

What are some Issues Surrounding the Phenomenon of Japanese Students Sleeping in Class and has this Pattern Changed over Time?

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ABSTRACT--- *Despite all the talk about educational reform in Japanese educational institutions, it would seem there is little hope for real reform, without changing the basic system. Educators cannot do much while the whole system is exam and job-oriented.*

Students' sleeping in the classroom in high school and university is endemic in Japan and is widely perceived as a serious problem for many educators. Is sleeping in class a result of this system failure and is this behavior inevitable?

The issue of sleeping in class is certainly a concern for second language teaching and learning. The complex blend of why the students are sleeping in class, why it is allowed, and in some instances encouraged is considered in this research. The specific focus is whether this pattern of sleeping in class has changed over time. Qualitative techniques were used in this research with 33 mixed age participants interviewed in individual and focus group settings. The results from this study clearly show the importance of the teachers' role in ensuring students stay awake in class, and how the teacher's attitude and approach to teaching and learning have a major impact on student behavior. It can be firmly concluded from research that teachers' skills in the classroom are positively related to students' achievement (e.g. Brophy & Good, 1986; Galton et al., 1999; Hirsch, 2000).

Interview results indicate there is little or no difference in students' sleeping in class pattern' over the last 35 – 40 years. Students at university and high school continue to sleep in class and often with the teachers' permission.

Keywords – sleeping in class, motivation, silence in the classroom, cultural issues

1. INTRODUCTION

Are the Japanese notions of punctuality, perseverance, diligence, long study hours and part time work really impacting on a student's ability to be awake and attentive, motivated and contributing? Are there underlying cultural issues and considerations? Or is it simply a matter of the lesson structure, content and delivery that is not stimulating. Prior to entering a university the practice and acceptance of sleeping in class is well established, both by teachers and students alike.

The issue of sleeping in class is complex. Much of what occurs in schools between and among students and teachers is an expression of traits valued and/or accepted in the broader culture. Japanese schools are no exception as they seek to educate students in various subjects, and also to socialize students so that they are able to function smoothly in the society in which they live. As a result, in Japanese schools, interactions are based, among other things, on listener responsibility, group mindedness, consensual decision-making, and formalized speechmaking (Anderson, 1993, p.104). Traditionally, the Japanese view of a good student tended to value those who were “quiet, passive, and obedient youths who perform well on tests” (Nozaki, 1993, p 28).

In Japan almost all students are admitted to high school based upon entrance examination performance. Since entering a high-ranked high school increases a student's chance of a high-ranked university admission a lot of importance is placed on these examinations. The desire to be accepted into a high level university means “High school students attempting to enter a university with a good reputation are urged to follow the slogan ‘yonto goraku’, or ‘four (hours sleep) pass, five fail’ and curtail night-time sleep” (Stegar, 2006, p. 197). “One has to think of education in Japan,” wrote sociologist

Ronald Dore in 1982, “as an enormously elaborate, very expensive testing system with educational spinoffs, rather than the other way around.” In many instances, the delivery of lessons has not changed since that time. In typical Japanese classrooms the method of instruction continues to be a top-down teaching style (Zembylas, 2004). It often involves direct instruction through methods such as lecturing whereby students experience passive styles of learning with a focus on the memorization of facts.

Remnants of Confucianism that used to be taught intensively at school from the Edo period (Finkelstein, Imamura, & Tobin, 1991; Harumi, 1999; Lebra, 1987) are evident in Japanese classrooms even today. In Confucianism, for example, respect for social order and seniority is highly valued and sleep is believed to be an urge or desire which can and must be controlled by will and effort. However in direct contrast with this basic idea is the widely accepted notion of public sleep, known as “inemuri” (literally to be present and asleep), which can be witnessed in many public places, from trains to the classroom! The importance of controlling feelings and desires is part of many students ethical training. Sleeping in class, therefore, would seem to be something students are choosing to do with little regard for teachers or lessons. This would seem to be acceptable behaviour in many classrooms.

Other cultural issues include the Japanese preference to be perfect and their respect for listening to others rather than speaking for themselves. Research shows that classrooms that emphasize correctness usually result in learners who are inhibited and will not take chances using their knowledge to communicate (Lightbown & Spada, 1999; Truscott, 1999; Russell & Spada, 2006). It is claimed that egalitarianism and group consciousness in schools contribute to a high standard of student achievement, but that at the same time, hampers the development of individuality and creativity (Shogo, 1991; Kaoru, 2001). This lack of personal involvement appears to produce students who lack motivation and who like to sleep (Dweck, 2000; Jones, 2000).

This research acknowledges the “socio-cultural norms, worldviews, beliefs, assumptions, and value systems that find their way into practically all facets of language use, including the classroom, and language teaching and learning.” (Hinkel, 2007). This includes sleeping in class. Many Japanese regard this behavior as self-evident and axiomatic. It is therefore necessary to acknowledge at the beginning of this research the importance of being culturally sensitive and responsive when seeking answers, explanations and offering possible solutions to students sleeping in class. It is not about making judgments but rather about developing an understanding of this phenomenon and seeking ways to support better learning opportunities for students.

How do educators inspire and motivate students to be on task and awake when this has not necessarily been a requirement of all classroom practice in their past? Do factors such as boredom, cultural differences and sleep deprivation mean that students will sleep in class? Or are there some major improvements that could take place in the classroom setting that would discourage sleeping? This research investigated the opinions and feelings of a range of high school, university and post university women on the reasons, as they perceived them, for sleeping in class.

The results from this qualitative study clearly show the importance of the teachers’ role in ensuring students stay awake in class, and how the teacher’s attitude and approach to teaching and learning have a major impact on student behavior. It can be firmly concluded from research that teachers’ skills in the classroom are positively related to students’ achievement (Brophy, 2000; Galton, Hargreaves, Comber, Pell & Wall, 1999).

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 The importance of attending class

Attendance in class is considered important by the Japanese student, “most important is 100 percent attendance” (White, 1993: 181). Japanese students consider being present in the classroom as an important factor in reflecting good work ethic. According to McVeigh (2002) schooling is “simulated” and rituals such as taking attendance substitute for measures of achievement. The fact you may be sleeping appears irrelevant.

2.2 Teaching styles

Traditional style, lecture type teaching is still the norm in Japan. Norris (2004) describes Japanese high schools as places of passive learning through lecture-style lessons that focus on memorization of facts, the use of textbooks and preparation for university entrance exams.

Steger (2006) concludes that the rather tedious lecturing style at high schools and universities is mandated not only by the fact-laden exam material, but also by the large class size.

The two main teaching methods used to learn English in junior high school and high school, and which reflect this traditional teaching style are firstly, an analysis of grammar forms, and translation between English and Japanese. This

method is called *yakudoku* (Hino, 1988; Gorsuch, 1998, 2001). The second main method used is by practicing grammar forms in oral repetition. This method focuses on engraining form-correct statements, questions, and responses as habit.

2.3 Silence in class

Japanese language learners' proclivity for silence has been alluded to by various writers (e.g. Anderson 1993; Korst 1997; Greer 2000) and is supported by plenty of anecdotal evidence. Some reasons for this silence have already been alluded to such as Japanese preference to be perfect, their respect for listening to others, the traditional lecture- teaching style and Confucianism (Kusaka, 2013).

In King's (2013) research, students were found to be responsible for less than one per cent of initiated talk within their classes, while over a fifth of all class time observed was characterized by no oral participation by any participants, staff, or students alike. There is a large body of literature showing significant progress being made through oral interactions in second language development (DeKeyser, 1998; Doughty & Williams, 1998; Izumi 2003; Swain 2005). Students' reluctance and lack of opportunities to engage orally in class lessons is of concern.

Despite Japanese students often being criticised for lack of talking in class “the absence of talk does not mean the absence of learning” (Schultz, 2009, p.5). Some students prefer to absorb knowledge and think further through listening or “silent participation” (Schultz, 2009, p.61). Silence can also be contextual and as such can be seen as positive (Bosacki, 2005; Schultz, 2009; Shuttleworth, 1990). It would seem from these studies that students may still be learning and participating in the lesson even though they were silent. It may also mean in a silent classroom, where listening is the main activity and participation is not required, those lapses in attention and sleeping are inevitable for some.

2.4 Motivation

If Japanese students are to learn a foreign language and put a lot of energy into this, they must have high levels of motivation. Studies have looked at student motivation from a vast range of approaches. These, amongst others, have included social psychological (Gardner, 1985; Gardener & Lambert, 1972; Ushioda, 2003; Williams and Burden, 1997), feminist and post-structuralist (Norton, 2000), and more recently, self and identity (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2009; Sakui & Cowie, 2012).

These approaches consider students and their learning process. However of growing interest and concern is the lack of research surrounding how and why teachers go about motivating their students (Sakui & Cowie, 2011). The motivational practices of teachers, is often a key ingredient in influencing student performance (Brophy, 2010; Falout, Elwood & Hood, 2009)

2.5 University Entrance Examination

The entrance exams for Japanese universities are considered very difficult (Brown & Yamashita, 1995a, b). Many Japanese consider university entrance exams to be the greatest challenge in their lifetime, *juken jigoku* (examination hell). “Thus there is a general belief that a student's performance in one crucial examination at about the age of 18 is likely to determine the rest of their life. In other words, the university entrance examination is the primary sorting device for careers in Japanese society. The result is not an *aristocracy* of birth, but a sort of *degree-ocracy*” (OECD, Reviews of National Policies for Education: JAPAN. 1971 p.89)

Japanese high school students take *Juku* (evening and weekend cram school classes), for years before the big test. A high score ensures entrance to a top university. Once you get into a good university a student has got an excellent chance of getting into a top company. With Japan's system of lifetime employment — they are set for life. Once university entrance is gained, Japanese university is generally considered easy and professors demand relatively little from their students (Frost, 1991; Amano, 1995; Sugimoto, 1997). McVeigh (2002) indicts the local university system as a *de facto* system of employment agencies or at best, a waiting room before students hit the assembly line working world.

3. THE STUDY

3.1 Research Questions

The data gathering method used in this research was narrative interviews.

Informed by the literature, this study considered the following questions:

1. Why do Japanese students sleep in English Language classes and has this phenomenon changed over time?
2. Can something be done to increase the motivation and participation of Japanese students in English language classes?

4. METHOD

4.1 Participants and Setting

The participants in this study were taken from a range of age groups and settings in a large Japanese urban area. Participants were from a junior high school (2), high school (2), university (25), housewives in the 25 -30 age group (2) and middle aged housewives in the 50 plus age group (2). All were female and all had or were receiving their education in Japan. The university students attended three different universities. The interviews took place in a school, university or participant's home setting. Some interviews were on a one to one basis if the participant could communicate in English or a focus group interview was arranged with students and a translator to assist. The purpose of the age range was to gather information on historical change in the behavior of sleeping in class.

4.2 Data collection

The study employed a qualitative methodology, which was suitable given the need to question at some depth the underlying feelings of participants from their own perspective. The participants needed to be able to tease out their ideas without the "suggestion" or implication of pre-set questions. Once responses were forthcoming it was imperative to be able to go below the surface answer and get the next level of in depth response for clarification. The questions asked of each individual or focus group were the same, but with the understanding that the interviewer could follow a response with further questioning if clarity was needed or a new idea emerged. "Qualitative research methods are designed to describe and understand certain patterns of behavior by accessing the intentions, motives, beliefs, attitudes, rules and values that lie beneath them and make actions and behavior meaningful" (Draper,2004,p.644).

In the following section the participants, whether they are a focus group and therefore a part of a group response, or interviewed as individuals, are given a letter for identification. A brief background of their age, level of schooling, and reason for participating is given. This is followed by their responses and "musings" when asked questions about sleeping in class. There are also a number of participants "voices" to indicate the authenticity of their responses. The ensuing discussion provides a gathering of the themes and ideas from the issues raised so that a picture of the aspects that most lead to sleeping in class will emerge strongly.

5. FINDINGS

5.1 The interviews

Focus Group 1 –F1 (students A and B)

Students A and B are both at Junior high school. They are 14 years old and felt very comfortable speaking with us. Both students were involved with sports clubs.

Key responses

These students indicated that many of their classmates do fall asleep when allowed to. Student A stayed awake and student B would take a nap, on average about 20 minutes per day. One teacher in particular was very scary (and mean) and he wouldn't allow the students to sleep. When asked why students slept they suggested that many students were very tired. If they were in a busy club activity then they had early starts and late finishes. Some students went to Juku (after school, evening and weekend classes) and they studied late. Some left for school very early and they were just tired so they needed sleep. I asked if there was anything else that contributed to students sleeping and they both laughed and said "yes". The main reason reported was that the classes were very boring. When asked to explain boring they said that "the teacher just spoke the whole time." If the teacher wasn't talking then they were writing on the board and the students had to copy it. Student contributions were not asked for and certainly not encouraged.

When asked what would help keep you awake and interested the students responded "If we could talk about the lesson. Also if the teacher is friendly and fun we are interested."

Both students also reported that teachers scolded incorrect contributions, and this made you feel bad, so it was better to remain silent.

Focus Group 2-F2 (students C and D)

Students C and D attend high school. Student C is a sports club participant and she attends Juku and studies English. Her day is long by the time she has done club activities, Juku, bathed and washed, had dinner and done her homework. Student D is a focused academic student. Her focus is on studying hard and she puts a lot of time into this. She also attends Juku.

Key responses

When asked if these students ever fall asleep in class they both responded that they did. They said that their friends also fell asleep if they felt tired. When trying to measure how often they slept it was most days. They reported maybe 20-30 minutes sleeping or longer. They weren't woken and although they felt they shouldn't really sleep they couldn't help it. The reason for sleeping was that students got very tired especially around exam time but all year they were busy. Clubs, Juku and study were the main reason for being tired. They also watched movies until quite late and were talking to friends via social media sites. When asked if there were any other reasons, they responded very quickly with "yes the classes are so boring". "The teacher does all the talking and we tire of his talking." "The teacher also writes on the board and we have to copy it." "If someone asks a question then the other students get angry with that person as it can make the lesson go on longer." "The lesson content is also very boring. It's the same book each day and it is not very interesting." The teacher leads the students in order through the book providing little or no stimulus. "Sometimes there are 6 or 7 students asleep at the same time in our class!"

Focus group 3-F3 (students E, F, G and H)

These four students are year 2 nursing students. Their course is very full and there are a vast range of reports to be written and homework to do. They each have part-time jobs. As part of their course they do practicum activities in hospitals that ensure long hours of work as well as assignments.

Key responses

When I asked these University students if they ever fell asleep in class, they laughed. One student showed me the arm of her blouse and it was red. I asked her what it was and she informed me it was lipstick, because she puts her head in her arm when she sleeps. All four of these high level students sleep most days in class and sometimes for the whole session. "The seats at the back of the room are best as you are away from the teacher but lots of students want those seats." They don't sleep all day in every class but "most days in most classes" unless they have practical components. When asked why they slept, they told me that the classes are not interesting and the teacher talks the whole time and writes notes on the board. "The same voice talking, talking, talking". "If they use a PowerPoint it is just words and they read them." "There are no opportunities for questions or to share your ideas." Student E informed me that if you ask a question you get "the look" from other students. "They are not happy with you. If you remain silent then the class may finish early and you can go."

When asked what would motivate you in a classroom, they replied with, "a friendly teacher. Someone who encouraged questions and set up discussions. Interesting presentations would be a big help".

Student I

Student I is an independent and well performing academic student. She is 21 years old. She attends a high level university and commits a lot of her time to study and mastering her courses. Her English is excellent and she was most able in expressing her points of view.

Key responses

Student I has learnt to sleep in class. At high school she seldom slept but over time it has become a necessary habit to survive. She studies hard in the evening and sets her own pace. She recognizes the need to attend class but she sleeps as some classes are so boring. She complains of too much talk from most of her professors, a lack of discussion, and no real opportunity to fully understand the class topic through interaction. Homework is set that doesn't really relate to class topics and it is extremely difficult even for very capable students. What was the purpose of this homework, she was wondering? The teacher talks for the whole class and the students are to keep quiet and listen. Other students do not appreciate you extending the class by questioning. When asked what would motivate you to contribute in class, she responded honestly – "the opportunity. Also if the teacher made the topic interesting I would have a lot to say."

Focus group 4-F4 (students J, K, L, M, N)

These students are a mix of foreign students (Korean and Chinese) and three Japanese students attending university. Between them they had enough English to communicate their ideas and thoughts well.

Key Responses

The Chinese and South Korean students could not comment fully on the issues as they do not sleep in classes in their countries so they listened with interest throughout the interview and offered some comment from their observations. They seemed genuinely surprised that so many students sleep in class in Japan. When I asked the Japanese students about sleeping at university, they each reported sleeping during classes. The main reason for sleeping was that they were bored. Too much teacher talking going on during the class and they had to listen or write notes. They also reflected on being tired from going to bed late. These students also reported that they sometimes stayed up much of the night talking with friends at their house or gathered for all night karaoke!

Focus group 5-F5 (students O and P)

These students are scholarship sports students at university. Student O is 18 years old and has a good practical grasp of English. Student P has less English ability but is still very capable of being understood.

Key Responses

When asked about sleeping at university both girls said that they slept just a little – around two hours per week. The key contributors to making them tired were – writing homework reports, washing clothes at night (sports scholarships), and sports activities until 7.00pm each night, having time to bath and eat and a little relaxing. They both went to bed around 11.30pm and woke up around 6.30am.

When asked were there other reasons for sleeping in class at University they gave these reasons. “It’s only the teachers that talk, students just sit and listen, there is no chance to hear students’ opinion, the teacher writes so much on the blackboard that you have to copy it.” When they were quizzed further about why students don’t try to ask questions they said that most Japanese were very shy and would not be happy speaking in class. Also the classes were very big and you didn’t want to be the one who “stood out”. “The students would worry about what other people might think of you if you spoke. Other students are not nice to you. They point at you and look at you. They make angry faces at you. It makes you feel like you have low confidence so you say nothing. Also the teacher says to the class no talking!”

Student Q

Student Q is 18 years old and she sleeps during her university classes. There is one class in particular when she sleeps every time! The class is no fun. There are about 50 students in the class so it is big and not personal. There is writing only and the teacher talking.

Focus group 6-F6 (students Q, R, S, T, U, V, W and X)

These students (8) were quite low level English speakers and were year one students. It seems the first time many of them had been in a class with an English speaker. One girl had a basic grasp of English so a translator was used for the questions and answers.

Key responses

It was worth noting that all ten girls slept in class at different times. They slept at both high school and at university. The same main themes were evident as they noted teacher talking for the whole class and writing notes off the blackboard as key motivators for sleeping. Sport club girls also noted that their club activities made them sleepy. When asked why they didn’t contribute or question in class they again noted that the teacher said “no talking” and that friends got angry with them if they asked questions.

Focus group 7-F7 (students Y and Z)

These participants were mothers in the 25 -30 age group and were able to recount their university and high school days for the questions. Both were English speakers and both have become so since leaving university and not as a result of attending university.

Key responses

The responses from this group were similar to others. They were sleepers at both high school and university. The classes they told me were very boring and they had to listen and write from the blackboard. “Students they were shy and didn’t like to stand out.” They said other students would be unkind to you if you tried to ask questions or contribute. Some slept because they were busy with jobs or sports but it was the boring classes they remembered so vividly.

Focus group 8-F8 (students A1, B1 and C1)

These students were in the 50 plus age group. The aim with these participants was to gain a more historical perspective to sleeping in class and look for any change in attitudes. Student A1 is still learning English at community classes and has a grown family. She is most capable of speaking English and explaining her point of view. Students B1 and C1 are both learning English at another community class.

Key responses

Focus group members A1, B1, and C1 helped each other to recall their sleeping habits at school and university. They recalled boys sleeping more than girls did, but essentially they all slept. They tried to be subtle in their sleeping and felt that modern day students were too obvious with arms sprawled out and stretched over a desk. They thought young students needed better manners in the way they slept now. Their reporting approach mixed their past views with what they have noted from their own children who have recently finished at university.

They made the point that sports club students (one of the sample group was a sports club student when at university), get very tired and needed sleep. In this case it was quite appropriate to sleep because they were tired. Having a part time job was also cited as a reason for sleeping in class. These jobs often go late into the night and early hours of the morning. The participants all remembered from their own experiences that students in the class are just not interested in the way it is taught. They are just there but with little motivation to do anything. There is now and in the past, still the issue of no talking in class. No student talk at all makes class very boring. These students and their children have never been allowed to ask questions. Participant A1 told me that once you get into a university that is the end of studying. “Just being there is all that is required. That is why high school students study hard – so they can get entrance to the university they want to go to.”

Participant B1 brought up another reason as to why students sleep. She pointed out that her daughter had the personality type to sleep. “All through her childhood she had easily and readily fallen asleep in the car, on a train, in her child seat on her bicycle. These types of children will quickly fall asleep in class if they are not interested, but also they can sleep even if they are interested – it’s just in their nature.”

6. DISCUSSION

This study demonstrated that by surveying a wide age range of Japanese women on the topic of sleeping in class, a number of common themes explaining the reasons were evident. Despite the range of experiences they had encountered in their schooling they all came up with similar explanations. There were four main themes with varying justifications.

Theme one was simply that the “students were tired”. Many students, especially at University had part time jobs. These jobs often go on late into the night or early morning. The students become very tired as a result of being up late and working long hours.

Some students attend Juku and after that they still have their regular homework to do so they become exhausted. They must sleep in class to catch up on lost sleep.

Many students are members of clubs. The clubs can take a lot of time and sports clubs in particular (but not exclusively) can have students up very early and working late into the evening. After this there is still the report writing and homework to do. There seemed to be a greater sympathy and tolerance from teachers for sports club students who needed to sleep in class as their physical workload was often large.

Travel to and from school also contributed to tiredness. Students could spend up to two hours travelling each way to University or school and as a result be exhausted at the end of the day.

The University students in particular gave another reason for their tiredness. It is largely a self imposed condition. They love to watch movies and be in touch on social media sites until late at night (or early morning). They stay up very late indulging this. Further, their love of karaoke means that on numerous occasions’ groups of university students stay at a karaoke lounge all night. One of the students I interviewed had done this twice in the last week and said she got sleep from 7.30am until 8.30am (one hour) at her home prior to going to class.

Theme two was largely around the “Cultural acceptance” of sleeping in Japan. It is and has been an acceptable practice in Japan for a long time. Sleeping in trains, on buses, in cars as passengers or on a sightseeing tour, is a common event. Sleeping in class is a natural extension of the many other places that sleeping occurs.

Theme three generated the most discussion, the most annoyance, the most anger, and the highest level of agreement as to why students sleep – The students were “Bored”.

Time and again the respondents in the focus groups said the same things, no matter what their age or focus in life. Firstly that they were not interested in what the teacher was saying and the topics they were talking about did not stimulate them. This was a mix of the topic and the way it was presented. The annoyance at having to sit through a teacher talking for the whole lesson with students writing notes off a board was very evident. Even if the teacher used a PowerPoint presentation (which was rare) the same format of reading the notes off the computer was used. Students as a group reported that there was no or little teacher encouragement to voice student ideas or any attempt to encourage discussion. The students reported that they knew the times each week when they would get the most sleep.

Theme four centered on the notion that some Japanese students have a predisposition to sleep. It was in their personality to be able to drift off to sleep in many situations.

7. IMPLICATIONS

The views and opinions presented here have been derived from 30 female participants ranging in age from 14 to 50 plus. These opinions are a small sample of the population. Within this sample there is clear evidence that the phenomenon of sleeping in class continues to be an issue within Japanese classrooms. It also strongly indicated that historically this situation has not markedly changed over the last 35 years. Despite educational reform, changes in teacher training and professional development this issue continues.

This research indicates areas of possible future research when considering why students sleep in class. Without doubt there are inspirational teachers who make learning an interesting and motivating experience for students, but clearly this study shows these teachers are far too few in number in junior high school, high school and university level.

Given the four major headings that were apparent in discussions with the participants, namely, “tired students, bored students, cultural acceptance and a predisposition to sleep”, it appears that “students who are bored” are a category that could be significantly changed for the better. The question needs to be asked continuously “why are the students bored?” The teacher practices employed have to be questioned when all 30 participants surveyed came up with similar reasons for being bored. Is the teacher talking to the students and getting them to write notes off a blackboard or PowerPoint acceptable if interest levels are so low? Is there a case to be made to introduce staff development that focuses on teacher qualities so that interest and motivation for students and staff have a chance to grow? What teaching qualities do teaching staff have prior to entering the institution? Are qualifications over-rated in terms of appointments when we also need charismatic, competent communicators? What of the demands on teachers to prepare students for the inevitable exams that are approaching? Is it fair to have a system that virtually forces the hand of teachers to cram facts into students?

If students can be encouraged to buy into the lesson by being participants in the process, would the desire to sit out the lesson by sleeping be reduced? Maybe we need to look at the current need to cram so many facts into the students before exams, and think of another way to select and encourage students to participate. If we want our students to ultimately be lifelong learners then we are failing them by making a lot of their study so “boring”. Careful structuring of lessons, consideration to the needs of your class, giving ownership of some of the lesson back to the students through discussion times and responding to student feedback through survey sampling are just a few key thoughts that may warrant further investigation to see if these base concepts are even considered. Encouraging learners to participate means careful thought must be given to the environment and this is another full research project, as current barriers must be pulled apart before new conditions for participation are put in place.

Yet despite all of this, Japanese results on international surveys continue to be impressive. Maybe the role of Juku impacts positively to such a high degree that many classrooms can continue to operate as they always have.

The other three issues discussed in this paper are also impacting on the notion of being bored and cannot be strictly separated out. The cultural notion of sleep being acceptable in class and the prevalence of sleeping in public places in many instances in Japan are impacting on students decisions to fall asleep in class. If it's fine to sleep and you are tired from a late night then why not sleep? There are many things happening outside of student life that influence the decision to sleep through the day in class. Staying up all night and chatting with friends at their house, all night karaoke parties, working until late at your part time job, studying until late, Juku attendance, watching movies until very late, long hours involved in sports teams and clubs, all influence how you feel the next day and impact on decisions made to sleep or stay awake, no matter how fabulous and exciting the class is.

Further insights into all of these issues would certainly enhance the chances of helping Japanese students be motivated and included in their learning process. Ultimately we need learners who experience success, build self motivation and are successful members of society. By enjoying the experience along the way we will help create an environment for life-long learners.

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