

*Charitable Giving and Educational Possibilities: An Examination of Student Presentations  
on Charitable Giving Experiences in Japan*

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**Abstract**

This paper examines Japanese student participation in educational event about charitable contribution. While Japanese schools have long been involved in charitable activities, many schools and organizations have begun exploring the educational potential of charitable monetary giving. This is partly engendered by a renewed emphasis on financial education since the late 2000s. With rapid global economic changes, many educational materials became available not only to develop students' financial skills but also to expand their awareness of social implication in their financial decisions. Meanwhile, social withdrawal and decreased sense of self-usefulness in society among the youth have become grave concerns. In response to these situations, some schools and organizations have begun offering educational opportunities about charitable giving to raise students' interest in social engagement. Through an examination of charitable giving workshops and educational events held between 2020 and 2021, this paper explores the ways in which students consider the relationships between their charitable giving and social engagement. My analysis suggests that participation in these activities has helped students gain awareness of social challenges in their communities and what financial contribution can bring to charitable activities. However, it also indicates that further instructional support is necessary in some topics, such as how to make appropriate giving decisions as a group and how to sustain and evaluate one's own charitable commitments.

Keywords: Charitable Contribution, Philanthropic Education, Japan

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## **Introduction**

This article examines the charitable financial contributions and relevant educational events in Japan. While Japanese educational institutions often provide occasions to donate for school and other social projects, there has been renewed interest in incorporating charitable contributions into education. This article examines the social factors that contribute to this recent emphasis on charitable giving and social contribution education and how students reflect their engagement with charitable contributions. The students' comments suggest that they believed that charitable financial contributions could provide important support in solving social challenges. However, their participation in charitable giving was somewhat limited because they often failed to include topics such as how to allocate and sustain their charitable contributions.

## **Charitable Giving Education and Social Contribution Education**

While supporting students to become contributing members of society has long been an important goal for schools and educators, it has only been about ten years since the term social contribution education (shakai koken kyoiku in Japanese) emerged. Shunsuke Oishi, a strong advocate for this education, mentioned that around 2009, the Japan Fundraising Association (JFRA) and Oishi began to promote social contribution education actively (Oishi, 2020).

Soon after, other organizations began to express similar interests in promoting societal recognition of the importance of charitable activities. Books and brochures were gradually published, and workshop events began to be offered (Naka, 2020). With this trend, in 2020, a booklet proposal for promoting social contribution education (Shakai Koken Kyouiku Suisin Foramu Inikai, n.d.) was published. The proposal claims that social contribution education is an important area of education, and through such an education, students are encouraged to connect their education at school with their surrounding society. It also says that students can develop a sense of self-esteem through social contribution education and find meaningful roles in society. The proposal includes examples of relevant activities that promote this type of education, such as kifu no kyoshitsu (charitable giving classrooms) supported by JFRA.

The proposal's emphasis on connecting school education with societal contexts corresponds with the current guidelines of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology in Japan (MEXT). The MEXT periodically publishes new curriculum guidelines, and its most recent guidelines are scheduled to take effect in 2020 for elementary schools, 2021 for junior high schools, and 2022 for high schools. These new guidelines emphasize the importance of forging strong connections between school education and society. The guidelines encourage schools to incorporate activities to help students connect their classes with the community and world situations surrounding them. The guidelines recommend developing collaborations with local and other organizations and activities that raise awareness of local and global situations surrounding children. The guidelines claim that the new curriculum aims to promote students' understanding of the ever-changing societal situations and equip students with the knowledge and skills to challenge local and global problems (Monbu Kagaku Sho, n.d.).

The advocates for charitable giving education claim that providing education fits these new guidelines well. For example, the JFRA webpage states that charitable giving is an important way to learn about social contributions (Japan Fundraising Association, n.d.). It explains that through charitable giving, students can participate in activities that they are particularly

interested in supporting and gain a sense of social contribution. Yutataro Yonehara, a frequent workshop organizer, said similar comments in an online workshop event held at Fundraising Japan 2020 (FRA 2020), September 2020. He said that by providing activities, students could become aware of their own sense of values, develop their own decision-making skills, and learn to collaborate with others.

While volunteering is also identified as an equally important activity, charitable giving has received recent attention in programs and activities in social contribution education. This is partly because charitable donations are not often discussed in educational settings (Shakai Koken Kyouiku Suisin Foramu Inkai, n.d.). This is also because of the increased presence of non-profit organizations in Japan and the growing interest in supporting these organizations through private charitable contributions.

Since the 1990s, Japan has encountered several large-scale disasters, and they have created a variety of changes in how people think about society. The Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake in 1995 is argued to be the starting moment for current volunteer activities in Japan (Suzuki et al., 2003). Having experienced large-scale disasters, many people in Japan have realized the important role of volunteering in society. Many non-profit organizations have been established to organize volunteer activities, and legal status and other relevant laws and systems gradually began to be established. While some organizations seek governmental financial support, support from diverse citizens, including charitable contributions by individuals and groups, has become essential for running their activities.

Rapid and profound global changes in financial situations also occurred simultaneously. This led many Japanese institutions, such as the Financial Service Agency in Japan, to reexamine previous financial education (Fukuhara, 2012). The collapse of the bubble economy and financial recession since the 1990s brought social and financial challenges to many people in Japan. Meanwhile, a transformation of consumer practices occurred. For example, the use of credit cards has increased, and fair-trade products and other socially and ethically concerned consumption practices have become more widely recognized. These changing contexts brought renewed recognition of the importance of cultivating financial decision-making skills from a broader perspective. In addition to managing day-to-day expenses by individuals, new topics such as investment and charitable giving are included in the focus of financial education materials. Subsequently, lesson materials, such as guidebooks published by JFRA and the Japan Philanthropic Association (JPA), and other supportive educational events and workshops became available in the 2000s (Naka, 2020).

## **Youth in Japan**

The context surrounding current Japanese youth is another contributing factor to the backgrounds of current charitable giving and social contribution education. There has been a concern that young people may not have meaningful connections with their surrounding communities. The White Paper on Children and Young People 2021 (Kodomo Wakamono Hakusho, hereafter the White Paper), for example, provides several characteristics of young Japanese people. While 70.8% of young people answered that they wanted to contribute to society, about half of the young people (49.9%) answered that they felt useless (Naikakufu, 2021). Although it is important to examine how to interpret these data, this indicates some gaps between young people's desire for social engagement and the situations surrounding them.

This may be related to several other characteristics of current youth in Japan. The White Paper suggests a relatively low sense of self-affirmation among Japanese youth. According to the White Paper, 46.5 % of young Japanese people answered that they like themselves. This figure is lower than in other countries such as the USA, France, Germany (all of them are over 80%), and South Korea (over 70%; Naikakufu, n.d.). The White Paper also suggests that the number of students who cannot or refuse to attend schools (*futoko*) has increased from approximately 126,000 in 2015 to 180,000 in 2019. This suggests that an increased number of young people are hesitant to participate in school education. Additional data from the White Paper suggest that young people's lack of social integration is not limited to schools. Despite the shrinking young population, the percentage of young people (between the ages of 15 and 39) who do not work increased from 2.1 % to 2.9 % from 2015 to 2019. These indicators suggest that a considerable number of young people have difficulties participating in society, particularly through education and work (Naikakufu, 2021).

This context on Japanese youth is an important background for NEXT's new curriculum emphasis and the proposal. As previously noted, both emphasize the importance of strengthening the connections between school education and society. How, then, do students perceive their participation in the lessons and relevant educational events about charitable contributions? In the following, I examine three cases to explore this question.

### **Cases Examined**

This article is based on three types of educational events held between 2020 and 2021. While not all schools incorporate financial contribution education into their activities, an increasing number of schools are offering educational workshops and other related activities on this topic (Oishi, 2020). However, the diversity of charitable contribution classes and lack of comprehensive data makes it difficult to analyze these educational efforts. Furthermore, the spread of COVID-19 has many limitations in classroom and research activities. Within these limitations, this article analyzes three types of online presentations organized with the support of facilitators and organizations such as JFRA and JPA.

Each case examined in this study took a different approach to charitable contribution lessons. However, all of them participated by students and offered reflections about their experiences. Because it is often difficult to make observations at schools and other educational events, these presentations provide a good opportunity to explore how students and teachers view their participation in workshops and classroom activities related to charitable contribution education.

#### **Case 1**

The first case was an online presentation by two schools. The presentation was held in March 2021 as a part of a seminar about charitable contribution education organized by JFRA. Both schools incorporated charitable giving and social contribution components into their classrooms in collaboration with JFRA facilitators.

One of the schools was a public junior high school. Charitable contribution lessons were incorporated into a series of social studies classes for third-year students. The workshops lasted for six class periods, and approximately 130 students participated. The other school was a public high school with a business major. The charitable contribution lessons were held for nine class periods over two months, and about ten students participated.

Although their levels of education are different, these schools organized their charitable contribution lessons in a similar format. As often suggested by JFRA, the first part of the lessons focused on considering how charitable contributions could bring significant social influences. With the help of facilitators and teachers, the students received a general introduction on how monetary giving could help support a variety of community challenges. The facilitators then introduced several (usually three to four) non-profit organizations and their activities to students. These organizations deal with various social challenges, such as providing mental health support for the homeless, caring for abandoned animals, and afterschool activities for young children. The junior high school students were provided information about four organizations already chosen by the facilitators and teachers. In contrast, the high school students researched and chose the organizations themselves. From the explanations provided by the organization staff members and their own research, the students learned about how organizations work to alleviate social challenges and how monetary contributions could help support their efforts. The students were then provided with money to use as a donation. After the discussions, they chose one organization for their donations.

After a brief explanation of how these two schools offered lessons about charitable contribution, the presentation moved to the participants' reflections on their experiences. In written notes and in their own comments at the event, students in both schools expressed that the lessons on charitable contribution provided opportunities to learn about social challenges more deeply. The students' comments suggested that while they knew the challenges existed in society prior to the lessons about charitable giving, they did not "feel" or consider how these challenges affected people's lives. For instance, a student from the junior high school commented that he knew it was a problem, but he previously thought that it would affect other people, not people near him. Through learning about specific non-profit organizations' activities, many students deepened their understanding of the community and social challenges.

The fact that the students were given money to donate also helped them feel closer connections between social challenges and themselves. Because they learned about how monetary contributions could help fund the organizations' specific activities and they could support them financially, some felt that their opinions mattered. The students' comments suggested that charitable contribution lessons helped the students to see how giving could be a way to be involved in their surrounding society. For example, one student answered that monetary donations were a tool to create an ideal society. Another student answered that contributions could provide opportunities to learn about situations in the world that are otherwise unknown to them.

The reflections on these activities also suggested two areas that the student participants felt somewhat difficult. One is how to make a collective decision on where to donate. Lessons about charitable giving made the students realize that diverse concerns and priorities existed even among their fellow students. For example, the teacher at the junior high school mentioned that there was a student group that could not decide on an organization for their donation, and this group took extra time to reach a collective decision. Some high school students had similar difficulties. Because they felt that all the organizations provided worthwhile services to the community, they felt that they should not choose just one organization. They eventually decided on one organization, but they also set up a fundraising campaign at their school for the other organizations.

As often mentioned in the guidebooks about charitable contribution education, the realization of such diverse opinions among students is encouraged in the class. However, the students'

comments also suggested that the students felt somewhat left alone to figure out how to deal with diverse opinions among them. As making a group decision is necessary for this type of lesson, providing ideas and suggestions to form a decision can be helpful.

Another topic mentioned was how to extend the lessons to the next step. These lessons ended through donations, and some students and teachers wondered how they could use the lessons to develop their engagement in society. In the presentation, the students and teachers had opportunities to discuss the potential next steps. Some suggestions included sending SNS information about giving, making a children's book for giving and social contributions, and participating in fundraising and other volunteer activities to support NPOs and other civic organizations. They were all in the brainstorming stage, but these discussions suggest the potential for developing further social engagement. They also indicate existing challenges regarding how lessons on charitable contribution can be extended as a sustainable form of engagement.

## **Case 2**

The second case is based on a web-based event called the Charity Movie Project organized by the JPA. In this event, junior high and high school students voluntarily participated and produced short movies to raise financial contributions for non-profit organizations. Unlike the first case, the participation of this event was not by schools but by individual students. The call for participation was announced in July 2020, and the final online event was held in January 2021. About 70 students from all over Japan and Malaysia participated in groups or as individuals. The participants learned about the social significance of financial contributions, and they also studied the non-profit organizations they chose (from a list of five different types of non-profit organizations) with the help of the chosen organization. With the help of the event staff, the participants moved on to making short videos to introduce the organizations' activities. With the video and written explanation of their support for the organization on the event website, the participants asked viewers for donations. Each group presented the amount of money they aimed to collect (e.g., 200,000 yen). While no groups collected the targeted donation amount, over 2,000,000 yen was donated through the event.

Although this event did not provide specific occasions for students' reflection, the students' considerations on their participation in the events were extrapolated in several ways. They often commented on how they created their short movies, through which they indicated their understanding of giving. The comments posted alongside the movies, YouTube, and other messages posted on the event site also provided opportunities to examine how students felt about their experiences through this event.

The students' comments suggested that they were impressed by the organizations' activities and became aware of how financial contributions could provide the necessary support for these activities. For example, in a blog made by one group, two students reflected on their participation in the event. With a screenshot of their detailed notes before and after their interviews with the organization staff members, they said they learned a lot about the organization and the importance of their work. They also mentioned that they were so moved that they felt that they would like others to learn about this organization and provide financial support through their short movie. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, each group only contacted the chosen organization online, but the student comments suggested that their participation provided valuable learning opportunities for the organization and social challenges.

At the same time, the students tended to focus more on making a strong appeal for donations through their short videos. For example, in the blog mentioned earlier, the students spent the rest of the blog explaining their trial-and-error experiences of creating a movie to encourage others to give for their chosen organization. They explained some of their strategies, such as taking their mask-off so that viewers could see their facial expressions, carefully selecting information to include, and adding hand-drawings to the whiteboard. They also said that to make a stronger appeal for the viewers, they decided to make a movie that only they could make. This led them to wear school uniforms and select their school classroom as the venue for the movie.

The other participating students made similar decisions in creating short videos. Most of them wore uniforms and shot the film in the classrooms, although the event or organizations had little to do with the schools. The videos often included handwritten pictures and charts, and some included dramatized or animated stories to illustrate the social issues in which the organizations were working. While these arrangements were well prepared, they were used to emphasize implicitly that they were students who made the video. From the students' perspective, these arrangements were a strategy to deliver their messages to the viewer effectively. However, because many videos similarly stressed that they were students, the extent to which these arrangements created the students' intended results was questionable.

How the students' final short videos were presented on the web also tended to draw viewers' attention away from the intended main goal to support the activities of the organizations. While the webpage contained information about the organizations and each participant group, the donated money was placed on the top right area of the page, which made it easy for the viewers to see. Underneath the donated amount figure was the percentage that the donated money would be divided by each group's donation goal. This emphasis on the donation amounts and percentage of targeted donation goals were also clearly displayed in the final reporting web pages that appeared when this event was over. Although this information was important, it could give the impression that raising the targeted amount of money was as important as or more important than why the students made the presentations. Furthermore, the amount of money that each group raised was displayed in an easily comparable manner among the other groups, giving the impression that raising more money mattered.

As in the first case, this case also provided learning opportunities for students about charitable giving and how financial support helps organizations work for social challenges. However, short-movie production and the event arrangement tended to focus the students' and viewers' attention on collecting donations. As the donations were raised from others in this event, there were no discussions about how the participating students could also contribute money. How to make sustainable financial support was also not discussed.

### **Case 3**

The third case was a year-long class activity held by a private high school in Tokyo. The teacher who organized this class and two former students who took this class presented their experiences at FRJ 2020, an online conference about fundraising and charitable giving organized by JFRA, in September of 2020.

Prior to this event, this school participated in educational workshops on charitable contribution, such as kifu no kyoshitsu, as a part of its extra-curricular activities. Expanding on these experiences, this school incorporated charitable contribution education elements into a regular

class, titled “Kokusai Kyoryoku to Shakai Koken” [International Cooperation and Social Contribution]. The class was for third-year high school students, and about ten students who took this class met twice a week.

The students explained that the main goal of this class was to learn about social contributions and how they can play a role in dealing with contemporary social challenges. First, the students examined Japanese Official Development Aid (ODA) in the past 60 years. The students summarized that they learned about the complex relationships between business and international aid/development. One student mentioned that she learned that while they might seem at opposite ends, they could form meaningful relationships.

The rest of the class was devoted to learning about charitable contributions. The students first explored non-profit organizations and their activities. They discussed how financial contributions could help these organizations’ activities and pondered where they could provide financial support by the money that was given to them to use as a donation. Unlike case 1, the students decided to spend enough time developing their own criteria to decide which organization should receive their donation. In addition, the students decided to raise money through crowdfunding. The students set up a crowdfunding site, where they requested financial support to cover expenses to invite guest speakers, conduct research on non-profit organizations, develop their own criteria about where to give, give money to the chosen organization, and make and distribute final reports about their findings. In the end, they raised more than their targeted 300,000 yen.

The two students reflected on their learning experiences with the teacher’s facilitation. Both said that they had been interested in social contributions before this class, but they did not know what exactly it was and how they could do it. The class provided opportunities for them to realize that social contribution was something they could do to realize a better society. One student said that she had volunteered before, but she did not consider why she volunteered or the significance of her action. She knew that there were social challenges, but she felt that there had been little to do with her. She mentioned that through this class, she felt that these challenges were something much closer to her. She realized that she could make a difference by giving. As in case 1, the class provided first-hand experiences of learning social challenges and how giving could support the organizations that were confronting these challenges.

The students also found it difficult to decide where to donate. Learning about a variety of non-profit organizations with their staff members, the students noticed the strong commitment of all these organizations. This left them with a question about how to choose which one to support. One student said that after learning about the Japan Center for NPO Evaluation, she thought it was important to evaluate whether the organizations were trustworthy (shinrai). To ensure that the organizations could be trusted, they created their own criteria. However, as the other student added, even with such criteria, they found it difficult to rate each organization.

The students in this case were able to spend much more time deciding where they gave, and they also had more flexibility in deciding their class activities than the other two cases. However, these students’ comments suggest that even in such a situation, the students felt the need for further elaborate discussions and support for deciding where to give.

Like the other two cases, two topics—how to allocate funding if possible and how to make financial support sustainable—were not included in this case. As in the second case, it was assumed that there was only one organization to support. However, as people learn and find



important diverse activities of organizations, dividing donations into several organizations may occur. The lack of consideration of this topic can matter more when students try to give themselves. As in case 1, this case also did not extend the discussion of making the giving sustainable. It was assumed that the donation only occurred once. Although the students felt the importance of charitable giving, developing charitable contribution as individual or collective practice was not included in their discussions.

As in case 2, the students included fundraising efforts. Unlike case 2, however, the students also raised money for their activities. This allowed them to consider how to be accountable for their giving. A student mentioned that she was surprised to receive support from other people, but this experience gave her another look at what they were doing. She felt that it was important to explain what they did, such as why they consider giving as an important way to face social challenges. The students also made a report and held a meeting with the contributors to share what they did in the class and tentative ideas about how they could deliver similar learning experiences to other students, within and outside their own school. As in case 2, the comments in their presentation slides emphasized their perspectives as students. The image of the crowdfunding site clearly stated that they, as high students, created their own criteria for evaluating non-profit organizations. The site and presentation did not specify how useful such an evaluation created by the students would be for others. Rather, the main appeal was that the students were the main actors in such evaluations. The students seemed to consider that their own initiative could draw attention from potential donors.

## **Conclusion**

The three cases discussed have similarities and differences. The comments and reflections of the students suggest that learning about charitable giving provided them with opportunities to learn about social challenges and organizations working to deal with them. They also learned that financial contributions are an important way to support these organizations' activities.

However, the three cases also suggest divergent approaches to providing lessons on charitable contribution. Reviewing these three cases indicates two emphases of charitable contribution lessons: decision-making and fundraising. Case 1 focuses on choosing where to give. Providing students with the opportunity to choose an organization to donate led the students to investigate the organization's activities. Case 2 suggests an alternative approach. It provides students with opportunities to advocate for organizations and gather financial contributions. In the third case, these two approaches are incorporated. By provided some money to give, the students researched the organizations' activities and explored how they could make the best decision to give. Crowdfunding efforts provided first-hand experiences of raising money to support the organizations. They explored how to gain support from others by explaining the importance of learning about giving.

Although all the cases raised the students' awareness of social challenges and the importance of charitable contributions to face them, they did not address how to make them sustainable. The students' activities did not extend to the topic of how the students could allocate their own money for donations. As these lessons centered on one-time donations, there were few discussions about reviewing their charitable commitment and what could help develop charitable financial support as repeated practices. These topics, however, become important as students make their own charitable contributions.

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