

Vitalization of local communities through women's empowerment: The role of local female entrepreneurs in women's career education

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Abstract

The main purpose of this research is to indicate the positive effect of the involvement of local female entrepreneurs in career education on the vitalization of local communities. Recently, self-efficacy has been attracting academic and practical attentions as one of the determining factors in career development planning for women. With low self-efficacy, women are more likely to be indecisive and negative toward themselves. On the other hand, high self-efficacy encourages women to take a proactive stance and to pursue a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment in their career. It is expected that career education based on interactions would improve self-efficacy. This research particularly pays close attention to the roles of local female entrepreneurs as mentors in interactive career education. The results of a survey showed the positive effect of such interactive lectures on students' self-efficacy.

Keywords

vitalization of local communities, female entrepreneurs, self-efficacy, life career, interactive career education

1. Introduction

1.1 Gender-based financial challenges for women

Many women in Japan are facing gender-based financial challenges in their life events, such as childbirth, child rearing, and nursing care [Nishio, 2012]. There have been higher risks for women to become unemployed or non-regular employed in their careers and the risk of falling into poverty will increase in the case of divorce or bereavement. The high rates of unemployment and non-regular employment of women also hinder mid- to long-term economic growth in certain industries, in which female workers occupy important positions, such as tourism. Creating career development plans financially independent from their partners in the early stages of their careers is an effective means to encourage such women to achieve their career goals and avoid poverty. The increase of women as skilled workers and active consumers would be one of the essential factors to promote economic growth. In the process for women to develop their career plans, their own values, preferences, and especially job consciousness at the time of their graduation from universities and colleges have crucial roles [Kosaka and Kashiwagi, 2007]. However, as Nishio and Matsunami indicated in their research in 2012, many female university students still show stronger preference for economic dependence to their future partners than establishing their own source of income.

1.2 Self-efficacy for women

Recently, self-efficacy has been attracting academic and practical attention as one of the determining factors in career development planning for women. In the 1990s, psychologists such as Albert Bandura brought new perspectives to the field of psychology by paying more attention to the human's learning process and behavior. This trend made a substantial

contribution to the field of education as well. The social cognitive theory, including the idea of self-efficacy and self-esteem, can be applied to understand students' learning process and to motivating the students. Perceived self-efficacy is defined as people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives [Bandura, 1994].

The research conducted by Hackett and Betz in 1981 led to the debate over "self-efficacy" and women's empowerment. Since then, it has been often discussed that women in general have lower self-efficacy in comparison with men, and they are less likely to fulfil their potential in career development because of that.

A person with higher self-efficacy usually shows more assertive and independency-oriented attitude and higher capabilities [O'Brien and Fassinger, 1993]. Self-efficacy in developing the career plans affects especially decision making because it reflects a persons' faith in their capabilities in career development [Tominaga, 2008]. For example, it is reported that people with higher self-efficacy spend more effort on self-discovery and search for preferable work environments than people with lower self-efficacy [Adachi, 2008]. In addition, the general tendency of female students with low self-efficacy to value doing what they like over working to make a living has been commonly observed [Kinjyo, 2008]. On the other hand, high self-efficacy encourages women to take a proactive stance and to pursue a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment in their career [Pina-Watson et al., 2014].

1.3 Career education based on interaction

In recent years, educational organizations pay stronger attention on career education in Japan. Many of them have started a curriculum for career development. However, some research, such as Toda [2018], indicated that students with low self-efficacy still face challenges in execution of their career plans and career decisions. To help such students build up their self-efficacy, the career education based on interaction with others

has been introduced in universities and colleges in Japan. In these curriculums, interactions with people who have professional experiences and different perspectives will bring new and valid information to students and remove assumptions and prejudices in their minds.

1.4 Purpose of research

The purpose of this research is to examine the effects of interactions with local female entrepreneurs on self-efficacy in women's career education. In this study, local female entrepreneurs in the Kinki region, who have high self-efficacy based on their rich professional experience, motive power, decision-making skills, self-discovery experiences and adaptability, took part in the curriculums as mentors.

This study examined the short-term effects of interactions with vibrant local female entrepreneurs in the Kinki region on female students for removing assumptions and prejudices in their minds and achieving new perspectives. This research conducted a survey on female students at a college located in Osaka Prefecture before and after the interactive lectures presented by local female entrepreneurs in the Kinki region.

2. Vitalization of local communities through women's empowerment by career education

2.1 Promotion of women's participation and advancement in the workplace

The Act on Promotion of Women's Participation and Advancement in the Workplace is one of "the three arrows" of the so-called "Abenomics," which are former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo's economic policies. The "three arrows" represents the political directions of the Abe Cabinet: aggressive monetary policy, flexible fiscal policy, and growth strategy that promotes private investment.

In this act, "female participation and career advancement in the workplace" is defined as to "become successful in their participation in the workplace and fully demonstrate their personality and capabilities." (Act on Promotion of Women's Participation and Advancement in the Workplace, Chapter I General Provisions, Articles 1)

There are three fundamental principles in this act (Chapter I General Provisions, Articles 2). The act is to be conducted for the purpose of firstly providing more employment and promotion opportunities for women; secondly, enabling a smooth and continuous balance between the working and family lives of men and women, by establishing a supportive environment; and thirdly, giving special attention to the importance of respecting the wishes of women concerning the balance between working and family life.

2.2 Vitalization of local communities

It should be noted that supporting local female entrepreneurs has positive contributions to vitalize local communities. Starting a new business would increase consumption and create jobs. In addition, the existence of local female entrepreneurs itself would inspire other women and activate the local community. As a part of promoting women's participation and advancement in the workplace, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) started up the Network for Support Female Entrepreneurs project in 2016. Under the project, METI established ten regional groups which are led by regional financial institutions, industrial and start-up support organizations, and private entities and NPOs engaging in female-career consulting services.

In the Kinki region (Osaka, Kyoto, Hyogo, Nara, Mie, Shiga, and Wakayama Prefectures), more than 97 organizations are involved in this network to support local female entrepreneurs in accordance with each situation and various demands. Entrepreneurial women who wish to "work staying true to themselves" require a wide variety of support to do so. For example, the Network for Support Female Entrepreneurs project in the Kinki region held "Ladies' Entrepreneur Discussions Kansai (LED-Kansai)" to share and contest their business ideas. The event has been providing opportunities of mutual learning, empowerment, and networking to the potential female entrepreneurs in their own local communities.

However, despite all the efforts which have been made along with the act and the local network, the employment rate of women in Osaka Prefecture is still relatively low in Japan (Fig-

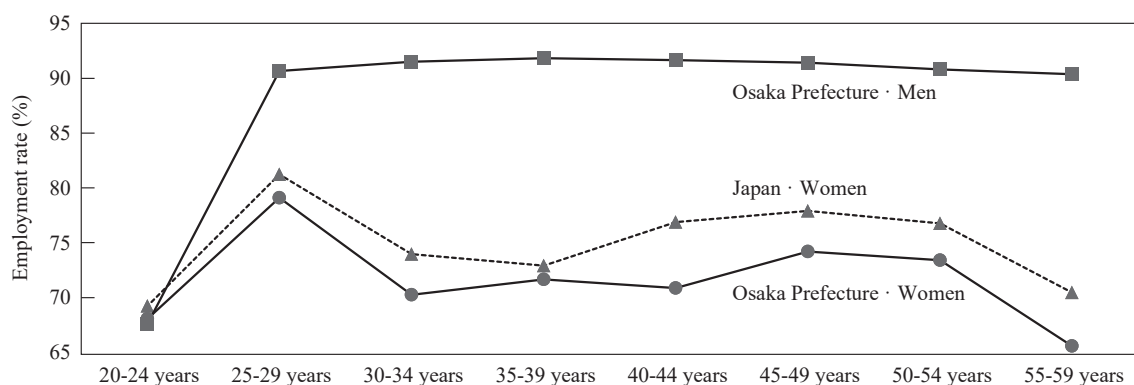


Figure 1: Employment rate by ages

Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, The 2017 employment status survey outline of the survey.

ure 1). The employment rate of women in Osaka Prefecture declines at the point of ages when they get married and childbirth more significantly than in other areas.

Therefore, this research proposes one additional measure to support local female entrepreneurs and vitalize local communities and, at the same time, mutually beneficial for students: the involvement of local female entrepreneurs in career education for women.

For students, local female entrepreneurs could be role models to whom they can relate themselves. The involvement of local female entrepreneurs in interactive career education for women could bring new perspectives to their self-efficacy and life career planning.

Participation in local women's empowerment has advertising effects and raises their public profile for female entrepreneurs. Also, many of the female entrepreneurs are highly motivated in their companies' social contribution activity in local communities, and improving the general environment for women who wish to pursue work and a life career. Furthermore, being involved in other women's career development and helping other women's self-efficacy would rise their own self-efficacy even higher.

It has been a shared understanding that more successful female entrepreneurs would bring more consumption and more job opportunities to local communities. In addition, it is notable that more ambitious and active women with their own career plans in the workplaces could rise the employment rate and create a positive economic effect on their communities.

3. Life career education

In general understanding, the word "career" stands for a person's occupation or a person's personal history. Recent academic research, such as Hikima [2018], distinguished "work career," which focuses on professional occupations and work history, from "life career," which widely contains activities and roles in a lifetime, such as professional occupations, family lives, social and local activities, and personal activities including hobbies.

From this point of view, existing career education in Japan covers only "work career." Although many Japanese educational organizations have a department which is dedicated to support students' career paths, what they been offering is limited to information about business, employment examinations and internship.

Life career development requires the students' own self-discovery, learning about the industries that the students are aiming for, and competence development in accordance with each students' career path. In making career plans in this process, encountering mentors as their role models is essential for students. Role models will give students concrete examples and help them to recognize the challenges for their goals.

However, in reality, finding role models is difficult for students, especially for new graduates with limited access to business circles. In fact, the Japanese students build up their view

of profession and work value mostly by watching people close to them, such as family members and teachers. For the life career, students' parents are the role model and for the work career, seniors in the same industry or company are the role model for most of the Japanese students.

Two career goals and the paths sometimes collide with each other, particularly when the student's parents pursue their career in a different industry from the one the student wishes to work for. In other words, students need role models who can help them setting their goals in both life career and work career at the same time. Therefore, connecting students to such role models is currently becoming the most important challenge for educational organizations in Japan [Kobayashi and Takanaka, 2019].

In addition to such issues mentioned above, Japanese female students and educational organizations are struggling in gender-based challenges due to the low self-efficacy of students. At the turning points in the life stages of women, such as marriage, pregnancy, childbirth, childcare, divorce, nursing and bereavement, women, especially ones with low self-efficacy, are more likely to give up or compromise their career. Therefore, female students need to learn the ways to elevate their own self-efficacy from role models. Improving self-efficacy could build up mental strength, self-confidence, and a sense of oneself and help them to overcome adversity in their work career and life career. An increase in number of such women would promote economic development and vitalize local communities.

4. Research method and result

4.1 Case study

The survey for this research project was conducted at a career planning course at a college for women in Osaka Prefecture in 2018. In their career planning course, they hold 7 interactive lectures presented by local female entrepreneurs out of 15 classes in total. The interactive class contained these visiting lecturer's presentations and question-and-answer sessions. The selections of the visiting lecturers were made based on students' interests and majors.

In 2018, 82 first-year students registered for courses for career planning as one of the compulsory subjects. Their majors were in the wedding industry, beauty industry, fashion industry and confectionery industry. In this year, the college invited a few local female entrepreneurs who joined LED Kansai and started their own businesses in Osaka Prefecture with support from the Network for Support Female Entrepreneurs in the Kinki region.

To maximize the educational benefits, the college particularly paid close attention to the diversity of each female entrepreneur's experience, both at work and in private. At work, as a general tendency, women who wish to start their own business have a wider range of experiences than others who stay in the same company or same industry. In private, many of them have faced a variety of gender-based challenges in their family lives.

In the interactive classes, students can listen to the unique stories and various perspectives, also they can exchange frank views in question-and-answer sessions. By engaging in such dialogue, students can relate themselves to these role models in many ways and improve their own self-efficacy to take an active stance in choosing career paths. Therefore, the survey conducted before and after interactive classes to measure the effects on students' self-efficacy.

4.2 Method of research

According to Taylor and Betz [1983], "Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy" stands for a person's self-confidence to take actions and make decisions in his/her career. They also proposed the scale to measure the CDMSE. To measure self-efficacy, this research adapted the scale developed by Urakami [1995] based on the CDMSE to reflect the situation of Japanese university and college students. This modified CDMSE has been most commonly adopted in Japan to measure university and college students' self-efficacy at the stage of making a career choice [Tominaga, 2008].

Although the Japanese government and the society have been trying to stimulate the social progress of women, many women still face gender-based challenges in order to balance work and family life and pursue their work career. In a time of rapid change, there are a wide variety of career paths for female students in Japan.

Therefore, this research conducted a survey on students based on the modified CDMSE before and after the classes and gained 70 valid respondents.

4.3 Results

In the questionnaire survey, 5 options of life course were presented to the students: homemaker, reemployed after child rearing, seeking balance between work and family life, having double income no kids (DINKS), unmarried.

- "Homemaker": leave work upon marriage or childbirth and not to be reemployed afterwards.
- "Reemployed after child rearing": leave work upon marriage or childbirth and reemployed afterwards.
- "Seeking balance between work and family life": continue working upon marriage or childbirth.
- "Having double income no kids (DINKS)": get married and continue working without having children.
- "Unmarried and working": working throughout one's life without getting married.

The results of "Marriage and Childbirth in Japan Today: The Fifteenth Japanese National Fertility Survey" (see Table 1) in 2015 suggest that 34.6 % of people selected the "reemployed after child rearing" option. Therefore, the most popular option is seeking reemployment, followed by the second most popular, "seeking balance between work and family life" option, which was supported by 32.3 % of people. 18.2 % of people voted for the "homemaker" option, and 5.8 % for "unmarried and working." The least popular option was the "DINKS" option, which was selected by 4.1 %.

The proportion of never-married women who choose "home-

Table 1: Ideal/intended life courses

18-34 years never-married singles women	Homemaker	Return-to-work	Managing both work and family	DINKS	Unmarried and working	Other
Japan : N 2570	18.2 %	34.6 %	32.3 %	4.1 %	5.8 %	5.0 %
Before the lecture: N 70	30.0 %	41.4 %	15.7 %	4.3 %	2.9 %	5.7 %
After the lecture: N 70	31.4 %	40.0 %	21.4 %	2.9 %	1.4 %	2.9 %

Source: Marriage and Childbirth in Japan Today: The fifteenth Japanese national fertility survey in 2015.

Table 2: The changes of students' views on ideal life career before and after the class

	After the lecture						Total
	Homemaker	Return-to-work	Managing both work and family	DINKS	Unmarried and working	Other	
Before the lecture	Homemaker	14	6		1		21
	Return-to-work	6	15	6		2	29
	Managing both work and family	1	4	6			11
	DINKS			2	1		3
	Unmarried and working		1			1	2
	Other	1	2	1			4
	Total	22	28	15	2	1	2

Table 3: Statistical facts

Study period	Mean value	Standard deviation	Standard error of the mean	Coefficient of correlation	Significance probability
Before the lecture	2.356	0.239	0.043	0.929	0.000
After the lecture	2.619	0.264	0.048		

maker” as an intended life course decreased from 9.1 % to 7.5 % in the last five years, whereas the proportion of those who choose “seeking balance between work and family life”, or “unmarried and working” increased from 24.7 % to 28.2 %, and from 17.7 % to 21.0 % respectively.

Table 2 compares the results of the survey about students’ views on life before and after the class in this case study to the national average. Table 2 is a cross-tabulation table which summarizes the changes of students’ views on an ideal life career before and after the class. This result showed that the survey respondents in this case study have a stronger preference for becoming homemakers or part-time workers after marriage or childbirth to continue working than the national average.

The common tendencies among female students in Japan, that many of them give priority to family life, could be found in this case study. Also, as Matsunami and Nishio [2018] pointed out, a significantly bigger number of female students in colleges than in universities intend to become homemaker or part-time workers after marriage or childbirth in Japan.

The present result suggested that less students selected “reemployed after child rearing,” “having double income no kids (DINKS),” “unmarried and working,” and “other” for their ideal lifestyles. Also, there was an increase in the number of students who selected “homemaker” and “seeking balance between work and family life” after the class.

Calculation of the paired t-test using the above example with 30 data items of students gives $t(70) = -14.656$, $p < 0.001$. Therefore, the improvement on students’ self-efficacy made by the last class was more significant than the one by the first class. Also, the effect size d was 5.72 and r was 0.94. These numbers suggest that the effect was significant.

4.4 Feedback from participants

In addition to the statistical facts, feedback from participants after the class showed the positive impacts on both students and visiting lecturers. In the students’ feedback, they felt encouraged to pursue their own career goals, to stay positive about themselves, not to give up, and to make persistent efforts even in difficult situations due to gender discriminations: “the class reminds me that there are some other options than just to find a job and get married,” “I realized the importance of a strong will especially in difficult situations in my life,” “the class showed me that I have been giving up too soon in my life,” “I could relate myself to these female entrepreneurs, and I hope to start my own business in the future.” The interactions with female entrepreneurs brought new perspectives to the students about themselves, their career, their independence, and it also

improved the students’ self-efficacy. The female entrepreneurs who joined the class also had a positive experience which encouraged them to trust themselves.

The feedback from students and visiting lecturers have brought great insights about future improvement measures for interactive career education programs. In addition to these feedbacks, new findings and knowledge in psychology have been offering information and ideas to develop educational curriculums for students and society. For instance, for the students who did not show any changes in their attitude toward their career, the theory of “learned helplessness” could be applied. Seligman and Maier explained that helpless or powerless feelings are related to the repeated perspectives of non-contingency between their behavior and results [Seligman and Maier, 1967]. To help such students to understand the issues they are facing, bringing the cognitive-behavioral therapy framework into the career education curriculum could be an effective measure.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this research is to examine the effects of interactions with local female entrepreneurs on self-efficacy in women’s career education. In the case study, positive effects of the involvement of local female entrepreneurs in career education were observed in the survey, which was conducted with before and after the interactive classes to measure the effects on students’ self-efficacy, and the feedback from students.

6. Prospects for the Future

Women’s empowerment has been an important issue in the world and the Japanese government and society have been conducting a few projects to support women’s participation and advancement in the workplace, however the results obtained so far are still controversial. Considering the growing role of career education for women, educational organizations, such as colleges and universities, have to keep devising their approaches and curriculums to adopt the changing situations of women in Japan.

In recent career education for women in Japan, students’ own views on their work career and life career have been taken into account and improving their self-efficacy has been becoming an important task to help students to deal with various challenges at work and family life.

Based on the fact that there have been some positive effects of interactive career education focusing on students’ self-efficacy on women’s empowerment, it could be presumed that such perspectives on career education would also be beneficial for men’s empowerment.

It must be noted that due to the relatively small number of samples, there are certain limitations in generalizability and further research with a larger data set is recommended. Further studies are needed to closely observe the vitalizing effect on the local communities made by the increasing number of active women in work career and life career. Also, further research would be recommended to measure the mutual benefit for such women to enhance one another in many ways, including the involvement in younger generations career development.

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(Received September 30, 2020; accepted October 30, 2020)