

Summary of Research Findings on Education in Collaboration with Industry and Local Communities (2024–2025)

Abstract

This study examines the current state, characteristics, and challenges of socially collaborative education in Japanese higher education. In this study, socially collaborative education refers to educational activities developed through collaboration among universities, industry, and local communities. As social challenges become increasingly complex, higher education institutions are increasingly expected to connect academic learning with practical and socially engaged forms of education. The study draws on questionnaire surveys of Japanese universities, interviews with universities, companies, and local governments, and a review of collaborative education practices in East Asia. The findings indicate that socially collaborative education has become widespread across Japanese higher education in diverse forms, including internships, project-based learning (PBL), and community-based learning. At the same time, the study identifies several common challenges, such as coordination burdens, shortages of faculty and staff resources, and disparities in organizational support systems among institutions. The case studies further demonstrate the importance of integrating theory and practice, supporting student-centered learning, and establishing sustainable partnership and coordination structures. The findings also suggest that companies and local governments increasingly function as active educational partners rather than merely external supporters. Based on these findings, the study argues that socially collaborative education should be positioned as an important dimension of higher education quality assurance. More broadly, the study suggests that universities, industry, and local communities are gradually shifting toward relationships based on the co-creation of education through collaborative support for student learning and development.

1. Members of the Research Committee

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2. Background and Objectives

2.1. Background

In recent years, higher education has been required to respond to rapid social change and increasingly complex social challenges. Universities are now expected not only to provide disciplinary knowledge but also to cultivate competencies that enable students to engage with real-world problems and contribute to society.

Against this background, growing attention has been paid to socially collaborative education that connects universities with industry and local communities. Through collaboration with external stakeholders, universities are increasingly expected to provide learning opportunities that integrate academic study with practical and social experience.

A previous study conducted in FY2021–2022 examined competencies required in contemporary undergraduate education and identified the importance of competencies such as logical thinking, problem-solving, and the application of disciplinary knowledge. At the same time, the study revealed gaps in mutual understanding between universities and external stakeholders regarding contemporary educational initiatives, highlighting the need for stronger collaboration and communication between universities and society.

These developments underscore the importance of examining how universities, industry, and local communities collaboratively support student learning and socially responsive higher education.

2.2. Objectives

This study aims to examine the current state, characteristics, and challenges of education implemented through collaboration among universities, industry, and local communities in Japan.

To achieve this aim, the study pursues the following objectives:

- to clarify the current forms, scope, and characteristics of socially collaborative education in Japanese higher education institutions;
- to identify educational approaches and learning environments that contribute to the development of competencies required to address contemporary social challenges;
- to examine organizational and operational challenges associated with implementing and

- sustaining collaborative education with external stakeholders; and
- to explore implications for assessment frameworks and the quality assurance of socially collaborative education in higher education.

Through these objectives, the study seeks to provide insights into how universities and external stakeholders can collaboratively support student learning and strengthen the quality of higher education.

3. Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach combining questionnaire surveys, interview-based case studies, and literature review. By integrating quantitative and qualitative data, the study examined the current state, characteristics, and challenges of socially collaborative education in Japanese higher education.

3.1. Questionnaire Survey

A questionnaire survey was conducted between May and June 2025 to investigate educational activities implemented through collaboration with industry and local communities at Japanese universities offering undergraduate programs.

The survey consisted of two components: an institution-level survey examining university-wide policies and organizational structures, and an academic unit-level survey focusing on collaborative educational practices implemented by faculties, departments, programs, and other educational organizations. The survey explored areas such as forms of collaboration, relationships with external stakeholders, educational methods, organizational support systems, learning outcomes, and operational challenges.

Responses were obtained from 262 universities in the institution-level survey and from 206 universities and 321 academic units in the academic unit-level survey.

Table 1. Overview of Survey Responses

Survey Category	Responses
Institution-level Survey	262 universities
Academic Unit-level Survey	206 universities / 321 units

The responding universities represented diverse institutional types and enrollment sizes.

Table 2. Institutional Types of Responding Universities (n = 262)

Institutional Type	Number	Percentage
National	32	12.2%
Public	30	11.5%
Private	200	76.3%

Table 3. Undergraduate Enrollment Size of Responding Universities (n = 262)

Undergraduate Enrollment Size	Number	Percentage
Fewer than 2,000 students	110	42.0%
2,000-4,999 students	67	25.6%
5,000-9,999 students	55	21.0%
10,000-19,999 students	19	7.3%
20,000 students or more	11	4.2%

For analysis, universities were categorized by institutional type and enrollment size in order to identify common patterns and organizational differences in collaborative education.

3.2. Interview Survey

To complement the questionnaire findings, semi-structured interviews were conducted with universities, companies, and local government stakeholders engaged in collaborative educational initiatives.

The university cases included Otaru University of Commerce, Kyoto Bunkyo University, Prefectural University of Kumamoto, and Saitama Women’s Junior College. Additional interviews were conducted with JAL Aviofuture Lab Co., Ltd. and Setagaya Platform (Setagaya City).

The interviews examined the design and implementation of collaborative educational programs, partnership structures, organizational support systems, student learning experiences, and challenges related to management and sustainability.

3.3. Literature Review and International Comparative Perspectives

The study also conducted a literature review focusing on collaborative education systems and partnership models in East Asia, particularly in China, South Korea, and Taiwan.

The review examined policy frameworks, institutional models, and industry-linked educational initiatives related to university–society collaboration. These comparative perspectives were used

to consider the characteristics and challenges of socially collaborative education in the Japanese context.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Expansion and Diversification of Socially Collaborative Education

The questionnaire survey revealed that socially collaborative education has become widely established across Japanese higher education institutions. Collaboration with industry, local governments, and community organizations is no longer limited to specific professionally oriented programs but is increasingly incorporated into diverse disciplinary and institutional contexts.

The forms of implementation identified in the survey were diverse. While internships remain one of the most common approaches, collaborative education has expanded beyond conventional internship-based models to include project-based learning (PBL), community-based learning, and joint educational programs with municipalities and companies. Many of these initiatives involve students working on real-world issues presented by external stakeholders, including regional revitalization, local industry development, tourism promotion, welfare support, and sustainability-related challenges.

The findings further suggest that socially collaborative education is increasingly valued not only for employability and career development but also for fostering broader competencies such as problem-solving, communication, collaboration, reflective learning, and civic engagement. In this sense, socially collaborative education appears to be shifting from short-term experiential activities toward more integrated forms of learning connected to social issues and regional contexts.

Overall, the results indicate that socially collaborative education is gradually becoming embedded within broader educational practices across disciplines and institutional contexts in Japanese higher education.

4.2. Organizational Structures and Sustainability Challenges

While socially collaborative education has expanded significantly, the analysis also revealed substantial differences among institutions in terms of organizational capacity and implementation structures.

Larger and national universities tended to possess more established coordination systems and specialized support structures for collaborative education, including dedicated centers, liaison offices, and administrative staff responsible for external partnerships. By contrast, smaller institutions often relied more heavily on the individual efforts and personal networks of faculty members, making collaborative initiatives more difficult to sustain when staffing responsibilities changed or coordination demands increased.

The survey and interview findings identified several common operational challenges. One of the most frequently cited issues was the burden associated with coordinating relationships among multiple stakeholders. Collaborative education requires continuous communication and adjustment between universities and external partners regarding educational objectives, student activities, schedules, and expected outcomes.

Another major challenge concerned the availability of faculty and staff resources. Many institutions indicated that collaborative programs require substantial preparation, supervision, and coordination beyond conventional classroom teaching, while institutional support systems have not always expanded at the same pace as collaborative activities themselves. In some cases, collaborative initiatives depended heavily on a limited number of faculty or staff members, creating concentrated workloads and operational vulnerability.

These operational challenges also raised broader concerns regarding the long-term sustainability of collaborative education, particularly where programs relied heavily on specific individuals, external relationships, or short-term initiatives.

Variations in student engagement and initiative also emerged as an important issue, particularly in practice-oriented and open-ended learning environments.

Overall, disparities in organizational capacity continue to affect the scale, sustainability, and stability of socially collaborative education across institutions. Sustainable development in this area requires not only educational innovation but also stable organizational infrastructures, institutional support systems, and long-term partnership frameworks.

4.3. Partnership and Coordination Structures

The interview case studies provided important insights into the educational significance and operational conditions of socially collaborative education.

From the university perspective, one of the most notable characteristics observed across the

cases was the integration of theory and practice. Rather than separating classroom learning from practical experience, the programs encouraged students to connect academic knowledge with engagement in real social contexts through reflection, communication, and collaborative problem-solving.

Another important feature was the emphasis on active and student-centered learning. Students were expected not only to participate in activities designed by universities but also to engage proactively with external stakeholders, identify issues, and contribute to collaborative learning processes.

The case studies also highlighted the central importance of coordination mechanisms and partnership structures in sustaining collaborative education. Successful initiatives were typically supported by individuals or organizational units responsible for facilitating communication and coordination among universities, students, companies, local governments, and community organizations. These coordination functions played important roles in aligning educational objectives, managing collaborative activities, and maintaining trust-based relationships among stakeholders.

From the perspectives of industry and local governments, collaborative education was often regarded as an opportunity to contribute to future human resource development and strengthen connections between universities and society. External stakeholders increasingly functioned not merely as providers of practical training opportunities, but as active contributors to educational processes. In particular, local governments frequently functioned as platforms facilitating collaboration among universities, companies, and regional communities.

Across the different cases, the findings suggest a gradual shift toward relationships in which universities and external stakeholders collaboratively participate in the design and implementation of education. In this sense, socially collaborative education reflects a broader movement toward the co-creation of education through ongoing interaction among multiple actors.

4.4. Learning Outcomes and Quality Assurance

The expansion of socially collaborative education raises important questions regarding the assessment and quality assurance of learning.

Traditional evaluation approaches based primarily on classroom performance and standardized

assessment methods may not fully capture the competencies developed through collaborative and experiential learning. Many institutions therefore emphasized the need for assessment frameworks capable of evaluating competencies such as problem-solving ability, communication skills, collaboration, initiative, and reflective learning.

Several institutions reported utilizing rubrics, portfolios, reflective reports, and presentation-based assessments to evaluate students' learning processes more comprehensively. At the same time, approaches to assessment remain uneven and are still under development at many institutions.

The findings also highlight the importance of continuous dialogue among stakeholders in ensuring the quality of collaborative education. Because educational activities are jointly implemented by universities and external organizations, quality assurance increasingly depends on ongoing communication regarding educational goals, learning processes, and expected outcomes.

Moreover, maintaining shared understanding among universities, external stakeholders, and students regarding educational objectives and learning outcomes emerged as an increasingly important challenge. In this context, quality assurance cannot be understood solely as an internal institutional process, but must also involve collaborative reflection among multiple actors.

More broadly, the findings suggest that socially collaborative education should be positioned as an important dimension of higher education quality assurance. As universities strengthen their relationships with society, the ability to design and sustain meaningful collaborative learning opportunities may become an increasingly significant indicator of educational quality and institutional relevance.

4.5. Toward the Co-Creation of Education

A broader implication emerging from the study is the gradual shift toward relationships based on the co-creation of education among universities, industry, and local communities.

Traditionally, universities have been regarded as institutions that provide education independently, while external organizations primarily functioned as recipients of graduates or providers of practical training opportunities. However, the findings suggest that these boundaries are becoming increasingly fluid.

In many collaborative initiatives examined in the study, universities and external stakeholders jointly participated in identifying educational objectives, designing learning activities, and supporting student learning. Educational processes were therefore shaped through ongoing

interaction among multiple actors rather than through one-sided institutional delivery.

This shift toward co-creation reflects changing expectations regarding the social role of higher education. As social challenges become increasingly complex and interconnected, collaboration among universities, industry, and local communities may become increasingly important not only for enhancing educational relevance but also for strengthening the public significance and social responsiveness of higher education itself.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the current state, characteristics, and challenges of education implemented through collaboration among universities, industry, and local communities in Japan.

The findings demonstrate that socially collaborative education has become widely established across Japanese higher education and is increasingly integrated into diverse educational contexts. Such initiatives provide students with opportunities to engage with real-world issues and to develop competencies associated with problem-solving, collaboration, communication, and reflective learning.

At the same time, the study identified several challenges related to institutional capacity, resource limitations, coordination burdens, sustainability, and the assessment of learning outcomes. The findings suggest that effective collaborative education depends not only on educational practices themselves but also on sustainable partnership structures, organizational support systems, and continuous dialogue among stakeholders.

The study further indicates a gradual shift toward relationships based on the co-creation of education among universities, industry, and local communities. In this context, external stakeholders increasingly participate not only as supporters of education but also as collaborative partners in student learning and educational development.

From the perspective of higher education quality assurance, socially collaborative education should be recognized as an increasingly important dimension of educational quality and institutional relevance. Continued efforts to strengthen organizational support, develop shared assessment frameworks, sustain long-term partnerships, and promote continuous dialogue among stakeholders will be essential for the future development of socially collaborative education in Japan.