper highlights the importance of sustainable values education for Ukrainian society to become united and economically strong. The authors signify the Japanese value-creating pedagogy as transformational and leverage in making Japan a strong nation and competitive economy. Therefore, the experience is of interest to Ukraine. The New Ukrainian School Reform transforms schooling into an inspirational environment and a place of joy. It differs from the traditional classroom of the assertive discipline and, accordingly, leads to changes in teacher education. The research concludes that the Japanese approaches to teaching values and zest for life are within reform algorithms that are an adequate response to the democratization and humanization of education in the globalized world. The paper finds more profound comparative research in pedagogy necessary to improve teacher preparation.*

**Keywords:** *Japanese experience; New Ukrainian School Reform; teacher education; globalization; values-based education; zest for life.*

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## **1. Introduction**

Since the first days of independence, Ukraine has struggled to overcome the deeply-rooted traditions of the Soviet past and a lack of experience in building a democracy. No wonder, for Ukrainian education, the 30 years of independence have become the years of “intensive search” for how to modernize and comply with European democratic standards (Higher Education in Ukraine [HEU], 2017, p. 18; Nychkalo, 2017, p. 89). As a result, the young country has taken significant steps to create novel educational paradigms aligning with the political aspirations in the context of a globalized world (HEU, 2017, p. 28; Kuchai, 2014, p. 282; Matvienko & Kuzmina, 2020, p. 161; Nychkalo, 2017, p. 91). The adoption of the new laws and regulatory documents on education from 1991 through 2021 (Laws of Ukraine on Higher Education. Parliament Portal, n.d.) resulted in the establishment of the national education system, development of the national educational standards, the introduction of the new qualifications levels in correspondence with the European certification criteria. The emergence of the private educational sector contributed to competitiveness and responsibility for university reputation and student enrollment. (HEU, 2017, p. 15). The piecemeal reforms eventually changed the landscape of Ukrainian education. They led to the “de-ideologization, demilitarization, transfer from elite to mass education, humanization of education,” integration of distance education, financial autonomy of universities, internationalization of education, and academic mobility (British Council, 2020; HEU, 2017, p. 17; Ministry of Education and Sciences of Ukraine [MESU], 2020). The establishment of the National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance became a milestone for quality, accountability, and academic honesty (Luniachek et al., 2020; NAQA, 2017-2020).

Alarmingly, secondary schooling remained focused on providing academic knowledge rather than practical application and values. The outcome of that was reduced motivation and an increase in unhappy students. The lack of a holistic approach to values education became an obstacle to consolidating the nation. Responding to those above, the Ministry of Education and Science initiated the New Ukrainian School Reform – “an ideology of change” to bring up a well-rounded and happy personality with competencies to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. (New Ukrainian School Reform [NUSR], 2016, p. 18).

## **2. Methodology**

The research emphasizes values-based education and underscores its significance for teacher education. The method in use is the descriptive comparison based on the literature review and its analysis, along with a brief review of the evolution of education in independent Ukraine. The literature includes scientific papers, governmental documents, and Internet resources. Since the authors believe that the Japanese values education

contributed to the well-being of society and the economy (Aranito, 2019, p. 150; Kumagai, 2000, p. 20; OECD, 2018, p. 20) hence, they are confident that Ukraine can benefit from addressing values education seriously. Changes in teacher preparation are considered inevitable due to the political aspirations of today's Ukrainian society (Matvienko & Kuzmina, 2020, p. 162; NUSR, 2016, p. 7; Nychkalo, 2017, p. 90). Traditionally, teacher preparation is the domain wherein the future transformation of school is forged.

### **3. Values-Based Education in the Globalized World**

#### ***3.1. Globalization as a Catalyst for Better Values Awareness***

The era of globalization urges us to acquire new knowledge and competencies at an accelerated pace. Furthermore, it questions the body of knowledge sustainability if it does not integrate into the socio-political and cultural context and does not apply to different fields of human activity. According to Whalley (2005), “globalization can affect social values and vice versa,” impacting mutual understanding. While values cooperate, it is primarily believed that societies change (Blair, 2009). Keeping in mind that each country has a nationally-based values system (Parademetriou & Masouras, 2014, p. 5), values-based education helps avoid conflicts inside and beyond the boundaries. Globalization provides more access to research and integrated knowledge in parallel, deepening understanding of cultural uniqueness and authenticity. However, judging by the number of social and war conflicts many countries suffer from, education should address the values of diversity, equity, and tolerance better (Whalley, 2005). According to Tony Blair (2009), each nation possesses the “spiritual capital,” comprising the values of “democracy, freedom, and justice.” Responsible citizenship and empathy for the neighbors’ needs are conducive to the emergence of shared values, trust, and respect.

#### ***3.2. Prioritizing Approaches to Values Education: comparative profile***

The 25-year partnership between Ukraine and Japan has developed effective, fruitful exchange and collaboration in education and science (Bielieskov, 2016, p. 12). Once Japan faced economic, social, and political challenges, it overcame them. It is essential to pay credit to Japanese education for that achievement due to “relativism and knowledge construction,” adherence to national values and spiritual tradition of stoicism, and quiet dignity strong enough to withstand foreign influence. (Arimoto, 2019, p. 149; Crehan, 2016; OECD, 2018, p. 19).

According to Aramito (2019, p. 150), cultural and historical influence on values education in Japan is decisive. Similarly, Kumagai (2000, p. 42) suggests life itself should be the source of value that takes root in history and has resulted in value-creation in education. Furthermore, “value-creating pedagogy” never loses topicality because it is based on love

of life. Stemming from this theory, the Zest for Life concept relies on "the academic prowess, moral, physical, and mental health" (Kimura & Tatsuno, 2017, pp. 1-2; Kumagai, 2000, p. 44). The time has added new features: *Solid Academic Capabilities* consisting of basic literacy, self-direction, decision-making, problem-solving, and a *Well-Rounded Character* distinguished by self-control, cooperation, and empathy. A *Healthy Body* comprises both physical and mental health (Figure 1). The demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have broadened the concept resulting in including the *Practical Ability to Act for the World*. It is differentiating between individualism, relationship building, motivation for social participation, responsibility for building a sustainable future; *Collaborative Thinking and Problem-Solving* address problem finding and solving, logical, critical thinking, meta-cognition, adaptability; *Basic Literacy as Thinking Tools* - literacy, numeracy, information literacy (Kimura & Tatsuno, 2017 pp. 5-6; MEXT 2010). It is interesting to note that all these new developments and adjustments of the Zest for Life Concept took their start from "the education for happiness" (Kumagai, 2000, p. 43) and from the personal values: *Chi-iku* meaning cognitive development; *Toku-iku* – moral virtue; *Tai-iku* - physical development. Kugamai (2000, p. 44) emphasizes that Japanese values have been tested across centuries, ensuring harmonious "value-creating pedagogy," making the Japanese a strong nation. (Arimoto, 2017, p. 149, Crehan, 2016; OCED, 2018). The model's success may be related to cultural heritage; however, the input of the Japanese secondary and higher education is apparent.



Figure 1. Structure of "Zest for the Living concept" (source: MEXT, 2010).

Considering the value-oriented education and competencies outlined by the Ukrainian New School Reform, school becomes an environment that teaches to enjoy life (Nychkalo, 2017, p. 98), focusing equally on reason and emotion, which fully corresponds with the Japanese Zest for a Living Concept. Social, emotional, and physical development is equal to the

academic body of knowledge for contribution to the economy and society. Relating to real life, providing the competencies necessary for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, e.g., cross-cutting skills, critical thinking, creativity, risk assessment ability, cooperation with others, and a healthy lifestyle, are common (NUSR, 2016, p. 7). Compared with Japan, cognitive, moral, and physical developments are also substantial. Patriotism, honesty, dignity, hospitality, dedication, compassion, and service are the values the Ukrainians have treasured for centuries (Holos, 2019, p. 44; Kuchai et al., 2019, p. 90). Consolidating Ukrainian national identity, fostering the status of the Ukrainian language, and becoming a member of the European Union are the goals aligned with the immediate needs. The reform pledges to educate all-rounded, patriotic, responsible, innovative citizens, equipped with competencies of “mathematical literacy, cultural awareness, life-long learning, environment, and health knowledge, foreign languages proficiency, science, technology, and digital literacy, mother and national languages knowledge” (Holos, 2019, p. 49; NUSR, 2016, pp. 10-13).

#### **4. Teacher Training in the Context of New Ukrainian School Reform**

Interestingly, the survey conducted at the end of 2021 by the public educational organization “Osvitoria” revealed that many Ukrainian teachers followed the old teaching paradigm focused on subject content, although the reform was launched in 2016. About 66% of teachers admitted that they took professional development courses to fit the NUSR but still felt challenged. 59% - only read the directives of the Ministry of Education and needed guidance. 27% - obtained training on the learning platform EdERA. About 14% of working teachers did not take any training (Ukrainian School Reform, 2022). The New Ukrainian School Reform questioned the compatibility of the teacher education programs with its goals. Therefore, the “Teacher Preparation for the New School Reform” academic course in the graduate school syllabus and professional development programs appeared to be necessary. Judging by the feedback of graduate students, they believe the NUSR is transformational because it insists on holism and schools “created for joy.” The lack of joy may lead to the lack of the desire to live (Elkin, 2022). 95% of respondents are unanimous that the course improves their readiness to work under the NUSR. 100% of graduates approve of the emphasis on values-oriented education and making school a place of joy. The empirical studies demonstrate that teachers cannot instill values and morals they lack (Serikova & Nizhegorodov, 2017, p. 74; Vasilevskaya-Rutskaya, 2009, p. 64; Ukrainian School Reform, 2022). Thereby, enriching teacher preparation with values-based classes becomes a must.

Teacher education is widely believed to benefit from comparative pedagogy research, disseminating and applying the findings outside the country for transformational impact on home education. The Japanese experience motivates Ukrainian educators to explore and ensure the “cross-cutting educational process that informs values valid throughout the

world” (Kuchai et al., 2019, p. 87; NUSR, 2016, p. 7, p. 16; Vasilevskaya-Rutskaya, 2009, p. 59; Zmievskaya, Dovgaliuk, Glazunova, Kuzmina & Lisnichenko, 2020, p. 8).

To respond to the NUSR goals in an achievable way, the coherent changes in teacher education are noticeable: the student-centered approach, elective classes, interdisciplinary approach to teacher education, teaching academic integrity; internationalization of campuses, student mobility programs with cross-cultural and values exchanges opportunities (British Council, SAM Program, 2020; Laws of Ukraine on Higher Education, n.d; Law of Ukraine on Academic Integrity, 2020; Luniachek et al., 2020; Matvienko & Kuzmina, 2020, p. 166; Nychkalo, 2017, p. 89). However, more focus should be made on studying the world’s best experiences. Arguably, the Japanese experience prompted the understanding that school is created to enjoy.

## **5. Conclusions**

The authors believe that the Japanese values-based education and teaching Zest for Life Concept are in tune with the Ukrainian New School Reform orientation to raise generations of people who value life and respect freedom and democracy. The Japanese experience proved successful in uniting its nation while reinforcing its statehood and economy. Hence, the further research with the implementation as a follow-up into teacher education programs as a segment of comparative pedagogy is reasonable. Importantly, values-oriented education lays a durable foundation for justice, equity, patriotism, and integrity in prospective teachers. This leads to assurance they will be able to pass these values on to their students. Both countries seriously address shaping national identity but, in parallel, teach universal competencies applicable in the globalized world. It is necessary to note that Japan emphasizes socio-emotional aspects of education, problem-solving, and critical thinking. Similarly, the New Ukrainian School Reform focuses on well-rounded development (Nychkalo, 2017, p. 98). If Ukrainian teacher education engages in research and collaboration more profoundly, the country will succeed in achieving the goals of Ukrainian society to consolidate and prosper.

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