

【研究ノート】

The Actual Situation of International Students' Working Time and Living Conditions in A Vocational College During COVID-19 with Mixed Research

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コロナ禍における専修学校留学生の労働時間と生活状況の実態

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Abstract: The number of international students increased in Japanese society before the COVID-19 pandemic struck, representing an essential foundation to support the aging Japanese population, which lacks an adequate workforce. Generally, international students support Japanese society as part-time workers; however, some lecturers' personal experiences reported international students working overtime. Quantitative research, through methods such as questionnaires, has a limited ability to grasp evidence for international students to work overtime due to their more cautious approach. Moreover, data by quantitative research methods will not necessarily reveal their current working situation because some international students are hesitant to answer some questions related to a part-time job, such as working time, possibly because they could be forced to apply for a new working visa. By contrast, qualitative research through interviews with anonymous interviewees is essential to recognize international students' working situations. In this research, the qualitative method through interviews revealed students' weekly working hours and conditions under COVID-19 restrictions.

Key words: COVID-19, international student, working time, interview, overwork time

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要旨：コロナパンデミック以前は、日本の労働力不足から日本で学ぶ留学生数は増加の一途を辿っていた。留学生達は、アルバイト労働者として日本社会を支える労働力である。しかしながら、一部の学校教員からは、留学生の違法な労働時間超過が報告されている。今までもアンケート調査による量的リサーチが行われているが、留学生の労働時間超過の実態を把握するには、限界がある。アンケート調査では、留学生の仕事に関する質問、特に労働時間に関して、留学生の警戒感から、必ずしも留学生の労働状況を正確に表している訳ではない。過当たりの実労働時間を明らかにせず、ビザの更新申請を行う可能性は否定できない。そこで、本研究では、留学生の匿名性を守りながら質的調査であるインタビューに主眼を置き、留学生の労働と生活状況を調査する。

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超過労働

1. Introduction

Before COVID19, the number of international students had been on the increase in Japan. The existence of international students in the workforce cannot be ignored in the Japanese labour market. However, there is very little research on international students' working conditions under COVID-19 restrictions. Moreover, only part of their overtime work is reported. Therefore, this research aims to clarify the working conditions in Japan under the COVID-19 restrictions.

The Japanese Student Services Organization, JASSO, has investigated international students' living and studying situations every two years solely through questionnaires. However, JASSO research has not yet clarified international students' working time over 28 hours during both term time and during seasonal vacations. The question regarding working time did not include a choice of over 28 hours in the questionnaire made by JASSO. Consequently, JASSO did not clarify students' overtime work exceeding 28 hours per week which is restricted by the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act.

This research paper clarifies the likely working time and conditions of interna-

tional students belonging to a vocational college in the Tokyo metropolitan in Japan under COVID-19 restrictions through the mixed research method, which uses both questionnaires and interviews.

2 Literature Review

This section considers international students' weekly working hours during term time and seasonal vacations and the possibilities used to conceal excess work time, and the methods used in past research.

2.1 International Students' Working Hours Weekly

JASSO researches international students' living situations every two years. According to JASSO's latest research in 2019, 19.9% of international students who belong to vocational colleges work over 25 hours a week (JASSO, 2021). However, this data by JASSO mixed their weekly working time during term time and seasonal vacations. They are allowed to work legally for 28 hours during term time, and for up to 40 hours a week during seasonal vacations, as set out by the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act. Without collecting data separately from weekly working hours during term time and seasonal vacations, the data of their working time cannot be obtained accurately.

Additional data in 2019 indicated that 62.8% of international students who belong to four-year universities work over 20 hours weekly (Itou and Hiruma, 2019). This research also does not distinguish their working hours in a week during term time and seasonal vacations. Hence, a significant gap likely exists between weekly working hours during term time and seasonal vacations. Moreover, the result of their weekly working time in this research separated three groups of working time as less than 10 hours weekly, from 10 to less than 20 hours weekly, and over 20 hours weekly. Overtime above 28 hours during term time and 40 hours during seasonal vacations went uninvestigated by the questionnaire's research.

2.2 The Possibility of International Students' Excessive Working Time

International students can work for 28 hours per week during term time and 40 hours during seasonal vacations. These weekly working times are stipulated by the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act. However, some students ignored the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act for overtime work and, as such, were in breach of Japanese law (Suzuki, 2011).

2.3 The Possibility of International Students Working in Multiple Workplaces to Escape Immigration Bureau Judgement for Renewal Visas

Siho (2015) reported that international students often worked for several companies simultaneously, leading to the immigration bureau identifying international students who overwork by data of their employed situation with his personal experience. Some students do overtime work for several companies simultaneously without the Immigration Bureau realising. It is reported that many attempt to conceal their excessive work time on purpose.

3 Methodology

This section identifies the research question and method.

3.1 Research Questions

The first research question is, how many hours do international students work in a week during term time and seasonal vacations under COVID-19 restrictions?

The second question is, what kind of methods do international students use to conceal their overtime work when applying for a new visa?

The third question is, how do international students manage to live in Japan under COVID-19 restrictions if suffering from reduced income due to the pandemic?

3.2 Research Design

This research conducts mixed research consisting of quantitative and qualitative research. The questionnaire is quantitative research for examining international students' working time and is conducted with approximately 200 international students in a vocational college in Tokyo metropolitan. The questionnaire consists of six closed and an open question. Qualitative research is also adapted into this paper. Three vocational college international students were elected for an interview to ask about their international students' general working hours, working and living situations, and visa matters.

3.3 Data Collection

Data collection was conducted from January to March 2022 at a two-year vocational college in metropolitan Tokyo, Japan. At the vocational college, 88 international students in the first year and 81 international students in the second year who majored in International Information Business, and 20 international students in the second year who majored in Information Technology, making a total of 189 students, were asked to answer the questionnaire. The interviewer then had a face-to-face interview with three international students. Both the interviewed international students' and the vocational college names were kept anonymous for security concerns.

4 Finding and Discussion

4.1 Questionnaire Result by Closed Questions

Remarkable questionnaire results are picked up.

Nationality and Gender

In this research, 81 of the requested 189 international students answered the questionnaire. Their nationalities were 89.9% Vietnamese, 5.1% Chinese, 2.5%

Nepalis, 1.3% Russian, and 1.3% unknown. Genders ratio are 61.8% female, 35.5% male, and 2.6% unknown.

Weekly Working Time During Term Time

During the term time, 34.2% of international students work between 25 and 28 hours, 30.4% work between 20 and 25 hours, and 16.5% work between 15 and 20 hours. 2.5% work between 28 and 30 hours, 1.3% work between 35 and 40 hours, and 2.5% work over 40 hours. The total percentage is that 6.3% worked above the stipulated 28 hours during the term time. Additionally, 5.1% didn't disclose their weekly working time during the school day. The above data shows approximately 88.8% of students worked within the legal weekly hours.

Weekly Working Time During Seasonal Vacations

The data of international students' working time during seasonal vacations showed that 93.7% worked within the legal 40 hours a week.

4.2 Open Questions Regarding the Hardest Challenges for International Students

An open question asked about the hardest challenges for living in Japan as an international student. In the open question, 25% of the total 189 international students mentioned that money for living was not insufficient, 16% mentioned working time for part-time jobs was shrinking, and 7.8% answered that tuition fees were burdensome. Moreover, 16% mentioned that they had not gotten a job offer yet, and 6% were worried about renewing their visas since applications may be rejected by the Immigration Bureau.

4.3 Interview with Three International Students

This section outlines the three international students' statements in the interview. Three international students, belonging to a vocational college, answered questions about international students' general working times and conditions under COVID-19 restrictions.

General International Students' Working Time and Way to Conceal Income

According to the first international student's interview, it was estimated that around 80 to 90 percent of international students who belong to a vocational college work over 28 hours during term time. Immigration bureaus have to handle numerous visa applications yearly; as such, immigration officers cannot closely scrutinize their weekly working hours, yearly income, bank accounts, and tax information. Consequently, many international students who work overtime are missed by the Immigration Bureau when applying for their new visas.

The first international student mentioned that, normally, international students who earn larger sums of money belong to several companies. Each Japanese company obeys the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act for international students not to be allowed to work over 28 hours weekly during term time. However, many students held several bank accounts to conceal the income that each company paid. They normally only submit a passbook to the Immigration Bureau to check yearly income and tax when applying for a new visa. If the immigration officer is not suspicious of their income, they hence don't need to submit additional concealed passbooks.

The second international student mentioned that eight out of ten international students work over 28 hours a week during term time. He stated that 28 hours of working time in a week was insufficient to make enough money to cover tuition fees and socializing costs, although one could earn living costs alone. The student recognized many international students also understand the risk of overtime work,

but most of them believe that “only God knows” whether a new visa will be accepted or rejected. Furthermore, the third international student clearly explained that over 75% of international students did overtime work, too.

Leave Payments and Governmental Aid for the International Students Under COVID-19 Restrictions

According to the first international student, most students did not receive leave payment while bars and restaurants closed during the term at the request of the Japanese government and Prefectural governors. They hesitated to ask their business owner or manager to pay them a leave payment. Otherwise, they didn't know the system of requesting leave payments. The Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare set an employment adjustment subsidy, *Koyou Chousei Jyosei Kin* in Japanese, for the business owner and employer to pay leave payments for the employees. However, many business owners, employers, and managers failed to hold legal and administrative expertise. Even though business owners, employers, and managers know the employment adjustment subsidy system, the application system is intricate due to requiring many forms and submitting many documents. As such, it takes a long time for the business owner and employer to obtain compensation as part of an employee's salary.

The three international students knew about the system of Emergency Petty Funds, *Kinkyuu Koguchi Sien Kin* in Japanese, and the Comprehensive Support Fund, *Sougou Sien Sikin* in Japanese, which are available for a reduced income. However, most international students can only apply for 200,000-yen Emergency Petty Fund. They have not been in serious trouble not living in Japan based on the statements by two international students. Consequently, they could live in Japan and handle their household finances. Some international students use the 200,000-yen Emergency Petty Fund to obtain a renewable visa, since they assumed that if they had the debt to the Japanese government while they were studying in Japan,

they would have a stronger reason to stay in Japan to return the debt with their renewed visa. If they cannot obtain a new visa, they have to return to their home countries and cannot return their debt to the Japanese government because of their smaller income potential in developing countries.

Fortunately, the second and third international students worked in workplaces unaffected by COVID-19. Their monthly income was stable.

Their Own Safety Net

Most international students manage to secure the workplace and living costs in Japan. Even though they face budget problems daily, they tend not to rely on the Japanese government's financial aid scheme, even under COVID-19 restrictions. Instead, they have created a safety net in their community in Japan, borrowing and loaning money to their friends and coursemates. The first international student loaned another student approximately 100,000 yen with a small amount of interest.

5 Conclusion

Both results of quantitative and qualitative research are synthesized. First, most international students answered that they work within the stipulated working time during term time and seasonal vacations on the questionnaire because they are obliged to pay attention to the Immigration Bureau for their next renewal visa. In many cases, it is also school policy for not being removed themselves by the colleges. However, approximately 80 to 90 percent of international students have a high possibility of overtime work, according to the three international students' feedback during interviews. They often believe obtaining a renewal visa depends on luck. Due to a mass number of visa applications, the Immigration Bureau's capacity for handling visas has already been excessive. Furthermore, vocational colleges cannot supervise all of their working time and grasp all workplaces. A

company also may not realize that they were hired by several companies simultaneously. As a result, their overtime workings do not come to light.

Colleges should recognize international students' weekly working hours from individual employers. If the colleges cannot manage their working time legally, the Immigration Bureau should compulsorily remove the college's qualifications to accept international students.

Secondly, due to COVID19, international students suffered budget losses for their tuition fees. Some were forced to reduce their working hours because companies such as bars and restaurants had to restrict management time at the request of the Japanese government. However, some international students could receive financial aid from the Japanese government. Also, according to the interview results from three international students, between 75% and 90% of international students may be working in excess of their legally allowed working time to gain more money. The Japanese government should take countermeasures to increase the number of immigration officers so as to scrutinize international students' documents, particularly to calculate their monthly and yearly income and tax in pass-books and taxation certificates.

Finally, in the case of the vocational college's international students, many are obliged to divert their time from focusing on studying to earn money to pay for the burden of tuition fees in Japan. Potentially, the Japanese government could raise the budget for studying in Japan before students leave their home countries, or otherwise reduce the tuition fees for schools that accept them, or directly assist them with their tuition fees. These changes would help shift focus from working to studying, which could help nurture high-skilled international students who support innovation in the Japanese society.

Only three international students at only a vocational college were interviewed for this research. As such, future research is essential to interview international students at several types of schools. Moreover, although only international stu-

dents were interviewed to consider their working time and situation multilaterally, it may also be valuable to interview lecturers who teach international students in future research.

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