

Is Japanese Internship for the Purpose of Education or Recruitment?: A Study of its Historical Background, and Recent Changes and Future Challenges

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This article examines internships for university students in Japan from the perspective of whether the internships are conducted for “educational purposes” or “employment and recruitment purposes,” with regard to related policies, the present situation, comparison with other countries, and trends characteristic in recent years. The article provides an overview of the history of internships for Japanese universities, and elucidates the distinguishing features of Japanese internships using statistical data. Such features include 1) the fact that the number of participants in internships is increasing while the period of internships is short and becoming even shorter, and 2) the fact that while universities and public authorities emphasize that internships are intended for educational purposes, in reality they are used for seeking employment and hiring. A look at developments in other countries shows that internships are now growing as separate programs that target employment and hiring, while programs such as “cooperative education” in the United States and “sandwich courses” in England continue to play important roles as education conducted through industry-academia cooperation. This study also points out the need for awareness of the relevance of labor market characteristics when comparing the industry-university cooperative education programs such as internships with those in other companies. Furthermore, this article reviews the issues and positioning of three types of internships—i) long-term, ii) participated by students in lower school years, and iii) online—that are considered to represent its distinctive trends in Japan, and clarifies the contents with regard to the purposes of education and recruitment, as well as problems and positioning while comparing with efforts in other countries.

- I. Introduction
- II. History of internships in Japan with a focus on educational purposes and employment/recruitment purposes
- III. Grasping the current state of internships in Japan via statistical data
- IV. Present situation of internships in other countries in comparison with Japan
- V. Recent changes to internships in Japan
- VI. In closing

I. Introduction


1. Objectives

Internships for university students in Japan have expanded considerably since the late 1990s, when promotion of internships was positioned as a government policy, but they have developed in a form that diverges from their original purpose, and is unique compared to internships and industry-academia cooperative education in other countries. With this in mind, this article examines internships for university students in Japan from the perspective of whether the internships are conducted for educational purposes or employment and recruitment purposes, with regard to related policies, the present situation, comparison with other countries, and trends characteristic in recent years. In specific terms, the article begins by offering an overview of the history of internships for Japanese universities, and seeks to elucidate the distinguishing features of Japanese internships, including their relevance to recent changes. Also, to better clarify the characteristics of Japanese internships and recent changes, this article reviews the situation in other countries and discusses the challenges and future of internships in Japan. In particular, there is a discussion of recent developments, including long-term, early-age, and online internships. The article examines the content of these internships with both educational and employment/recruitment purposes with that in other countries.

2. Approach to educational purposes and employment/recruitment purposes

In September 1997, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour, and Ministry of International Trade and Industry (all at that time) formulated the Basic Agreement on the Promotion of Internships (hereinafter, “Three-Ministry Agreement”). This served as a catalyst for the spread of internship programs at Japanese universities, with internships defined as “work experience related to students’ majors and future careers while still enrolled at university.” The agreement also defined internship in the phrases such as “educational activities for students conducted at enterprises, etc.” and, for enterprises, “activities carried out from the perspective of human resource development through industry-academia collaboration, and thus corporate initiatives from a broad perspective, not limited to securing human resources for themselves.” A partial amendment in 2014 added the phrase defining internships “could be positioned as part of education at universities and other institutions.” As these phrases indicate, official government documents emphasize and reiterate that internships are intended to be educational activities and not employment/recruitment activities.

This article divides internships into the two categories of those for educational purposes and those for employment/recruitment purposes, and, focusing on the difference, discusses the history and current situation of internships in Japan, developments in other countries, and recent changes in Japan. First, let us discuss the differences between these two categories in specific terms. The Three-Ministry Agreement notes the significance of internships for universities and students as well as that for enterprises and so forth. The significance can be classified by purpose cited above, as shown in Figure 1. It is difficult to clearly demarcate internships for educational purposes and those for employment/recruitment purposes, and the classification is based on which objective is stronger in relative terms. From the perspective of universities and students, items strongly characterized as educational purposes include “improvement or enhancement of educational content and methods” and “significance for future career or professional education,” while those more weakly characterized in this regard include “fostering a high level of professional awareness.” Meanwhile, from the perspective of enterprises, items strongly characterized as educational purposes include “reflecting the needs of industry and other sectors in university education,” while items strongly characterized as employment/recruitment purposes include “promoting understanding and communicating the appeal of enterprises.”

	Significance to university and its students	Significance to enterprises, etc.	Ref. (DISCO 2019)
Educational purposes  Employment/ recruitment purposes	Improvement/enhancement of educational content/methods Significance for career/professional education Cultivation of human resources with independence and originality Fostering a high level of professional awareness	Fostering a high level of professional awareness Cultivation of human resources with practical ability Promoting understanding and attractiveness of enterprises	Corporate contribution to community/social Human resource development through industry-academia collaboration Cultivation of professional outlook in students Corporate PR and image enhancement Formation of a human resource pool for recruiting Recruitment of excellent human resources (internships directly linked to hiring)

Sources: Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, and Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (2014); DISCO (2019).

Notes: 1. The above is based on the Three-Ministry Agreement as partially amended in 2014.

2. The author added DISCO 2019 as a reference quoting the purpose of the enterprise survey conducted by DISCO Inc., to supplement the somewhat confusing discussion of “significance to enterprises, etc.” in the agreement.

Figure 1. Outline of categorization of internships as educational purposes or employment/recruitment purposes

II. History of internships in Japan with a focus on educational purposes and employment/recruitment purposes

The term “internship” was first used in an official government document in the Program for Educational Reform: Toward the Realization of an “Educated Nation” in January 1997. Subsequently, based on the Action Plan for Economic Structural Reform (Cabinet decision of May 1997), internships were launched in earnest with the Three-Ministry Agreement of September 1997.

However, if the definition in the Three-Ministry Agreement (“work experience related to students’ majors and future careers while still enrolled at university”) is interpreted literally, then educational training, factory training, clinical training programs for doctors, and other required training for qualifications also qualify as internships, and these started long before the above-mentioned governmental measures.¹ However, while a broad interpretation of the concept of internships encompasses such training, for the purposes of this article they will not be included unless otherwise noted.

First, looking at the situation in the business community and at universities before the Three-Ministry Agreement², the Japan Association of Corporate Executives (Keizai Doyukai, hereinafter, Doyukai) “Toward an Education of Choice” (1991) called for “support for student job internships as an interaction with the academic community,” and the Japan Federation of Employers’ Associations (a precursor of the Japan Business Federation, or Keidanren) “University Reforms and Enterprises’ Response to the Challenges of a New Era” (1995) proposed that “in present-day university education... students’ vocational training at enterprises and experiential learning (e.g., the internship system in the U.S.), as well as volunteer activities, should be included in curricula.” Also, a council was established within the Employment Agreement Council, in which universities and enterprises discuss employment and hiring issues, to study the future of employment and hiring. In November 1996, members of the Subcommittee to Study Medium- and Long-term Employment and Recruitment were dispatched to Boston as a survey team to investigate employment, recruitment, and internships in the US, and the results were compiled in the “Survey Report on Employment and Recruitment in the US.”

In other words, the initial purpose of considering internships was to address employment/recruitment issues associated with the abolition of employment agreements for university graduates, and internships were introduced as a buffer against conflicts over job-hunting activities (Yoshimoto 2020). Therefore, it can be said that internships

at the outset were seen as for employment/recruitment purposes.

Next, let us examine the history of internships in light of socioeconomic circumstances since the 1990s, amid the labor shortages of the economic bubble era around 1990. There was an increase in the cases of *aotagai* meaning the earlier recruitment of newcomers with the unofficial job offers to students well before graduation (which originally means “reaping rice before the harvest” in Japanese), and at the same time an increase in employees quitting soon after being hired. The challenge at the time was to reduce the number of the latter by matching recruits with suitable jobs through internships (Hashimoto 2013). In other words, the main focus was employment/recruitment purposes. However, after the bursting of the economic bubble, as the Japanese economy stagnated, business performance deteriorated, and educational programs within enterprises dwindled, there was a notable rise in industries’ calling on educational institutions to develop outstanding human resources, and educational purposes became the main focus of internships.

After the Three-Ministry Agreement, the labor market for university graduates basically remained a seller’s market with falling numbers of young people in the labor force due to the declining birthrate. In line with this, internships more prominently “for employment/recruitment purposes” became the norm. At the same time, there was a move toward expanding the definition of internships to include those that were called “one-day internships” but do not provide students actual “work experience.” As if sounding an alarm over these trends, there were repeated reminders from the government that internships are primarily “for educational purposes.”

On that note, let us examine proposals from the government and the business community since 2010, and discuss the current situation, which can be called a struggle between these two purposes of the internships. In 2013, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) released a report “Summary of Opinions on Measures to Promote Popularization and Qualitative Enhancement of Internships” as results of the discussions by the experts at its Research Conference on Further Enhancing Internships for the Promotion of Systematic Career and Professional Education. It described the promotion of internships for educational purposes, such as “medium- to long-term, overseas internships” and “internships with various formats (for younger undergraduates, combined with project-based learning [PBL], etc.)” Regarding the relationship with employment/recruitment activities, the report states that “internships should be considered separately from enterprises’ recruitment activities... but as unique effects of linking these activities to university education have been observed, their significance and expansion should also be considered.” The report thus cites the need for a consideration of internships “for employment/recruitment purposes” while taking a basically negative view on them.

In response to these developments, the 2014 partial amendment of the Three-Ministry Agreement newly added “significance as career/professional education” as a new aspect of internships’ importance for universities and students, and newly clarified rules governing the use in employment and recruitment of student information obtained through internships, which can be seen as a strong clamp-down on internships for employment/recruitment purposes.³

Subsequently, in 2017, the MEXT released another report “Summary of Discussion toward Further Enhancement of Internships” by the Conference of Survey and Research Collaborators on Promotion of Internships, etc. While it continued to “position internships as a part of educational activities,” the report devoted a section for “The Relation of Internships to Employment and Recruitment Activities” with a considerable amount of description of this point. The conference’s conclusion was that “the current handling of internships as not directly related to employment and recruitment must be maintained,” and “the relationship between internships and employment/recruitment activities should be examined as a med-term issue from a broad perspective among the parties concerned, based on the prerequisite that the quality of students’ academic environments is ensured.” The conference firmly maintained a generally negative position on internships for employment/recruitment purposes, as it had in the past. However, the same report notes that “various opinions were expressed,” and introduced opinions regarding the flexible handling of student information obtained through internships. It can be said that employment/recruitment purposes were also given a certain degree of

consideration and positioning.

Meanwhile, as for developments within the business community, Keidanren discusses internships in its “Guidelines for Recruitment and Employment Screening” and the summary thereof. The December 2015 summary showed a negative view of employment/recruitment purposes. Specifically, it rejected internships of less than five days, and referred to “ensuring that all employees are informed that internships have nothing to do with recruitment and selection activities...” and also that “personal information obtained during internships is not to be used for subsequent recruitment and selection activities.” However, in the April 2017 summary of the guidelines, the minimum requirement of five days was removed, and instead it was stated that “one-day programs that have little educational impact and act as PR for enterprises while connecting to subsequent employment screenings are not to be implemented.” It recognizes internships of less than five days while clearly rejecting so-called “one-day internships.”

Furthermore, the Industry-Academia Council on the Future of Recruitment and University Education (2021, hereinafter, “the Council”), consisting of university officials and Keidanren members, took up internships as an important issue for the future of university education and industry-academia cooperation, and proposed a review of the definition of internship after the Three-Ministry Agreement, and classification of industry-academia cooperative education according to four types. Specifically, it defines internships as “activities in which students gain work experience (practical experience at enterprises) related to their field of interest, including their major, and their future career, to determine whether or not they have the ability to work in that field (whether or not they are qualified for that job),” proposing a model of internships that is slightly more conscious of employment/recruitment purposes than previously.

To sum up, developments within the business community show an understanding of the principle of internships being for educational purposes, but also of a demand for employment/recruitment purposes. It can be said that the business community’s stance is that discussions on internships should be separated from those on enterprise briefings which are very short term and do not include “work experience,” while internships for employment/recruitment purposes should be recognized to a certain extent.

III. Grasping the current state of internships in Japan via statistical data

Now, let us attempt to quantitatively grasp the current situation of, and changes in, internships for university students in Japan (Tables 1 and 2). First, according to the “Status of Internships at Universities, etc.” survey

Table 1. Number of internship participants and participation rate

		2006	2014	2015	2017	2019
Survey by the MEXT	Total undergraduates (persons)	50,430	66,125	79,840	75,369	77,594
	Internship participation rate (%)	1.8	2.6	3.1	2.9	3.0
	1st and 2nd year undergraduates as a percentage of all undergraduates (%)	20.1	26.2	28.6	30.5	35.1
	3rd year undergraduates as a percentage of all undergraduates (%)	71.1	61.2	56.4	56.5	51.4
Survey by private-sector employment information enterprises	Recruit Career Co., Ltd.	—	39.9	43.7	55.9	70.8
	Mynavi Corporation	—	58.2	62.1	78.7	85.3
	DISCO Inc.	—	42.7	51.2	70.0	77.2

Sources: MEXT, “Status of Internships at Universities, etc.” (results for each year); Recruit Career/Recruit Shushoku Mirai Kenkyusho (2021a); Mynavi Corporation (2021); and DISCO (2021).

Notes: 1. The MEXT survey covers internships for which credit is given, and which are not related to the acquisition of a specific qualification.

2. The denominator of the participation rate in the MEXT survey is the total number of undergraduates, and assuming that students participate in the survey once during their time at university, the participation rate can be multiplied by four to obtain something closer to the actual figure.

3. The private-sector employment information enterprise survey was conducted on students (mainly third-year undergraduates) scheduled to graduate in March of the year after the following year. Recruit Career survey and MyNavi Corporation survey include first-year graduate students.

Table 2. Composition of students' internship participation duration

	2006	2014	2015	2017	2019	(Ref.) 2021 graduates (Recruit)
1 day	11.1	2.0	5.4	2.1	2.7	75.0
2 days or more/less than 1 week	50.1	29.4	31.9	30.8	35.0	56.8
1 week or more/less than 2 weeks	27.3	44.1	38.2	42.2	35.0	11.0
2 weeks or more/less than 3 weeks	4.6	11.7	9.0	7.1	11.1	5.2
3 weeks or more/less than 1 month	4.4	3.2	3.8	5.5	5.7	2.0
1 month or more/less than 2 months	1.9	2.4	2.7	3.1	2.3	1.4
2 months or more/less than 3 months	0.6	1.0	2.6	2.2	2.8	—
3 months or more	0.0	5.0	4.2	6.3	4.5	—
Unknown	0.0	1.3	2.0	0.7	0.9	—

Sources: MEXT, "Status of Internships at Universities, etc." (results for each year); Recruit Career/Recruit Shushoku Mirai Kenkyusho (2021a.)

Note: The total in the ref. does not add up to 100 as the survey by Recruit allows for multiple responses.

conducted by the MEXT, the status of "internships not related to acquisition of specific qualifications" is that (1) the number of participants in internships is steadily increasing, but (2) the participation rate remains relatively low and (3) the percentage of internships with short duration is high. These trends have become more pronounced in recent years.

Next, a survey of student internships conducted by private-sector employment information enterprises shows that the participation rate has generally been around 70-80% in recent years, indicating an upward trend. In terms of duration, "one-day internships" have accounted for the majority in recent years, meaning that the number of internships that cannot be considered "work experience" as defined by the Three-Ministry Agreement is on the rise.

The results of surveys conducted by the public sector (MEXT) and the private sector (employment information enterprises) show both similarities and differences in results, as follows. The similarities are that the participation rate of university students is basically rising, and that this trend is more pronounced due to the shorter duration of internships. Meanwhile, the differences are that there is a large gap in the participation rate, and that many students participate for longer periods of time according to the MEXT survey. The reason for this discrepancy can be attributed to the difference in the scope of the surveys: the MEXT survey targets only student initiatives that are known to the universities, and the details of internships that students apply for or participate in on their own without going through the university are basically unknown to the universities, whereas the employment information enterprise survey targets students who are registered with the same enterprises and are engaged in job hunting activities. Thus it can be said that the participation rate found by the employment information enterprise survey is naturally higher than that of the MEXT survey, which covers all years of university and not only the later years when students are job hunting. Since the former survey targets students who are registered with employment information enterprises, it shows the situation of those students who are more actively conducting job hunting activities than the average.

When quantitative changes are examined from the perspective of "educational purposes" and "employment/recruitment purposes," it can be said that, contrary to the historical background discussed in Section II, the reality is that employment/recruitment purposes are the main focus. It is for this reason that warning bells regarding this trend have repeatedly been sounded, in the form of reiterations of the idea that internships are for educational purposes.

IV. Present situation of internships in other countries in comparison with Japan

Internships in the United States are characterized by the existence of both internships and cooperative

education. According to the Industrial Structure Improvement Fund (1998), cooperative education, carried out by universities as part of curricula, is a type of educational program in which students alternate between learning a specialized field of study and actual work experience related to that field during their school years, and is proactively managed and administered by universities in cooperation with enterprises. Internships, on the other hand, are operated and managed by enterprises, and cooperation between universities and enterprises is rather weak, with internship programs generally offered during summer and spring vacations. Internships may be unpaid in some cases. In recent years, however, both types of internships are generally paid.

According to the Recruit Works Institute (2015a), internships in the US are characterized as follows: (1) over 90% of surveyed enterprises offer internships, but only about half of them offer both cooperative education and internship programs, and no enterprises were implementing only cooperative education. (2) The duration of internships was shorter than that of cooperative education, with most of the internships lasting 6 to 12 weeks. (3) The results also revealed that for about 70% of the respondents, the purpose of internships was “to recruit entry-level human resources,” and in fact, 81% of interns who had done internships at their companies were hired as regular employees.

In other words, cooperative education is more strongly for educational purposes and is university-led, while internships are more strongly for employment/recruitment purposes and are implemented by enterprises. The duration of both types of programs is approximately six weeks to several months, which is very different from internships in Japan. As for internships implemented by enterprises, programs are conducted for the purpose of employment and recruitment, which is a point in common with the reality of Japanese internships. American internship programs are conducted so as to grasp the abilities of students, and participants are paid whereas Japanese internship programs are very short-term and are intended to form a pool of students from which to recruit employees. The fact that 80% of student interns are hired after completing internships during their school years indicates that internship selection plays a significant role in the actual hiring process in the US. In the US such early headhunting of students appears to be growing more commonplace. In Japan, where internship gained popularity amid accusations that enterprises were headhunting students too early during their university careers, the programs have avoided associating internships directly with employment, resulting in the spread of considerably short internships.

In the UK, the “sandwich course” is well known as a traditional form of industry-academia cooperative education. According to Inenaga (2013), it is a type of degree program that incorporates work experience into the undergraduate curriculum. As of the 2010/11 academic year, students taking sandwich courses accounted for 9.3% of all full-time undergraduate students. There are two kinds of courses, one entailing one year of work experience and the other two work experiences of about six months each, for which students are paid as a rule. Internships for the purpose of employment and recruitment are conducted separately from the sandwich courses, the same as those in the US. According to the Recruit Works Institute (2015b), some internships in the UK used to last from several months to a year, but recently they have grown shorter and usually last four to eight weeks during summer vacation, with some micro-internships, two to four weeks in length, also seen. While the shortening of the duration of internships resembles what is occurring in Japan, internships in the UK and those in the US, are longer than those in Japan.⁴

A phenomenon seen in both the US and the UK is the expansion of industry-academia cooperative education, including internships, with an orientation toward employment and recruitment. Traditional industry-academia cooperative education, such as American cooperative education and British sandwich courses, still plays an important role for educational purposes. However, with the problem of youth unemployment spreading globally, internships for the purpose of employment/recruitment are being enhanced and their duration shortened, either separately from or in addition to these programs. This trend can be seen in Japan as well, but the major differences are that internships generally last from a few weeks to a few months compared to Japan, where internships last for a few days, and that as a rule participants are paid.

In terms of research on internships, Iwai (2019a) summarized previous studies on internships in Japan and

Table 3. Industry-academia cooperative education, higher education system, labor market, and connections between education and labor market (Japan and other countries)

	Level of commitment to industry-academia cooperative education	Higher education system			Labor market			Connections between education and labor market	
		Relationship with society	Age range of students	Gaps in selectivity	Mobility	Human resource development	Wage differential	Relevance of education to occupation	Evaluation of utility of education
US	High	Medium	Low	High	High	Not in-house	Large	Medium	Medium
UK	Medium	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Not in-house	Large	Medium	Low
Germany	High	Strong High	High	Low	Medium	Not in-house	Medium	Medium	Medium
Finland	Medium	Strong High	High	Low	High	Not in-house	Small	High	High
China	Medium	Low	Low	High	High	Not in-house	Large	Low	Low
Japan	Low	Low	Low	High	Low	In-house	Large	Low	Low

Note: Broadly classified by the author on the basis of previous research.

abroad and points out that, compared to Japan, there are fewer studies on the educational effects of internships and rather more studies investigating the effects of internships on recruitment. Meanwhile, Mitate (2017) summarized previous studies on internships in Japan and found that there were fewer studies on connections between internships and recruitment and on connections between internships and careers after being hired compared to those on internship design and evaluation and on the role and definition of internships, and attributed this to the fact that internships in Japan were initially designed to be part of education.

Also, when industry-academia cooperative education including internships is viewed from an international comparative perspective, the OECD (2010), referring to the work of Acemoglu and Pischke (1999), found that the recruitment benefits of participating in industry-academia cooperative education in enterprises depend on labor market characteristics and regulations, such as labor mobility, wage elasticity, and the strength of job security. Table 3 summarizes differences in the degree of commitment to industry-academia cooperative education, the higher education system, the labor market, and the relationship between education and the labor market in Japan and other countries. For example, in countries where students tend to be older, industry-academia cooperative education may be easier, while the need for it may be relatively lower as students have more societal experience. In addition, countries where there is not extensive in-house training, enterprises may be more likely to recruit employees who are capable of working right away, and place more emphasis on students' professional skills and expertise, thus requiring a means of identifying appropriate recruits. Of course, it is difficult to clarify the relationship between internships and industry-academia cooperative education only through the data on this table. However, in the future, when making international comparisons of industry-academia cooperative education programs such as internships, it is necessary to refer to the labor market and enterprises' behavior, including differences in the working environment and employment management, in addition to the educational system and curriculum.

V. Recent changes to internships in Japan

Contrary to the intentions of universities and government, and regardless of their benefits and drawbacks, internships for the purpose of employment and recruitment have become mainstream. A similar trend can be seen in other countries as well, although the duration and content of internships differs greatly.

However, it is also true that as this trend has become mainstream there have been various criticisms over the years, and there have been some programs that do not include work experience and cannot actually be considered internships. For this reason, the MEXT established the "Internship Reporting and Commendation System for Universities, etc." in FY2018, and set six criteria for selecting internship programs for commendation: (1) the

program must involve work experience, (2) the program must be positioned within the regular educational curriculum, (3) the program must be positioned as an organized effort of the university or other educational institution, (4) a system must be in place to monitor the educational effects of the internship, (5) internship duration must be five days or more, and (6) the university and enterprise, etc. must collaborate on the internship program. (MEXT, Higher Education Bureau 2018). Judging from the above, it is clear that internships with greater emphasis on educational purposes are the focus. From among the initiatives⁵ commended in FY2018 and FY2019, the following are some of the most distinctive examples: (1) long-term internships, (2) internships for younger students, and, in addition to these, as a new trend, (3) online internships implemented in many universities and enterprises since FY2020 from the perspective of preventing the transmission of COVID-19, and case studies of these programs and recent previous studies dealing with their effects were addressed. Section V-2 below will discuss the concept of programs that combine educational purposes and employment/recruitment purposes, focusing on comparisons with conventional internships and part-time jobs, as well as with approaches in other countries.

While Subsections V-1-(1) and V-1-(2) focus on university-led internships with an awareness of being for educational purposes, the internships discussed in V-2 can be said to transcend the dichotomy of “educational purposes” vs. “employment/recruitment purposes.”

1. Recent changes

(1) Long-term internships

As described above, the extremely short duration of internships in Japan compared to other countries is a major issue, but some universities do offer long-term internships. According to a survey by the MEXT, a small but not negligible 9.6% (in 2019) of students participated in internships lasting more than one month (Table 2).

Based on a case study at one university, Takazawa and Kawai (2018) clarified the educational effects of long-term internships and identified three factors that contribute to their effectiveness: specific goal setting, reflection and feedback; mechanisms to support the stretch assignment experience; and an overall program design that consciously connects to the daily lives of university students. Yamamoto (2019), also based on a single-university case study, while noting that the effects of long-term internships remain at the stage of “opportunities to cultivate” various abilities, also positions them as a type of internship that ought to exist in the future. Yamamoto states that although it does not connect directly to hiring, it has been shown to be an opportunity to form a “potential pool of human resources” that is optimal for students and enterprises.

As described above, long-term internships are being implemented by many universities for educational purposes, but research on these internships is mainly based on single-university case studies, and more comprehensive research is expected to obtain further results in the future.

(2) Internships for students in earlier grades of university

Because internships in Japan, contrary to their originally intended purpose, have developed mainly for the purposes of employment and recruitment, the participants have primarily been third-year undergraduate students and first-year master’s program students. However, as shown in Table 1, the internship participation rate of first- and second-year undergraduates is on the rise, though they are still in the minority.

The Council proposes that internships in their earlier grades of university, as distinguished from internships for those in later years, be promoted as “career education for early-year students” that will improve their understanding of work at enterprises, and of industries and occupations, and motivate their subsequent university studies (Industry-Academia Council on the Future of Employment and University Education 2020).

Also, based on the recommendations of Doyukai (2015), the Advanced Internship Institute of Doyukai, established by enterprises and universities and led by Doyukai, has been offering long-term internships for first- and second-year undergraduate students since 2016.⁶ Kameno, Kaji, and Kawakami (2017) identified the characteristics and effects of internships conducted within this framework.

Matsuzaka and Yamamoto (2019) also found that internship participants in earlier grades became more career-conscious and expressed the significance of work verbally more than non-participants. In addition, Iwai (2019b) found that the effects of internship programs on university students' motivation to learn and to reevaluate university life were similar to those of the internship program for later-year students. However, none of these studies clearly compared the effects of internships with those for later-year students, and effects specific to younger students are unclear.

In the future, there is a need to systematize division of roles between internships for earlier- and later-grade students and integrate the two in an organic fashion, as well as to conduct empirical research on the effectiveness of such internships.

(3) Online internships

To prevent the spread of COVID-19, online internships rapidly grew more prevalent in FY2020. According to Recruit Career/Recruit Shushoku Mirai Kenkyusho (2021b), the rate of participation in face-to-face internships among the class of 2022 was 68.3%, while the online participation rate was 89.1%. Even taking into account the special circumstances that have made it difficult to conduct face-to-face internships during the pandemic, there is a high possibility that online internships will continue to play a significant role post-pandemic.

Under these circumstances, in the document "Points for Improving the Educational Value of Online Training" (2020), Doyukai clarified the strengths and weaknesses of online training, reaffirmed the unique educational effects of face-to-face training, and proposed an appropriate combination of face-to-face and online training in the post-pandemic world. Ito, Ogushi, and Nakai (2021) also note that remote internships have many advantages for workplaces by freeing them from temporal, spatial, and risk-management constraints, and that a hybrid of face-to-face and remote models can further expand the possibilities of internships.

As of today, there are few systematic studies of online internships, but the future of online internships in a post-pandemic environment is a focus of attention.

2. Programs for combined purposes of educational and employment/recruitment

As seen in Section I, there is no clear dichotomy between educational and employment/recruitment purposes, and there is middle ground between the two. The Council has proposed "job-type research internships" as a type of program that combines the two (Industry-Academia Council on the Future of Employment and University Education 2020).

Furthermore, based on the discussions in the Job-Type Research Internship Promotion Committee jointly established by the MEXT's Higher Education Bureau and Keidanren in 2020, the MEXT "Job-Based Research Internships (Innovative and Trial Programs) Implementation Policy (Guidelines)" set forth specific measures for the future of job-based research internships (MEXT, Higher Education Bureau 2021). The guidelines state that such internship programs are to be long-term, paid job-type internships, with areas of focus including activities for recruitment and employment. Specifically, they are intended for graduate students with the basic knowledge and ability to conduct research, are long-term (two months or more) and paid, and can be incorporated into the recruitment and selection process.

The type of internship (hereinafter referred to as "job-type internships") proposed by the MEXT and others above is expected to expand in the future. Meanwhile, the word "part-time job" is not included in the above proposal. However, a comparison of internship and part-time jobs shows that these internships can be seen as an intermediate format that combines the characteristics of both, in light of the objectives of students and enterprises, as shown in Figure 2. While part-time jobs for university students primarily provide inexpensive labor for enterprises and sources of income for students, as their effects are similar to those of internships, it is possible that they could be developed as an intermediate format between internships for educational purposes and part-time jobs.

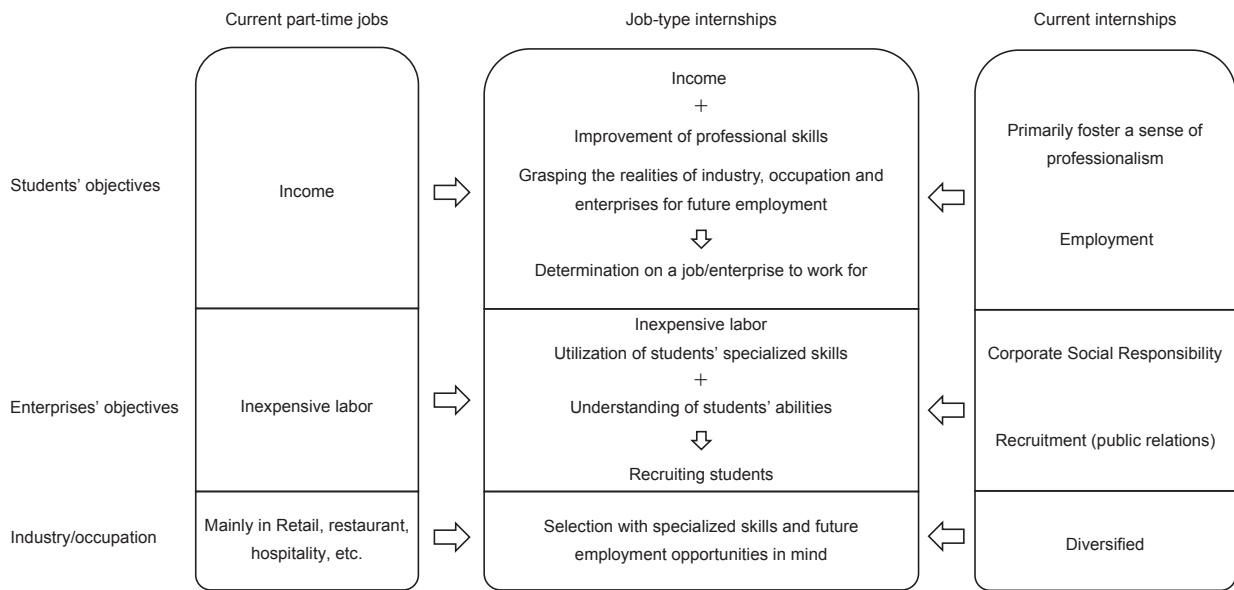


Figure 2. Job-type internships in relation with part-time jobs and internships

	Paid	Unpaid
Educational purposes ⇕	Cooperative education (US), sandwich courses (UK) etc. Job-type internships (Japan)	Internships (Japan), etc.
Employment/recruitment purposes	Internships (US), etc.	
Source of income/Source of labor	Part-time jobs (Japan) etc.	

Figure 3. Positioning of job-type internships: international comparison

According to the Japan Student Services Organization (2020), 86.1% of (daytime) university students have part-time jobs, and these are clearly a part of student life for many university students. Yoshimoto (2015) states that, depending on the conditions, the possibility of part-time jobs fulfilling a function similar to that of an internship needs to be considered.

Some studies have pointed out negative aspects of part-time jobs, such as interference with academic work (e.g., Kidoguchi 2013; Watanabe 2015), while others have analyzed their positive effects on career attitudes (e.g., Sugiyama 2009; Sekiguchi 2010), on the improvement of generic skills (e.g., Mitate 2007; Ishiyama 2017), or their relationships with recruitment and hiring (Hirao, Umezaki and Tazawa 2018; Kamenno 2020). However, there are no studies on intermediate formats between internships and part-time jobs.

In addition to this article’s categorization according to “educational purposes” and “employment/recruitment purposes,” if we also incorporate the question of paid vs. unpaid and draw comparisons with initiatives in other countries as described in Section IV, job-type internships can be called an intermediate form between cooperative education (US), sandwich courses (UK), and internships (US) (Figure 3).

The job-type internships advocated by the MEXT and others are intended for graduate students. It is expected that these internships will be expanded to include undergraduate students in the future.

VI. In closing

This article has examined the past policies, the current situation, comparisons with other countries, and recent trends with regard to internship programs for university students in Japan, from the perspective of whether the internships are conducted for “educational purposes” or “employment/recruitment purposes.” It has reviewed the history of internships for Japanese university students, and clarified their characteristics using statistical data. These characteristics are: (1) while the number of participants is increasing, the duration of programs is growing shorter and shorter, and (2) universities and governments emphasize that the programs are for educational purposes, but in reality, they are conducted for employment/recruitment purposes. As for overseas trends, cooperative education in the US and sandwich courses in the UK play important roles as industry-academia cooperative education for educational purposes, but the study also showed that internships focused on employment and recruitment are expanding, and therefore, in examining industry-academia cooperative education from the perspective of international comparison, it is necessary to focus on relationships between industry-academia cooperative education and labor market characteristics. This article also described how recent notable developments in Japan have been characterized by a number of factors. First, three types of diversified internships were discussed, and second, the contents of internships for educational purposes and employment and recruitment purposes combined were compared with those in other countries to clarify related issues and the positioning of internships.

In Japan, the introduction of internships triggered by discussions on employment and recruitment of university students, but once internships as a means of career education was focused, educational purposes came to the fore. In reality, however, internships with a focus on employment and recruitment spread, reflecting the trend of a sellers’ market for new graduates in the labor market. Meanwhile, the content of internships was meager compared to other countries, as exemplified by the ultra-short duration of many internships. In response to this trend, the importance of educational objectives for internships was frequently pointed out, and internships for longer periods of time and those in earlier grades of university became more widespread.

When discussing the future direction of Japanese internships positioned as being for employment and recruitment purposes, it is necessary to devise ways to link internships to enterprises’ understanding of students’ abilities and students’ grasping of the corporate culture, rather than simply utilizing internship to form a pool of potential recruits through ultra-short-term programs such as “one-day internship.” At the same time, internship programs should not be examined by itself, but rather their relationship to recruitment and job-hunting and the hiring en masse of new graduates should be discussed. In other countries, while internships for employment/recruitment purposes are spreading, as a rule these last at least one month to assess students’ abilities. By contrast, the ultra-short-term internships common in Japan reflect the fact that the country’s traditional practice of hiring new university graduates en masse requires a large pool of human resources to draw on in a short period of time. On the other hand, if internships are considered to be for educational purposes, the focus should not be solely on the motivational effects of internships on students, but rather on clarifying abilities to be developed. Also, the nature of internships should be discussed, including programs that can be expected to have similar effects, such as part-time work, intermediate formats between internships and part-time work, PBL (project-based learning), and field work.

However, the necessity of clearly dividing internships into two categories – for educational purposes, and for employment/recruitment purposes – should also be re-examined. It is natural to expect that internships will help students improve both specialized and general abilities and cultivate a professional mentality, and at the same time will help them understand the abilities and corporate culture required by the enterprises they hope to work for, which will in turn help them find future employment. On the other hand, if enterprises, as part of the world of industry, can not only contribute to improving the skills of young future members of the workforce but also accurately locate the human resources they seek through internship programs that enable assessment of students’ skills, then it will be a win-win situation. It should be remembered that internships are not an end in themselves,

but a means of heightening skills for students, and facilitating smooth recruitment and hiring for enterprises.

A quarter of a century has passed since internships were first fully introduced in Japan, and amid changes in the socioeconomic structure, various experiments with the nature of internships themselves have been carried out. It is important to reconsider the definition if confusion arises from defining such diverse activities with the single word “internship.” However, internships are only one means to an end, and there is scope for diversity of objectives. Indeed, in an increasingly diverse society, the fact that there are various objectives should be viewed in a positive light.

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Notes

1. For example, according to Tanaka (2007), there were provisions for student teaching (for teachers in training) in the regulations for teachers’ universities promulgated in 1907, which included the phrase “student teaching,” and student teaching programs were subsequently offered at teachers’ universities nationwide. Also, industrial training was conducted at the Imperial College of Engineering, the predecessor of the University of Tokyo, Faculty of Engineering, in the 1870s and at Tokyo Vocational School, the predecessor of Tokyo Institute of Technology, in the 1890s.
2. For details, see the Japan Society of Internship and Work Integrated Learning 10th Anniversary Working Group (2011).
3. In the appended “Approach to Enterprises’ Use of Student Information Obtained through Internships in Public Relations, Recruitment and Hiring,” the “Basic Handling” section states that “student information may not be used for public relations, recruitment and hiring,” which can be seen as quite a stringent restriction. However, the notes in the document state that “If entry sheets, transcripts, etc. submitted by students to enterprises contain information on internship participation, feedback results and so forth, they may be used for public relations, recruitment and hiring in the same manner as other academic performance records.”
4. In France, long-term work experience programs known as *stage en entreprise* are carried out, and while they continue to have educational significance, they have come to be considered part of the job-hunting process and an indispensable prerequisite for students to find work (Isohata 2020). In China as well, amid a worsening employment environment, internships have become an indispensable means of successfully advancing in the job hunting process, and internships for university students in China today are strongly characterized by job-hunting, rather than education, as a basic element (Fu 2014).
5. The initiatives of commended universities are introduced on the MEXT website. For AY2018, see https://www.mext.go.jp/content/1411892_02_1.pdf. For AY2019, see https://www.mext.go.jp/content/20200309-mxt_senmon01-100003720_4.pdf.
6. For information on the activities of the Advanced Internship Institute of Doyukai, see the website: <https://www.doyukai-internship.or.jp/internship/>.

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