

What Matters Is What We Teach, Not When We Start the School Year

Proposals to move the start of the academic year from April to September drew considerable attention as the novel coronavirus spread. However, predictions that too hasty a switch could result in social disorder prompted the government to make the right decision and postpone such a move.

Indeed, the most pressing issues as Japan's schools begin to reopen are the need to make up for lost time in student learning and alleviate concerns related to exam taking.

Opposition to revision of the academic year to a September start date galvanized after detailed simulations run by education professionals, including staff at the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), and other data showed just how difficult the changeover would be.

Projections showed that such an adjustment to the academic year would not only increase the number of children waiting to begin school, but would also strain household budgets because of increased education-related outlays. Furthermore, universities and other academic institutions are fully engaged in anti-virus efforts on their campuses right now.

As a result, the Japanese Educational Research Association and other academic organizations appealed to the government not to rush the introduction of a new system.

Likewise, a work team within the ruling Liberal Democratic Party sent a recommendation to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to delay the change. The Prime Minister himself has also indicated he views an early introduction of a new system from 2021 as being difficult.

Apparently the government plans to continue to study the feasibility of switching to a September academic year start date.

The sudden interest in commencing the academic year in September surfaced as a result of a desire to make up for the lesson time and school events which were canceled due to measures taken to stop the spread of COVID-19.

In addition, an academic year beginning in September is the standard in much of the world, including the United States. The switch would therefore make things easier for Japanese students who want to study abroad, and otherwise promote globalization. "Killing two birds with one stone," contend advocates of the idea.

Nevertheless, we need to abandon the illusion that adopting a September-start academic year will solve our problems and cause dramatic improvement in the Japanese education system.

The havoc wrought by COVID-19 has once again revealed deficiencies and highlighted how badly Japanese schools, including the most prestigious universities, lag in terms of such things as online education.

Amidst the ongoing global anxiety about the coronavirus pandemic, if the environment for IT activities at Japanese schools remains so feeble, it will be hard for Japan to win in international competition in areas like the fostering of human resources. And how can we possibly welcome foreign students with pride?

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Even if we agree that there is a need for two-way online instruction, it cannot be introduced in a haphazard fashion. How will educators at all levels be able to intellectually stimulate their students and thereby encourage them to want to keep on studying at a higher level?

To ensure that happens, we also need to reconsider teacher abilities and teaching methods.

We can't help but doubt that "globalization" brought about simply by aligning the academic year with those in the United States and some other countries constitutes true internationalization.

After all, the academic year in Australia and New Zealand begins in February, although because of their two-semester system students are also accepted in July.

If we are truly serious about fostering talent, we should be focusing on strengthening the content of Japanese education itself.

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9月入学見送り まず教育の中身を強靱に

新型コロナウイルスの感染が拡大する中で検討されていた「9月入学制」が当面、見送られることになった。拙速な移行による社会的混乱も予想されたから、見送りは妥当な判断である。

学校が再開される中、学習の遅れや受験に関する不安解消を急がなければならない。

文部科学省のほか、専門家らの具体的シミュレーションなどで9月移行の難しさが改めて明らかになり、反対論が強まった。

移行期の待機児童の増加や、学費・学習費などの家計負担も多額になる。大学を含む学校現場は感染防止対策に忙殺されているのが現状だ。日本教育学会など教育関係団体からも、拙速な導入を避けるよう申し入れがあった。

自民党のワーキングチーム（WT）が安倍晋三首相に当面の導入見送りを求める提言を出し、首相も来年からの早期導入は難しいとの考えを示した。

一方で中長期の課題として9月入学制の検討は続けるという。

9月入学論が浮上したのは、コロナ禍で失われた授業や学校行事の時間を確保する余裕が生まれるためだった。加えて欧米中心に秋入学が主流とされているため、留学しやすくなるなど「グローバル化」にもつながるとする「一石二鳥」の賛成論があった。

だが、9月入学にすれば、問題が解決し、教育が良くなるという幻想は捨てるべきだ。コロナ禍で有名大学を含め、日本のオンライン教育の遅れなどの弱点が改めて明らかになった。世界的に感染拡大への不安が続く中、学校のIT（情報技術）活用環境が脆弱（ぜいじゃく）なら、海外で競える人材育成などおぼつかない。留学生らも胸を張って受け入れられるか。

ネットで双方向の授業が必要といっても、慌ててできることではない。教員は生徒や学生らにその先を学びたいという知的刺激をいかに与えられるか、教師力と授業法の見直しも欠かせない。「グローバル」というが、安易に欧米に入学時期を合わせることで国際化なのかは疑問である。

例えばオーストラリアやニュージーランドの入学は2月で、2学期制で7月の受け入れもある。日本と時期がずれる「ギャップターム」を利用し、準備や体験を積む利点とすることもできよう。

真に人材を鍛えるためには、教育の中身の強靱（きょうじん）化が不可欠だ。

出典：【主張】9月入学見送り まず教育の中身を強靱に

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