

# VIEWS ON GLOBAL COMPETENCIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION AS SEEN IN INITIATIVES UNDERTAKEN IN JAPANESE UNIVERSITIES

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to analyze global competencies of higher education in this era of globalization through initiatives taken by universities in Japan. As universities are increasingly influenced by globalization and globalism, they must address the need for global competencies in educational activities, including activities concerning globalism on campus. Educational activities have been centered on career education and competency-training to focus on the gradual process of students' growth. This paper begins by examining the concepts and definitions of global competencies, focusing on five elements, then outlining 15 specific competencies on the basis of the aforementioned five elements, followed by a general discussion of educational improvement that would facilitate students learning and utilizing the 15 competencies smoothly and effectively in international career education. I will then examine an example of portfolio assessment as a method to evaluate students' competencies in career education at a Japanese university. Portfolio assessment in the formation and development of an international career in university education are believed to help improve and enhance the quality of university-wide competency-education.

**KEYWORDS:** Attitudinal competency, Behavioral competency, Student development, Career education, Portfolio assessment

## GLOBAL COMPETENCIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

### 1. Diverse communities with global and “glocal” perspectives

Globalization is progressing throughout the world, particularly through such as areas as tourism, trade, investment, finance, information technology, and telecommunications; “internationalization” and “globalization” have been promoted within local communities as well as in international relations between countries. With pressure to globalize coming from both domestic and foreign sources, the phenomenon of *glocalization* (a compound of *global* and *local*) has emerged in local communities. Within local regions, race, nationality, language, culture, and religion are becoming increasingly diverse, supporting heterogeneous societies characterized by wide variety, pluralism, and multilayer has been formed in the *Glocal* community. People are increasingly obliged to form, maintain and develop “international” communities: societies capable of coexisting symbiotically with the global community.

### 2. What is required of people in such a diverse society?

A diverse society means a society consisting of people with diverse and often different values, in other words, highly complex societies. People today often find themselves in situations where they need the ability to correspond with or adapt to a complicated society with a variety of different values. The set of skills, termed “competencies”, necessary to adapt to such a society have been divided into three broad categories, according to the DeSeCo (Definition and Selection of Competencies:

Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations in OECD), that is, 1) the competency to act autonomously (personal autonomy and initiative), 2) the competency to form human relationships in various social groups (interaction between oneself and others), 3) the competency to utilize social, cultural and technical tools interactively (correlation between individuals and society).

The concept of competencies does not mean mere knowledge or technique. It means competencies with which one can respond to complex demands or tasks by utilizing various psychological and social resources, including skills and attitudes in certain circumstances. In short, competency requires a high degree of sensitivity to different cultures, a high degree of adaptability to differing environments, respect for the humanity of any person, and the ability to build one’s own human networks. While Knowledge implies familiarity with a given set of facts or concepts, and skill implies a person’s ability to perform a given task, competency on the other hand is a set of behavioral characteristics and behavioral performance referring to whether a person can do something in a proficient and effective manner or not.

### 3. Approach to competencies in Japanese universities

In response to the external trend of globalization and the internal trend towards localization from inside communities or society, Japanese universities have fundamentally altered their approach to university education. In this context, Japanese universities feel both internal and external pressures to internationalize. Internally, the number of Japanese students who have experience overseas has increased, as has the number of foreign students and foreign

teachers on Japanese campuses. Externally, the number of international marriages has increased, as has the number of foreign workers or trainees, of tourists from foreign countries, of Japanese companies expanding abroad, and of foreign businesses operating in Japan. Notably, a number of Japanese municipalities have conducted international exchanges in the area of public administration, a field with a direct impact on local residents.

Japanese universities cannot ignore the phenomena described above, therefore university education has been forced to shift from traditional academics (understanding of learning) to global competencies (social behavioral skills). That means a qualitative transformation from a methodology based on teaching knowledge and skills to a methodology extensively orientated towards learning the behavioral characteristics and behavioral performance based on utilizing knowledge and skills effectively. At the same time, university education must place emphasis on human resources in terms of providing human resources to society. The goal of personnel education in higher education is to develop the oriented characteristics and behavioral characteristics that students themselves actively build up in their own career. This can be referred to in an international context as international career competency.

Below I shall provide a specific description of competencies in international careers in Japanese universities.

#### **4. Necessary skills and basic skills in university education**

##### **4.1 The development of student's competencies**

The purpose of university education is to foster, enhance, and develop competencies with which students can form and develop their own careers as human being capable of learning independently, thinking independently, and acting towards realization of their own goals. In the process of the students' career development, they are considered to get better ideas and concrete clues on learning life and student life on campus. Below are some of the stages of competencies through which students can confirm their own development step by step. I've set five goals of step-by-step teaching and learning. To be comprehensive, they will be summarized in systemic and interpersonal and instrumental competencies, or will be generic competencies.

##### **4.2 The first stage**

The first stage is development of the required basic skills that students should learn.

###### **4.2.1 Attitudinal competency**

###### **4.2.1.1 Competency of self-discovery**

Students take responsibility for their remarks and actions by judging themselves with their thinking and their acting enthusiastically to realize their own goals, that is, it is said autonomous person.

#### **4.2.1.2 Competency of Self-**

##### **realization**

Students can contribute to society by acting with courage to fulfill their responsibilities faithfully while considering the rules of society carefully; in short, a person capable of contributing to society.

#### **4.2.1.3 Competency of**

##### **interpersonal relationships**

Students can act as global citizens, having learned to feel sympathy towards people with a vulnerable position in society by deepening their understanding of the diverse peoples of the world and of their own community; in short, a person possessing “internationality”.

#### **4.2.2 Behavioral competency**

##### **4.2.2.1 Competency to address problems**

Students have acquired the ability to consider problems, to understand problems by collecting and analyzing relevant information, and to formulate plans for resolution; in short, a person who is able to handle and solve problems.

##### **4.2.2.2 Competency of self-**

##### **expression**

Students can understand and internalize the ideas of others, present and express their own ideas precisely (e.g. through reports or oral presentations), and exchange opinions with others on social life; in short a person who is able to communicate in foreign languages.

#### **4.3 The second stage**

Expanding upon the above discussion, in the second state, attitudinal competencies shall be categorized into nine separate competencies, while behavioral competency shall be categorized into six specific competencies, yielding a total of fifteen distinct competencies.

#### **4.3.1 Attitudinal competency**

##### **4.3.1.1 Autonomous person**

An autonomous human being has an affirmative attitude and an attitude to think positively, possessing such behavioral characteristics as 1) intellectual curiosity, 2) a sense of responsibility and 3) autonomy.

1) Intellectual curiosity (1) means one has the interest or motivation to acquire new knowledge and skills. 2) A sense of responsibility (2) means one is aware that one has responsibilities for one’s own actions; statements, roles and position, and that one can also accomplish things until the end. 3) Autonomy (3) means that one can act proactively or voluntarily to realize goals one has independently set for oneself, without disadvantaging oneself and while disciplining oneself.

##### **4.3.1.2 Person able to contribute to society**

For human being to be able to contribute to society, an understanding and recognition of their membership in society is necessary, typified by such behavioral characteristics as 1) compliance / cooperation, 2) integrity, and 3) the social activism.

1) Compliance / cooperation (4) refers to the ability to respect the rules or the mores of society or of school, to understand their significance, and to engage in cooperation without losing one's own identity. 2) Integrity (5) means an understanding of one's rights and duties as an individual in society and placing value on honest behavior in human relations. 3) Socially activism (6) means one can understand the importance of willingly working together as a member of a group, organization, social group for the sake of that group or the sake of society.

#### **4.3.1.3 Person possessing internationality**

A person who has acquired internationality can build smooth human relationships, as evidenced by such behavioral characteristics as 1) an understanding of diversity, 2) a sympathetic attitude and 3) flexibility.

1) An understanding of diversity (7) means one takes into consideration the importance of understanding different cultures and languages, differing ideas, differing behavior, and that one can act as citizen of this world from an international perspective and from the perspective of environmental protection. 2) Sympathetic attitude (8) means that one can act with recognition that there are people in need, can see things from another's perspective, imagining it and thinking it (when someone has trouble or problem, they can act with having feeling that they are faced with the same problem). 3) Flexibility (9) means they can utilize knowledge and skills that have already acquired depending on the situation of the time and of the place and can act with an attitude of respect for diverse values and cultures.

### **4.3.2 Behavioral competency**

#### **4.3.2.1 Problem Solving**

A person able to handle and solve problems possesses the competency to think logically. Relevant behavioral characteristics include: 1) the competency to find and collect information, 2) the competency to plan, and 3) the competency to think and make judgments.

1) Competency to find and collect information (10) means that one can collect necessary or reliable information using a variety of techniques, can decide to adapt or reject said information on the basis of its relevance, and can organize and save information for later retrieval. 2) The competency to plan (11) means one can execute a plan by analyzing problems or issues, organizing information, planning and reviewing necessary information or data in order to determine a solution. 3) Competency to think / judge (12) means they can think possibility logically with a line of approach and can judge by keeping fairness without biased decision in response to the situation at that time and on that occasion to solve the problem in the best manner.

#### **4.3.2.2 The ability to communicate in foreign languages**

A person able to communicate in foreign languages is able to engage in communication aimed at mutual understanding. Relevant behavioral characteristics include 1) the competency to present and express ideas, 2) the competency to exert leadership / membership (e.g. team work) and 3) the competency to speak and listen, and to exchange opinions.

1) The competency to present and express ideas (13) means one can create documents, find understandable explanations, and devise visual or oral presentations in order to illustrate one's own ideas easily in the form of reports, oral presentations, and research debriefings. 2) The competency to exert leadership / membership (14) means one can act while demonstrating leadership or membership by understanding one's roles or responsibilities and exchanging or cooperating with others to achieve the purposes of a small group or community. 3) Competency to speak, listen to, and exchange opinions (15) means that one can exchange constructive feedback by listening carefully to others' presentations or speeches, reading others' articles, grasping main points, and by summarizing one's questions or comments.

#### **4.4 The third stage**

In stage one (4.2), the overall basic skills necessary for achieving competency were examined, those competencies were then expanded upon and examined in greater detail in stage two (4.3). In the third stage the process of totalizing, systematizing, and integrating the 15 specific fields (4.3.1 and 4.3.2) begins. The process of the third stage may be translated into the process of teaching and learning, that is, to totalize, systematize and integrate each competency is nothing other than improving operational competencies that can use each competency mutually and use it multiply and simultaneously.

It hardly needs to be said that university education must develop and implement curriculum and programs that can synthesize, systemize, and integrate each competency. In particular, university education must provide curriculum such that students

can acquire competencies and must create opportunities for students to acquire practical or behavioral competencies which have been synthesized, systematized, and integrated.

#### **1. Matters requiring improvement in overall university education**

University education must be social existence with the process of inter-action between teachers (= education) and students (= learning). Social existence of university education must have contacts with the global society or community to be linked to domestic and foreign.

The following three points are based on the perspectives of faculty and students in higher education.

#### **5.1 Enhancing the quality of the curriculum**

As the fundamental orientation of the curriculum at university, it is required to review the way of classroom learning so that students can design their own international careers. In other words, classroom learning means that, by knowing themselves, students can envision their own futures within a global context.

While traditional conceptualizations of classroom learning generally segregate coursework into basic courses and specialized courses, it is essential that there be cooperative, conjunctive, and collaborative linkages between basic and specialized subjects. Classroom learning, of course, includes not only in-curricular activities but also extra-curricular activities; that is, learning inside and outside the classroom are asked to merge the knowledge inside classroom and experiential knowledge outside the classroom.

Because it is better opportunities that learning in university education is a point of contact with society and it is also given opportunities to realize that students are members of society. Extra-curricular activities might, for example, include questionnaire surveys, project work, project-based learning and interview activities.

University education must build a curriculum which is cross-sectional, rather than longitudinal. Building a cross-sectional curriculum requires reviewing the relevance of course contents from the standpoint of cooperation, the structure of teaching materials from the viewpoint of conjunction, and the strength of coordination among faculties from the perspective of collaboration.

## **5.2 Enriching students' lives on campus**

Enriching students' lives on campus entails expanding students' opportunities to understand their relationship with the international community in their college lives, with the expectation that they be able to recognize their relationship within the international community and be able to act as members of the international community. Such opportunities include: study abroad, cultural exchange with foreign students both inside and outside of the classroom, host family or home stays, home visits, volunteering abroad, social visits to international organization or international companies, practical training in international business, and international internships. Universities, as institutions of higher education, should promote globalism on campus more actively.

## **5.3 Creating and managing student portfolios**

Portfolio assessment of is used as a means or tool of evaluation in the educational field. The advantage of portfolio assessment is that it is possible to assess gradual progress and to evaluate students' learning process multi-dimensionally. In addition, the contents of evaluation are contextualized within the process of individual advancement or development of competencies. Creating and carrying out portfolio assessment has the significances for the developmental stages to acquire competencies in terms of the content and criteria of evaluation. The creation of portfolio assessment for university students is that what they can do and which level they can do during the period from entrance until graduation from university. It also seems to be beneficial in visualizing the process step-by-step for both teachers and students.

In any case, the students can review the steps for self-realization and check the levels of mastery of each competency by receiving a portfolio assessment, and it can be expected that students will acquire the career competencies and design their own careers. On the other hand, viewed from the standpoint of teachers, the introduction of portfolio assessment would help to establish an efficient and an effective system to give useful feedback and advice to individual students.

### 1. The direction of global competencies through portfolio assessment for students

Portfolio assessment is not a quantitative assessment in so far as a quantitative evaluation entails numerical results measured through testing. On the other hand, a qualitative assessment has been on the learning process and it means a result of the development observed potential and manifest abilities of individuals in descriptive and diagnosis.

It must be noted that the term “competencies” denotes a variety of concepts, definitions and meanings, however, a variety of its terms in competencies, for examples, ability, capability, literacy, performance, proficiency, skill, and so on, will refer to a partial of qualities and characteristics in competencies from multilateral angles. In any case, competencies are encompassed with the wide range of different concepts and definitions. If it is ignored that the elements of how students can use each competency which they has learned in university education and what kinds of results they can produce validly, it will be impossible to continue to discuss about the behavioral natures and

characteristics. In that sense, Japanese universities place the focus on the behavioral competencies by combining the process of forming their own careers and both of basic education and professional programs in higher education. Thus, the concept of career education, international career education, or career competency is emerged from the background of the above. It is considered significant for both universities and students that to evaluate the developmental process to utilize competencies in facilitate and in effective.

Here, I will propose the creation of content indices in the competencies that are centered on the portfolio assessment referred to in 5.3 with reference to the cases of some Japanese universities’ initiatives. It is also necessary, of course, to discuss each level or extent in competencies, however, it will be a better opportunity to reconsider concepts and definitions concerning competencies by setting the contents or indices of portfolio assessment. The following table illustrates the contents of the competencies described in this paper.

TABLE 1: The concepts and specific content fields of competencies

The first stage (4.2)	The second /third stage (4.3) (4.4)	Portfolio of competencies
<b>Attitudinal competency (4.2.1)</b>	<b>(4.3.1)</b>	
Competency of self-discovery	Possession of autonomy	1) intellectual curiosity, 2) sense of responsibility, 3) autonomy
Competency of self-realization	Capability for social contribution	4) the compliance / cooperation, 5) integrity, 6) the socially active
Competency of interpersonal relationships	Acquisition of internationality	7) understanding of the diversity, 8) sympathetic attitude, 9) flexibility
<b>Behavioral competency (4.2.2)</b>	<b>(4.3.2)</b>	
Competency to address problems	Capability to handle and solve problems	10) competency to find and collect information, 11) competency to plan, 12) competency to think / to judge
Competency of self-expression	Capability to communicate in foreign languages	13) competency to present and express ideas, 14) competency to exert leadership / membership, 15) competency to express, listen to, and exchange opinions

As for the points are not mentioned in this paper, the work will have to proceed to a detailed list of the competencies over the range from 1 to 15 in creating the items and evaluation criteria or standards for the portfolio assessment. Utilization of portfolio assessment would also require the creation of a rubric or radar chart, which would establish several levels (e.g. excellent, good and poor) or extents (from low to high) of each competency that would indicate the criteria for achievement. In fact, it has been used as an educational evaluation. These trends mean that the efforts to improve the effectiveness of portfolio assessment itself.

Japanese universities are increasingly developing and operating e-portfolio systems (e.g. MAHARA) by taking full advantage of computer networks on campus and the latest ICT (information and communication technology) . This is a general database system, and e-portfolio system has some functions to store, organize and share students' profiles by individual, their learning outcome and learning assessment in this system. Use of a browser enhances the convenience by enabling one access to the e-portfolio system anywhere and anytime. It is also possible to integrate an e-portfolio system with university portals, management of academic affairs and course syllabus or course curriculum in course design.

Once integrated, the e-portfolio system can also take advantage of SNS (social networking service) and LMS (learning management system).

The development and the operation of an e-portfolio system not only stimulates teaching and learning between teachers and students, but also has the potential to encourage activities that are capable of stimulating education university-wide. It seems to be beneficial to further improve the quality and the reliability of the portfolio assessment. It will be necessary to focus on the development and the operation of the current situation.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the future, any consideration of attitudinal and behavioral competencies should be contextualized within the progress of globalization or globalism and in terms of competencies. It is not wrong to capture competencies of having behavioral properties and behavioral characteristics in the context of

global society and competency education. It is a matter of course that Japanese universities have established and operated systems of career education with a focus on career competencies, which should be expected to improve attainment of global competencies in the globalization era.

In this paper I have sought to introduce initiatives undertaken in Japan to promote acquisition of global competencies. In addition, this paper is only provided a material of discussion to train, develop and improve students' competencies in the future of higher education. I intend to continue researching the approaches to competencies in higher education and the development of curriculum, courses, and educational programs focusing on competency-based education or career-centered competency, particularly by broadening the scope of my research to include the efforts and initiatives undertaken in other countries as well as the Japanese cases.

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