

# The Experiences of People Working on Social Issues at Universities: Focusing on the Process of Concretization of Interest

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to clarify the process that led to the concretization of interest in social issues, focused on their experiences during their university studies. In higher education, as in SDGs education and ESD, the focus is on developing human resources to work for social issues. In addition, compared to primary and secondary education, there is flexibility in curriculum organization. It is allowed to the creation of a learning environment based on students' own interests and concerns. Therefore, in this study, we conducted a semi-structured interview focusing on the university years of a person who has continued to work for social issues. Through the analysis of that, we developed three hypotheses.

*Keywords: Social Problem Solving, University Education, Unlearning*

## Introduction

The purpose of this study is to clarify the process that triggers and deepens the interest of people who work on social issues, focusing on their experiences while in university. The reasons for focusing on the experience while in college are the following twofold: universities aim to develop human resources capable of solving social issues, and universities have environments where students can participate in and create activities based on their own interests and concerns.

Universities have the role of fostering human resources capable of solving social problems (MEXT: the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology-Japan, 2018). Therefore, problem-based learning such as SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) education and ESD (Education for Sustainable Development) are widely practiced in universities. Several universities, including the University of Tokyo and Kyoto University, have held symposiums, lectures, and study groups on the SDGs (Demise, 2020). Additionally, several universities, including Osaka Kyoiku University and Rikkyo University, conduct ESD education through lectures such as "Human Resource Development Theory" and "General Education Theory" (Takamatsu, 2019). Therefore, clarifying the university experiences of people who work on social issues will help to confirm the results of these efforts.

Moreover, universities have environments where students can participate in and create activities based on their own interests and concerns. For example, Learning Commons provides the opportunities for students to take the initiative in planning and implementing events, launching projects, and other activities (Yamamoto et al, 2017; Nakatani

et al, 2016). Also, the university offers classes and activities in cooperation with the community, allowing students to interact with a variety of people. We considered that students' experience of activities related to solving social issues in such an environment would be a trigger for fostering their awareness and attitude toward solving social issues in the future.

Therefore, in this study, we take the case of X, a graduate of Z University, which focuses on fostering solutions to social issues and has a learning environment that supports students' self-directed activities, is used to clarify how X's university experience has influenced his ongoing efforts to solve social issues.

## **Research Design & Methods**

This study employed a semi-structured interview with X who currently works at an elementary school as a full-time teacher and as an NPO as a life worker, to determine the process of continuing to work for social issues. X has worked for the NPO; since 3rd year of university, to support Syrian refugees' children in Turkey and Syria even after graduating from university.

The authors conducted semi-structured interviews online for 1-hour for the first time and 30-minute for the second time. The second interview was based on the questions generated by the analysis. The reason we chose X was that he continued to work on social issues since he was a university student. He has participated in projects related to social issues, NPO activities, and overseas volunteer activities since his university days. Now, he has continued to work at NPOs, and he also intends to continue in the future.

The interview was audiotaped and transcribed. The data analysis procedure in this study occurred in three stages: (1) to open coding, (2) to create categories, and (3) to developed hypotheses.

## **Results & Conclusion**

One is [Relationship with the Parties Concerned]. When X participated in fieldwork in Tohoku in Japan, he met <A Syrian Student Who Go with him Unexpectedly>. X felt that the Syrian student was very cheerful, spoke multiple languages, and kind brother. However, he noticed that the Syrian student was < Refugees from Syria> and had gone through a lot of hardships to protect his family. It was a different experience that X listened to the people involved in the lecture. The <Shock and Surprise> of a time when <Personally learned> that a person who has become friends is living with a variety of challenges provided an opportunity for X to become interested in the way refugees live.

The second is the [The Self-Image that Allows You to Act Independently]. When X entered university, he imagined a student who thought and acted independently. However, he could not act how he imagined, because of a lot of class tasks and outside school activities. He felt a sense of crisis about this, so < he took a course where he could experience practical experience>. What he experienced there were <Fun of Learning on a Project Basis> and <A Sense of Accomplishment through Activities Based on Their Questions>. For X, it was called “unlearning.” Through this experience, X felt <Deepening the Question of Wanting to Know More> and <Expanding the Possibility of Collaborating with Various People>.

The third is the [Awareness and Experience of Creating Activities from Zero]. X had <Someone Who had Managed to do it> nearby. Thus, he became a mind that <He could Manage>. This is also deeply related to the fact that there was < A Place Where They Could Manage>. The <Main that can be Managed> is also deeply related to <Others who Cooperate>.

In this study we will reveal that the way people work on social issues continues through their university experience. In this study, one person's experience was analyzed, and several hypotheses were developed. From now on, it is necessary to examine these hypotheses through a multi-people.

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