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# **Analysis of Varying Opportunities in International Education**

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A thesis submitted to the University Honors Program  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Honors Certificate with Thesis

Approved by

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## Introduction

Traveling abroad is a strong desire numerous Americans have. This is evident in the ample study abroad programs seen spreading throughout American universities in addition to the voluntourism promoted in Universities. In more recent years, there has been an increase in awareness of the opportunities to teach abroad. When researching education jobs abroad, hundreds if not thousands of opportunities are shown.

This work will illustrate first essential information about a few of the leading countries with teaching abroad occupations that I found intriguing. The information will be concise and a summary of the culture of the country, the culture surrounding schools, the structure of the education system, the curriculum implemented in these schools, common teaching strategies employed by educators in those countries, as well as personal implications for teaching in this country. The research has been conducted for Japan, Poland, South Korea, Thailand, and Vietnam in that order.

Furthermore, there will be two other options explored: Military Base and Peace Corps. These other opportunities are included to provide alternative ways an educator can teach through American programs. These opportunities can lead an educator to numerous countries such as Germany, Costa Rica, and even Zambia. Their summaries consist of an overview, job opportunities, living conditions, and implications for each job opportunity.

This analysis will then conclude with implications found throughout the research as well as a cohesive analysis of ways an educator can teach abroad. These occupation opportunities are explored at the end of this work to ensure that first theirs an understanding of the potential countries, and the teaching situations you may be in. Equally as important, numerous oversea

teaching programs intertwine with each other. The opportunities included at the end compile information found through various platforms.

## **Japan Culture and Education**

### **Culture of Country**

Kubota (2003) stated in her book, “Critical Teaching of Japanese Culture,” that “With all these diverse facets of society, Japanese culture cannot be defined as mono-ethnic or purely unique; rather, it has integrated experiences of various groups, constituting a hybrid culture” (p. 77). She says that Japan’s culture is everchanging and dynamic, meaning it is difficult to objectively describe Japanese culture. However, she does say that it is rich in tradition and yet modernizing slowly. For instance, in Japan its typical to show respect to the elders by the younger family members supporting the elders physically and financially. This ideology is a part of their culture but is evolving. An education example would be that classrooms are rigid and squash individuality, but Kubota addresses that stereotype saying that in actuality individuality is celebrated but rules are respected (Kubota, 2003). They also have a strong sense of cultural identity and national unity. Individuality does have a presence in this society. There are distinctions in status based on age, gender, employment, and social and educational background (Leestma et al., 1987).

### **Culture and History of Schools**

Education has always been highly regarded in Japan which has greatly influenced the culture that surrounds the schools (“Japan Overview,” n.d.). According to Leestma et al. (1987), the “content of the school curriculum and manner in which teaching and learning are accomplished impart the attitudes, knowledge, sensitivities, and skills expected of emerging citizens of Japanese society” (p.2). This belief is present in how parents and children are devoted to the student’s education. They believe the success in school endeavors is a crucial determinant of a student’s economic and societal status in their adult life (Leestma et al., 1987). The impact

education has on Japanese society, social status, and economic success causes there to be high expectations in this field.

To further explain the high expectations seen around education it is imperative to explore the governments perception as well as religious roots found in the culture of school. Leestma et al (1987) stated the government policymakers as well as the business leaders view the content and quality of public education a top priority. This is due to its influence on national cohesion, economic development, and international relations. Furthermore, the report later emphasizes how Japanese commitment to education is related to a common religion in Japan, Confucian and Buddhist. Confucian and Buddhist heritage have great respect for learning and educational endeavor because it is interwoven personal and societal improvement (Leestma et al., 1987). Therefore, not only do family pressure, student's future success, and Japan's society as a whole rely and influence the quality education a student receives, but a student's attitude and motivation related to education influence the culture of the school.

The culture of the school is also greatly influenced by Japanese perception of ideal character traits as well (Leestma et al., 1987). For instance, Japan students are expected to exhibit being diligent, perseverant, and a hard worker. In addition, students are expected to be motivated and a desire to learn. There is an understanding that motivation is not based upon luck, personality traits, or family background, but that it is shaped by teachers and influenced by the student's environment. One method implemented into the education system to motivate students is group activities. This not only instills a sense of shared identity while simultaneously promoting individuality through opportunities to influence the group activities (Leestma et al., 1987).

The culture surrounding education can be described as having high expectations, but there are high expectations for all. To clarify, Japanese students receive the same curriculum throughout the entire country (“Japan Overview,” n.d.). They are not allowed to skip grades or be held back in a grade. Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) and teachers do not participate in tracking students in their academic achievement. They expect all students to meet the same expectations, standards, regardless of where you come from or how you performed in the past (Leestma et al., 1987).

### **Structure of School**

The overall structure of Japanese education consists of three trimesters. It is decomposed into April to July, September to December, and January to March. According to Leestma et al. (1987), including adjustments for “half days on Saturdays, the Japanese school year contains the full-time equivalent of about 195 days of classroom instruction” (p. 10). Students spend six days a week in school, one being a half day. They have shorter summer vacation compared to other developed countries. Additionally, the students spend a tremendous amount of time outside of school to complete homework, gain tutoring, or attend juku (Leestma et al., 1987).

Japan consists of two mandatory levels of education: primary school and lower secondary school (“Japan Overview,” n.d.). Primary school lasts six years and lower secondary school lasts three years. However, majority of children do attend the three years of optional kindergarten and the three years of upper secondary school. Upper secondary school requires students to apply to one of three types of upper secondary schools: senior high school, colleges of technology and specialized training (“Japan Overview,” n.d.).

Of all the students continuing their education into upper secondary school, majority of these students enroll in senior high school; this school provides general, integrated, and

specialized courses (“Japan Overview,” n.d.). The selection of courses in senior high school reflects if you wish to seek employment afterwards or attend a university. To attend a senior high school, you must complete an arduous exam. The other two upper secondary schools do differ in curriculum and outcome after completion (“Japan Overview,” n.d.).

If a student wishes to continue their education in upper secondary school but does not want to attend a senior high school, they can then attend either colleges of technology or specialized training colleges (“Japan Overview,” n.d.). The colleges of technology provide students with a five-year program in engineering, resulting in obtaining an associate degree. To attend a college of technology you must complete an entrance exam. In contrast, specialized training colleges do not require an entrance exam. Specialized training colleges offer vocational education in one of eight varying fields: technology, agriculture, medical care, personal care and nutrition, education and welfare, business, fashion and general education. Once completed, a student will receive a diploma with the option to continue their education to earn an advanced diploma (“Japan Overview,” n.d.).

Several primary and secondary schools operate six days a week (“Japan Overview,” n.d.). However, students and parents seek additional education in up to 12 hours through after-school private tutoring and schooling business called juku. Innumerable school aged children attend juku. Juku is similar to hagwons from South Korea; it is a shadow school system where students obtain one-on-one tutoring, remedial classes, and preparation for entrance exams. Although juku is not accessible to all due to the expenses, its propelled by parent’s ambitions for their students (“Japan Overview,” n.d.).

## **Curriculum**

Japanese curriculum is developed by MEXT and advised by the Central Council for Education (“Japan Overview,” n.d.). The high expectations for educational outcomes can be seen in the information demanded each student knows. There is a demand for mastery on an abundance of content and their underlying disciplines as well as various skills like problem-solving (“Japan Overview,” n.d.). These high demands are seen throughout the country.

Expectations for meeting those high demands are for almost all students in the nation. Curriculum standards are specified nationally, and textbooks are government approved (Leestma et al., 1987). Generally speaking, students throughout the country in the same grade study essentially the same material at approximately the same time and pace. During primary school and lower secondary school, ability or achievement tracking is not present. Separate tracks, ability grouping, remedial programs, or student electives do not exist (Leestma et al., 1987).

Japan’s primary school curriculum is separated into three categories: compulsory subjects, moral education, and special activities (“Japan Overview,” n.d.). Compulsory subjects include Japanese language, Japanese literature, social studies, science, music, arts, arithmetic, programming and Physical Education. English is being taught informally in the last two years of primary school. Moral education and character development include but are not limited to teaching students to have self-control and have respect. There is a belief within the society that schools have the obligation and authority to teach fundamental Japanese values (“Japan Overview,” n.d.). This will then aid students in building a foundation of proper moral attitudes and personal habits (Leestma et al., 1987). The last category is special activities which refers to activities or ceremonies that promote teamwork and cooperation (“Japan Overview,” n.d.). The overarching categories can be seen throughout a Japanese student’s education.

Japan's curriculum is designed in order to build standards upon each other. Students will learn and skills that will continue to be enhanced throughout their education ("Japan Overview," n.d.). This ideology is present throughout the primary school curriculum as well as in lower secondary school. All compulsory subjects in primary school are continued in lower secondary school with a few additions. Fine arts, foreign languages, as well as numerous electives are added to the curriculum in lower secondary school ("Japan Overview," n.d.). Excluding the additional subjects, the curriculum evidently builds from one grade to the next even with an advancement to a higher school.

### **Teaching Strategies**

As stated earlier, group activities do play a huge role in Japanese education (Leestma et al., 1987). This indicates that a teaching strategy implemented in this country is cooperative learning. Students are expected to work together to come to a conclusion. It has also apparent in the report that group activities are also expected to spark individuality due to opportunities for students to voice their ideas on group goals and outcomes (Leestma et al., 1987). Therefore, another teaching strategy employed is modeling. Students have the opportunity to peer teach and model ideas that they believe are the most correct.

### **Implications**

Japan has one of the leading scholar scores in numerous subjects according to the National Center of Education and the Economy ("Japan Overview," n.d.). There education is comprehensive and promotes conceptual understanding at a young age. Teaching here could provide great insight on what a successful and rigorous education system is like. Nevertheless, Japan's culture surrounding the school indicates that an education job here would be prestigious but challenging. There is a drive for excellent academic performance, which could cause

pressure for teachers, especially for teachers who have been trained to teach in America.

American's education is adequate and competitive, but there are vast differences in Japan and American education systems. As for all countries, the differences in curriculum, culture of the school, and main teaching strategies will differ. Japans differences should be considered prior to committing to an oversea education program.

## **Poland**

### **Culture of Country**

Poland culture is vast and unique, but one common thread in research is how religion is at the root of their culture. Poland has one predominant religion which is Catholicism (“Guide to Poland,” n.d.). It is a country known to be devoted to its religious beliefs in Europe (“Guide to Poland,” n.d.). In addition to religion, there are common values that are perceived as critical. Poland conducted a survey in 2010; in this survey people were asked to rank their most important values. The values majority of Polish citizens are first family and then health. They also value education, quiet life, respect from others, and honesty (“Polish Values,” 2010). Although Poland has strong religious affiliations and core character traits that are valued, Poland is not stagnant, but is a country that is quickly evolving and becoming a fierce competitor in the education field.

### **Culture and History of Schools**

Poland’s education has a unique history. In more recent years Poland students have been reported as outperforming numerous other developed countries in subjects like science, mathematics, and reading (“Poland Overview,” n.d.). With that being said, the culture found within the school is evolving as well.

Poland implemented the New Core Curriculum which not only provided national standards, but also emphasized innovative teaching methods (Delaney & Kraemer, 2014). This curriculum had teacher preparation programs split focus on content knowledge to also have a strong focus on instructional strategies. Polish teacher’s salaries also shifted from the traditional salary system that considered hours worked and the number of years in the field to a new system.

Their salary is now based on teaching quality, innovative teaching practices, commitment to the practice, excellent performance, and their qualifications and experiences within education.

Bonuses are also available for school systems that produce superb results (Delaney & Kraemer, 2014). Poland emphasizes the importance of innovation and consistently improving.

Their education system does provide a framework, but teachers are permitted to adjust their curriculum in order to best teach their students (“Poland Overview,” n.d.). They are encouraged to enhance materials and instructions for their specific students. They promote individualism within the students and the teachers while still demanding excellence (“Poland Overview,” n.d.). It is clear that this country believes they can continually improve and continually push themselves to achieve greatness which attributes to the culture surrounding the schools.

### **School structure**

Poland has within the last few decades decided to structure their school similarly to south Korea and Japan. Students attend primary school for six years and attend lower secondary school for three years (“Poland Overview,” n.d.). Following that, students have four different options for upper secondary school. These upper secondary schools are general upper secondary school, technical upper secondary, vocational school, and a special school (“Organization,” 2019).

Upper secondary schools differ on their duration but can be as short as three years for special and vocational schools but last as long as five years for technical secondary schools (“Basic Directions,” 2019).

However, it is important to note that the structure of Poland schools is being drastically changed back to the traditional structure (“Poland Overview,” n.d.). The traditional structure

only consists of primary school for eight years and secondary school for three or four years. This change is gradually occurring and will be completely implemented by 2024 (“Poland Overview,” n.d.). These changes such as structure enforce the ideology that the education field here is ever evolving.

The Republic of Poland’s Ministry of National Education website also entails a brief description of primary school departments and kindergartens (“Core Curriculum,” 2013). This early school education lasts for approximately three years. Preschool education does not involve subjects, but is determined by each program, and any curriculum designed by the teachers which then must be approved by their program. (“Teaching and Learning,” 2019).

## **Curriculum**

There are new national exams that have been recently implemented in order to monitor student performances (“Poland Overview,” n.d.). These exams occur at 6<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup>/ 13<sup>th</sup> education stage. These exams correlate with the end of each schooling stage: ending of primary school, ending of lower secondary school, and ending of upper secondary school. With the structural changes occurring in the near future for this country, there will be a new exit exam for grade eight students rather than the exit exams for sixth and ninth grade (“Poland Overview,” n.d.).

There is a core curriculum for primary and lower secondary school. This curriculum is designed to have national frameworks as guidance, but there is encouragement for teachers to adapt their curriculum for their students. Recent changes by the government have also added more curriculum in history and patriotic education (“Poland Overview,” n.d.). As of 2019/ 2020, the Republic of Poland’s Ministry of National Education has developed curriculum to be

implemented this current academic year that has an emphasis on values such as civic and patriotic attitudes (“Basic Directions,” 2019).

Polish Government in 2014 adopted a national qualification framework titled ‘The Lifelong Learning Perspective’ (“Lifelong,” 2019). One component of this framework is the focus on creativity, entrepreneurship and innovation. This supports teachers in flexibility in order to provide individualization and diversification for learners (“Lifelong,” 2019).

### **Teaching Strategies**

An early strategy implemented in Polish schools is play activities (Teaching,” 2019). This teaching strategy is heavily focused on early childhood, especially because no subjects are being taught to the young students. Hence, teachers are encouraged to use games and other stimulating activities to aid students in developing. Schools are designed to be Montessori or even R. Laban’s creative gymnastics (“Teaching and Learning,” 2019). Regardless of the style of preschool, the teaching strategy implemented for younger scholars are play based activities.

‘The Lifelong Learning Perspective’ stated that teachers should promote active and practical learning in problem-solving teams (“Lifelong,” 2019). The Center on International Education Benchmarking states how Poland’s education has improved significantly throughout the decade, but that there are not common teaching methods besides differentiation (“Poland Overview,” n.d.). It is implied that Poland promotes individualism in the curriculum and that adjustments should be made for each student. The adjustments create a clear indicator that differentiation is a key component.

### **Implications**

Poland evidently has a strong desire to continuously strive for excellence. There improvements in their education system is tremendous considering the strides they have made within the last few decades. However, there are a few implications worthy to note. Although there is great freedom in differentiating your instruction to make innovative moves, that means you must have a firm understanding of those innovative practices. This would require further research on Polish practices. In addition to that, Poland's education system has evolved greatly, and is still evolving to this day. If an oversea educator is intrigued with Poland education system, then you should have a desire to be challenged and able to adapt throughout your experience.

## **South Korea Culture and Education**

### **Culture of Country**

South Korea is an ever-evolving country that clearly emphasizes family, tradition, and the pursuit of bettering itself. According to Korean Cultural Center NY, “The geographical conditions of the peninsula provided Koreans with opportunities to receive both continental and maritime cultures and ample resources, which in turn enabled them to form unique cultures of interest to and value for the rest of humanity, both then and now” (“Korean Information,” n.d.). Koreans culture embraces traditions while also combining modernism. Currently, Koreans unique culture is becoming increasingly appreciated in the modern world. Literary words are being translated into numerous languages for global leaders. The Korean monochrome paintings are the talk of the global art world. In addition to those recognition, Korean pop artists have attracted attention across the globe. The popularity the Korean culture has attained is due to its long record of traditional culture and their arts. Throughout the decades, Koreans have valued vibrant handicraft, athletic activities like ssirum and taekkyeon, and storytelling through jultagi (“Korean Information,” n.d.). South Korea exhibits perseverance, tenacity, and a unique sense of art through their culture.

### **Culture and History of Schools**

The history of education aids to understanding the culture of the country and the school’s culture. Japan occupied Korea up until the end of World War II (“South Korea,” n.d.). Prior to Japan departing, Japan taught the South Korean population and even attended some secondary schools and higher education institutions. Once Japan left, South Korea was left with no teachers and a country that was approximately eighty percent illiterate. Then in 1950, the Korean War

occurred, derailing any progress in the education efforts. At the end of the war, the government decided the Ministry of Education should control education and combat illiteracy found throughout the country. On the report of National Center on Education and the Economy (“South Korea”, n.d.), South Korea is currently “topping the global charts in both quantity of education and quality of education.”

The South Korean education system is highly test-driven which is a key component in the culture of the school. South Koreans base numerous opportunities such as marriage prospects to job prospects based on which upper secondary school and university a student attends (“South Korea,” n.d.). Due to this, parents work extremely hard to assure their own children succeeds in life and children work extremely hard to achieve high marks in school (“South Korea,” n.d.).

There is a high degree of stress and emphasis on education, which is evident in numerous statistics, policies, and programs. For instance, the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT) coincides with tremendous pressure to succeed and earn a high score (“South Korea,” n.d.). Students attend hagwons, which are afterschool and weekend tutoring programs. These programs help students advance in their education and perform at a mastery level at their age. Hagwons are used throughout a student’s education but are utilized when students are preparing for CSAT. Seventy percent of students complete some form of post-secondary education (“South Korea,” n.d.). CSAT has students attend hagwons and private tutors in order to achieve higher scores in order to obtain a higher education.

The culture around school can still be seen as high pressure and highly valued but is evolving to be supportive and inclusive to more socioeconomic classes. For instance, early childhood education has a significantly high enrollment. Enrollment rates exceed ninety percent for preschool aged students (“South Korea,” n.d.). In addition to that, ninety-five percent of

students complete upper secondary school. Both statistics show that school is valued and a priority to families and students. Although its highly valued in South Korea and contributes to the school culture, the value of school has caused a competitiveness which resulted in hagwons and performing well. South Korean's government issued restrictions on hagwons operational hours as well as support school-based extracurricular activities. This policy was implemented because of the price of hagwons and private tutoring was not accessible to all South Koreans, causing there to be an education performance gap between socioeconomic classes ("South Korea," n.d.). Implementing that restriction was South Korea attempting to be a more inclusive and supportive environment for a successful education progression regardless of the socioeconomics.

### **Structure of School**

A common difference throughout the countries, is the vast differences of how school is structured. For South Korea, students are expected to attend school between the ages of six to fifteen ("South Korea," n.d.). However, there is a recent addition (2012), that provides families and young children the option to attend a free half-day public preschool. Students are required to attend six years of primary school, three years of lower secondary school and then attend upper secondary school, which can be either academic or vocational. From there on, it is typical that a student purses a higher education either through a junior college or a university. High education is not mandatory in this country but is highly recommended for the current generations ("South Korea," n.d.).

Like numerous other developed countries, South Korea does have numerous public and private school options throughout a student's education ("South Korea," n.d.). In the past, South Korea's higher secondary schools were extremely competitive. To combat that issue, South Korea

in 1970 implemented an equalization policy. This policy was implemented in order to reduce the competition and implement a lottery system for students' admission to secondary school, as long as they reside in equalization zones. Students can attend lower secondary school without completing an entrance exam; however, upper secondary school does require an entrance exam to assess students' competency. Due to this lottery system for upper secondary schools, specialty schools and autonomous schools were developed. These schools have programs that are highly competitive in current times. Regardless of what upper secondary school a student in South Korea attends, their education does meet the national curriculum provided by the Ministry of Education ("South Korea," n.d.).

## **Curriculum**

South Korea's education standards and curriculums are addressed approximately every five to ten years by the Ministry of Education ("South Korea," n.d.). Common curriculum now addresses skills such as creative thinking, analyzing, and interpreting. A unique implementation for this country, is that schools are allowed to add curriculum into their school system that meets specific needs for that community. South Korea also requires students to participate in a curriculum called Creative Experiential Learning (CEL). Essentially, students are required to participate in clubs, volunteer, and explore careers ("South Korea," n.d.). The curriculum for the various stages of education vary greatly between primary school, lower secondary school, and upper secondary school.

The structure of what content is taught at what age is unique. South Korea in primary school focuses on Korean language, mathematics, Good Life, Wise Life, and Happy Life ("South Korea," n.d.). The last three subjects aid in students transitioning into school life by teaching them skills needed in order to be successful. The students then transition from few subjects to a

wider range of academic subjects when they attend lower secondary school (“South Korea,” n.d.).

Lower secondary schools include Korean language, social studies/ moral education, mathematics, science/ information technology, physical education, English, music and the arts as well as elective courses (“South Korea,” n.d.). During these three years, students are also given a semester where no exams are allowed to be administered. The elimination of exams allows students to study a non-traditional course or develop an independent study that aligns with their interest. This is the only semester where students are not abiding by the mostly test-driven educational culture (“South Korea,” n.d.).

Upper Secondary School has two different routes students can take; students can attend a vocational school or an academic school (“South Korea,” n.d.). An academic upper secondary school does contain all the subjects of a lower secondary school with additional subjects: Korean history, science exploration and experiments, and electives including technology, home economics, Chinese characters, a second foreign language, and liberal arts. The second pathway students can take is vocational schools. Vocational school require students to take forty percent general subjects and sixty percent vocational subjects, as well as elective courses. Vocational school can be broken down into three years. Year one contains a common set of academic courses. Year two combines academic and vocational courses. Year three adds specialized vocational courses. These schools due require an entrance exam, and throughout upper secondary school the test-driven educational culture (“South Korea,” n.d.).

South Korea does portray a country that is driven by tests for data and evaluation of their educational policies and curriculum. Students are assessed throughout their educational progression by school-based tests (“South Korea,” n.d.). There is guidance in the national

curriculum framework on the type of questions school-based assessments should contain. With that being said, these school-based tests every year vary from province to province. There is a national assessment administered to grades nine and eleven, but the scores are solely used to inform policy and inform what schools need additional support (“South Korea,” n.d.). The test-driven school boards and Ministry of Education has also seeped into university admission.

Once upper secondary school is completed, students can continue their education at a university or junior college (“South Korea,” n.d.). Students have to take CSAT in order to obtain higher education for most universities and colleges. Universities and colleges have limited criteria for admissions, therefore student’s performance on the CSAT is critical (“South Korea,” n.d.). This contributes to the test-driven educational culture as well. Students have a high degree of pressure to perform well on CSAT.

### **Teaching Strategies**

Through research, it is apparent that South Korean’s education is diverse and holistic. In primary schools, students social and emotional well being is cared for and addressed through the subjects called “Good Life,” “Wise Life,” and “Happy Life” (“South Korea,” n.d.). This curriculum is an effective strategy implemented by the government in order to provide students with explicit guidance and instruction on expected behavior. Another teaching strategy observed through the research is their use of data-driven decisions gathered by their tests. Test scores greatly influence a student’s path in education (“South Korea,” n.d.). This shows that students do receive often feedback to help them understand where they can improve academically. Explicit guidance and feedback are some of the few of many strategies South Korea implements.

**Implications**

Teaching in South Korea appears to be a great honor and opportunity to develop enhanced teaching practices, curriculum, and even strategies. Similar to Japan, The National Center on Education and The Economy included South Korea in their Center on International Education Benchmarking: Learning from the World's High Performing Education Center ("South Korea," n.d.). These centers state that South Korean students perform high on the rankings comparatively to other countries ("South Korea," n.d.). This can be interpreted that South Korean education is excellent and competitive. However, the culture surrounding schools are intense; students are expected to perform well which directly reflect how efficient a teacher is. The pressure to teach students with the same standard in mind for all of them seems challenging. Although there are challenges, teaching in South Korea can bring a new understanding of education and a new perspective.

## **Thailand Culture and Education**

### **Culture of Country**

Thailand is described as welcoming with a rich culture heritage. The predominant religion found in Thailand is Buddhism (“Guide to Thailand,” n.d.). Buddhist teachings and philosophies greatly influence the culture present in Thailand. Furthermore, Buddhist monks are highly respected and held in high esteems. Thai people have a concept of “face,” which means they have a desire to be polite, respectful, and smiling. It is typical to avoid causing others embarrassment so that person does not “lose face” (“Guide to Thailand,” n.d.). The respect exhibited to strangers, elders, and Buddhist monks show that Thai citizens are accepting people who enjoy a serene life.

### **Culture and History of the Schools**

In order to better understand Thai society and the education field, it is important to note how Thai’s education system is directly influenced by the economy, political instability, and the aging population (Michael, 2018). Political instability conjoined with frequent and numerous military coups has caused education reforms and adjustments to be derailed. This can be seen in the country having had approximately 20 different education ministries in 17 years. As an alarming rate of Thai citizens are aging, there are concerns for the longevity of numerous higher education institutions as well. Although there has been a large investment in modernizing the education system, the education reforms have been criticized for its more political nature and aim for stability (Michael, 2018). Consequently, Thai’s education system needs to become more of a priority to all in order to overcome the obstacles.

Furthermore, the culture surrounding schools depends on the area: rural or urban. There is a discrepancy with access to education and equal opportunities (Michael, 2018). Poor rural populations have lower enrollment and graduation rates. There is also a shortage in teachers which can only exacerbate the problem. Rural communities do not always have the resources for qualified teachers (Michael, 2018). This causes some rural areas to not highly value education.

Overall, Thailand's education system is influenced by religion, especially Buddhism. It is also greatly influenced by family life and as discussed earlier political institutes as well as social and economic conditions (Pitiyanuwat & Sujiva, 2000). There is currently a revilement of civic and values of education in order to find the harmonious balance between global values and local values (Pitiyanuwat & Sujiva, 2000). This shows that although Thailand is experiencing globalization, they are trying to improve their education while still honoring the value of education seen in the Buddhist heritage.

The culture surrounding schools is evolving just like their political institutions. They value education and are striving for improvement. However, the culture in rural areas is vastly different than the ones found in urban areas. This can be seen in later data about Thailand teaching strategies. Therefore, I believe Thailand's culture in the school is dynamic like the geography but is striving for excellence.

### **Structure of School**

Like numerous other Asian countries, Thailand has six years of compulsory education (Michael, 2018). The first six years of education consist of elementary school and the following three years are considered the lower secondary school. These nine years are mandatory. Students begin their formal education at the age of six, and only prestigious schools require an entrance

exam. Schools do have a restriction of five hours a day for education. They begin their lower secondary school at the age of 12 (Michael, 2018).

There are optional educational courses students can take. Thailand offers three years of free pre-school as well as three years of free upper secondary education (Michael, 2018). Upper secondary school consists of a general academic track, university preparatory track, or a vocational school track. However, both educational options are not mandatory for Thai citizens (Michael, 2018).

Unlike primary school, the admission into lower secondary school and upper secondary school vary greatly depending on where a family resides (Michael, 2018). It is common for there to be an entrance exam as criteria as well as completion of elementary school. However, some areas do have a lottery system due to the high demand for citizens wanting to attend (Michael, 2018).

## **Curriculum**

Curriculum for primary education consists of Thai language, mathematics, science, social studies, religion, culture, and foreign languages (Michael, 2018). Students will be tested in their third year and their sixth year in their elementary education. If they pass the test in their sixth year, they will receive a certificate for primary education (Michael, 2018).

According to the 2008 Basic Education Core Curriculum, secondary school curriculum does follow nationwide frameworks that have the same core subjects as primary school (Michael, 2018). Upper secondary school does have requirements are designated for mathematics, science, and the arts. There is a discussion for reform, but nothing has been implemented (Michael, 2018).

Traditionally, Buddhist temples provided education in Thai's past. Hence, faith-based education does influence Thailand (Michael, 2018). They also accommodate for Muslim minorities with Islamic schools. Religious high school institutions can require faith-based exams which are regulated and national exams (Michael, 2018).

### **Teaching Strategies**

This country is diverse in its education due to the discrepancies found throughout the country. Although teachers are required to have a five-year bachelor's degree, it is known that some rural areas cannot obtain qualified teachers (Michael, 2018). For this reason, a group of scholars from Worcester Polytechnic Institute conducted project was to increase science literacy in rural Thailand. These scholars noted that science education in Thailand lacked science engagement, a hands-on activity (Climer et al., 2009). In addition to that, Peace Corps does visit Thailand to aid in instruction. With both of these data, it is clear there isn't specific and effective teaching strategies implemented throughout Thailand.

### **Implications**

Thailand's education has made tremendous strides within these past few decades, but there have been several obstacles Thai society has had to overcome. An oversea educator would have to consider the discrepancies within the country. They must consider working in the rural areas which genuinely need qualified teachers, or in the urban regions. They would also have to be extremely adaptable due to the current fluctuation of policies, programs, and politics. At any rate, Thai citizens greatly value their education due to their strong religious backgrounds. This means that it may cause pressure for students to perform, there is respect and honor given to teachers. Another consideration is how welcoming Thai society is.

## **Vietnam Culture and Education**

### **Culture of Country**

This country has greatly been influenced by globalization and colonization (McLeod & Dieu, 2001). Additionally, they have been influenced by numerous European and Asian countries as well as America. Due to this, the country's culture is dynamic and has evolved tremendously. Equally as important to note, their traditional religion, Buddhist or Confucian, still has a significant place in Vietnamese hearts. Their religion does influence their interpersonal relationships. For instance, they have deep rooted beliefs that elders, family, and education should be respected and honored. In addition to that their culture focuses more on status within age and education rather than monetary status (McLeod & Dieu, 2001). These customs, traditions, and their culture significantly impact the education.

### **Culture and History of the Schools**

Similarly to other Southeast Asian countries, Vietnam is also reforming their education. Vietnam's reasoning to reform and modernize their education system is to meet the need of its industrialization in a booming global economy (Trines, 2017). Thus, Vietnam has recently developed a national qualification framework in order to guide education into improvement (Trines, 2017).

Throughout the past few decades there has become a strong value for education; however, with this push there has been overcrowding and decrease in the quality of education some scholars receive (Trines, 2017). This pressing issue is being combated with increase funding. Funding has caused there to be less of a discrepancy with urban and rural regions. There have been improvements in enrollment and educational quality due to this change (Trines, 2017).

Vietnam currently is ruled by Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), causing the education system to be centralized and ran by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) (Trines, 2017). With the CPV and MOET, there have been issues with efficiency. According to the World Education News and Reviews article (Trines, 2017), Vietnamese education system struggles with foreign language training, several bureaucratic obstacles, as well as curriculum that is not always sufficient.

Education is highly valued, causing there to be an emphasis on success in the field (Trines, 2017). There are numerous reports that Vietnam's second most corrupt sector is unfortunately education. Surveys have reported that teachers accept bribes for grade improvements and administration accepts bribes for admission. The government is combating issues with policies, but little reports or surveys can prove yet how effective these policies are to abolish corruption (Trines, 2017).

Overall, education plays a huge factor in Vietnamese culture. The culture surrounding the school is somewhat corrupt. Personally, I perceive the corruption surrounding education is due to how highly esteemed a quality education is to Vietnamese citizens. They strive for better grades and for better schools.

### **Structure of the Schools**

Mandatory education for this country begins at the age of six (Trines, 2017). This elementary education will last for five years. Once a student completes elementary education, they have the option to continue their education in a lower-secondary school or attend a vocational training program. A general lower-secondary education school is public and lasts for three years. Lower-secondary education is split up into thirty classes each week that last approximately forty-five minutes long (Trines, 2017).

Upper-secondary schools are highly competitive and require an entrance exam (Trines, 2017). This schooling is for grades tenth through twelfth. There is a variance of type for upper secondary schooling. There are specialized high schools which offer programs solely focused on foreign language. There are vocational upper-secondary programs. There are general secondary education programs which offer typically one of three subjects: technology, natural science, and social sciences and foreign languages. Like lower-secondary schools, upper-secondary schools have thirty courses a week that last up to forty-five minutes each (Trines, 2017).

### **Curriculum**

Elementary education that is taught in Vietnam includes mathematics, Vietnamese, moral education, natural and social sciences, arts, and physical education (Trines, 2017). The last two grades in elementary education also begin to learn about history and geography. A recent addition to their curriculum is the implementation of foreign language, computer training, and an elective course of minority languages. These additional courses will be added in the third grade (Trines, 2017).

The curriculum for lower-secondary school included mathematics, foreign language, Vietnamese, natural sciences, civics, history, geography, technology, computer science, arts, and physical education (Trines, 2017). Students have elective courses that include additional foreign language or minority languages (Trines, 2017).

Upper-secondary education curriculum varies greatly depending on the program a student is enrolled in (Trines, 2017). However general upper-secondary education recently allows scholars to customize their schedule with elective concentration subjects for only a third of their

schedule. All students are required to take Vietnamese, foreign language, mathematics, as well as military education (Trines, 2017).

### **Teaching Strategies**

I believe Vietnamese education has mixed critical views. On one hand the curriculum implemented is designed to push students to gain not only a procedural understanding but an in-depth conceptual understanding (Trines, 2017). Its curriculum is said to be specific in core concepts and core skills; however, it is also known to teach students through rote learning and memorization (Trines, 2017). The juxtaposition present is that only memorization and rote learning will not necessarily result in conceptual understanding nor are neither of those teaching strategies effective if used alone. This understanding can be supported with the Taxonomy of Educational Objectives also known as Bloom's Taxonomy (Anderson et al., 2000). This framework shows that although both of those teaching strategies are important, they only build a solid base of knowledge. Conceptual understanding is achieved when students are higher on the taxonomy and are evaluating, synthesizing, or analyzing that new knowledge (Anderson et al., 2000). Thus, Vietnam's use of memorization is a tool that can be used as a teaching strategy but should be paired with more teaching strategies to reach their goal.

Additionally, Vietnamese do prioritize building a positive learning environment (Trines, 2017). They foster a positive learning outlook in the hopes to achieve that positive learning environment. They also simultaneously practice having good classroom management strategies which again will lead to the desired environment (Trines, 2017). In brief, there's little public record for common teaching strategies implemented in Vietnam, but it is apparent they value memorization, conceptual understanding, positive learning environment, good classroom management, and an overall positive outlook towards learning.

**Implications**

A huge challenge as an overseas educator in Vietnam would be the corruption present in the education system. Teachers would need guidance and training on how to overcome challenge while still staying safe in the country. This obstacle would cause there to be potential challenges with communicating parents as well. The positive aspect of the corruption present is the implication of how important and valued education is for Vietnamese citizens. Another challenge is there teaching strategies. As mentioned earlier, there is evidence that rote learning and memorization are key teaching strategies employed. Although these strategies are easy to implement, there is a reason why other high performing countries implement numerous other strategies. If a foreigner does decide to teach in a school that has an emphasis on those teaching strategies, it may create an opportunity and challenge to implement new and differing strategies. Other implications include having a strong government in charge of the education system and curriculum that can sometimes be political.

## Military Base

### Overview

To teach on an American military base in another country you must apply through the Department of Defense Education Activity also known as DoDEA (“About DoDEA,” n.d.). This organization strives to provide excellent education to military families. DoDEA aims to shape their students to be leaders, productive citizens, and successful in their careers (“About DoDEA,” n.d.). Furthermore, the DoDEA strives to provide their students with excellent education from the most qualified teachers.

DoDEA is responsible for operating the elementary, middle, and high school systems for the Department of Defense (DoD) (“About DoDEA,” n.d.). The DoDEA is held to the same expectations in the state, indicating that students should be career or university ready when they graduate. These standards are not identical however with the states, because there is added curriculum to educate the students about their country (“About DoDEA,” n.d.).

DoDEA’s vision statement is ‘Excellence in Education for Every Student, Every Day, Everywhere’ (“About DoDEA,” n.d.). Their mission is to “educate, engage, and empower military-connected students to succeed in a dynamic world” (“About DoDEA,” n.d.). DoDEA appears to be a dedicated education provider, that is driven to prepare students for their choice of university or occupation.

### Job Opportunities

There are 163 schools in eleven foreign countries, seven states, Guam, and Puerto Rico (“About DoDEA,” n.d.). That means there are hundreds of jobs needed to run DoDEA. There are

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs. The various schools need English, mathematics, science, social studies, fine arts, foreign language, and so many more teachers. They also need elementary teachers and special education teachers. The opportunities to teach abroad are nearly endless (“About DoDEA,” n.d.).

The requirements in order to receive a job as an educator for the DoDEA is extensive. You must have a state/ territory certificate/ license, a bachelors degree from an accredited institution with stipulations on how many semester hours, a semester of student teaching or an internship, testing requirements, a Department of Defense Dependent Schools (DoDDS) licensure, and a strong interest in extracurricular activities (“About DoDEA,” n.d.). Hence, DoDEA seeks for the most qualified candidates, and the occupation opportunities are competitive.

### **Living Conditions**

Getting paid to teach through DoDEA has a vast amount of benefits. DoDEA does help cover expenses of relocating overseas; they will support their employees by providing monetary assistance of no more than \$650 or one-week’s salary to cover miscellaneous expenses such as utility fees or deposits (“Pay & Benefits,” n.d.). There are other allowances you can receive through the DoDEA; however, you must apply to receive Living Quarter Allowances (LQA) and Post Allowances (PA) (“Pay & Benefits,” n.d.). According to DoDEA’s website, overseas educators in the 2019-2020 year earned a salary with only a bachelor’s degree for \$46,845 (“Overseas,” 2020). The monetary incentives are excellent, but there are a few more benefits for working with DoDEA.

Not only are there monetary assistances and payments for teaching in a foreign country, there are other health benefits. You have access to the federal employee dental and vision insurance (“Pay & Benefits,” n.d.). In addition to that, you have access to medical insurance. An additionally benefit you have as government employee is life insurance (“Pay & Benefits,” n.d.). However, a benefit that is enticing is the chance to live in a foreign country and immerse in a new culture.

### **Implications**

Through research, I have learned that teaching through DoDEA has ample benefits and what appears to be few draw backs. As a DoDEA employee, you will have the opportunity to gain government employee benefits. The DoDEA does aid with moving to a foreign country as long as the finances have been approved. The salary overall is quite impressive, considering that average is for a candidate with only a bachelor’s degree and limited experience in teaching. In addition to that, you have the chance to teach American students while immersing yourself in a new culture.

It is clear though that being accepted as a DoDEA teacher is rather competitive. There are numerous requirements to be a teacher, and even then they preferred teachers with even more qualifications. This setback is small, considering numerous most American schools do seek the most qualified teacher within their budget.

## **Peace Corps**

### **Overview**

The Peace Corps website states “The Peace Corps is a service opportunity for motivated changemakers to immerse themselves in a community abroad, working side by side with local leaders to tackle the most pressing challenges of our generation” (“About,” n.d.). Essentially this program is driven to provide trained people to a country, promote a better understanding of Americans, and promote a better understanding of the world (“About,” n.d.). Generally speaking, Peace Corps is a unique opportunity to work in a country that is in need of assistance.

There are six different sectors in Peace Corps: agriculture, education, health, community economic development, environment, and youth in development (“What Volunteers,” n.d.). To join, you apply to a specific country within your sector. There are numerous countries involved from all four corners of the world. You can teach in Zambia to Thailand to even Costa Rica. It is a two-year program where you go and assist the community utilizing your special training (“What Volunteers,” n.d.). For two years you strive to make your community better with every project and conversation you have.

### **Job Opportunities**

There are thousands and thousands of jobs working with Peace Corps; however, there will be a sole focus on educational opportunities explored here (“What Volunteers,” n.d.). When you volunteer for Peace Corps in another country, you may work in an elementary school, secondary school, or post-secondary schools. The subjects commonly taught through Peace Corps are math, science, and English. Peace Corps volunteers are also used as teacher trainers and as resources. Occasionally they will also aid in developing libraries and technology resource

centers for their community (“What Volunteers,” n.d.). The job opportunities are endless and through your application and deliberate research, you can find the country and job that fits you the best.

### **Living Conditions**

Peace Corps volunteers have the opportunity to volunteer across the globe. Although you do have a say on what country you want to volunteer in, you do not have control over where in the country you will reside in (“About,” n.d.). Through researching the Peace Corps website, every country has different living conditions. These living conditions can be drastically different from even within the country. Wherever you reside, its expected that you live like the locals.

Volunteers are placed in remote areas within their country, which does increase risk for volunteers. To combat these risks, Peace Corps volunteers are trained for several months prior to their placement (“Health,” n.d.). They are also taught extensively the language as well as the culture of the country. Furthermore, they reside for several months up to their whole volunteer experience with a host family. Living with a host family aids in the volunteers being welcomed into the community (“Health,” n.d.).

A Peace Corps volunteer can expect to experience less-developed transportation systems, new diets, unique cultures, different housing norms, and diverse sanitation (“Health,” n.d.). Comparatively to the United States, most of these countries also do not have a developed health-care infrastructure like U.S (“Health,” n.d.). Overall, their experience in their new home will be drastically different from the United States.

### **Implications**

There are several positives and negatives in my opinion with volunteering with the Peace Corps. An instant positive I see is that you will have the opportunity to meet people not only across the United States during training, but also make connections in other countries. You will have the opportunity to be fully immersed in another culture. This opportunity will allow you to learn another language conversationally and allow you to live a more modest life. If you choose a specific country, at the end of your program you can also receive a Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) certificate (“What Volunteers,” n.d.). In addition to that, you can start an adventure that not only challenges you, but allows you to become a better communicator, leader, and compassionate person. My favorite positive aspect for the Peace Corps is that you will have the opportunity to change lives of people who truly need it.

Although there are an abundance of positives, there are some negatives that I can foresee. There is still a risk in living a country you have only had a few months to learn their language. With that being said, you are fully immersed in your country, including their culture. Although you will be trained, there will be times that being the minority in your community can surely be challenging. You will also have to make an adjustment to living like the locals do. That means the salary you earn in Peace Corps will not make you rich. In America, we are very privileged to have our own mode of transportation and conveniences such as food, health care, reliable roads, internet access, and even electricity surround us. The Peace Corps has a great amount of opportunities, but the adjustment to a new life is significant.

### **Implications**

Conclusively, it is evident that the research above indicates the countries described value education and are striving to continuously improve their quality of education. The culture in the countries greatly influences their education. This notion can be supported with the Japanese students attending jukus which is influenced by parent's ambitions and the Vietnamese culture dealing with bribery in education influenced by their desire to succeed and enroll in competitive schools. Although each country has its own culture surrounding the school, most countries researched have a strong desire for their students to learn, perform well, and better their community. Most countries additionally highly respect educators. All of these components are critical to consider prior to deciding where to teach abroad.

As mentioned earlier, there are hundreds of places in foreign countries that are seeking educators, especially English teachers. The U.S. Department of State has a website page titled *Teaching in International Schools Overseas* (2018) which contains numerous opportunities to teach abroad. There is a disclaimer on this government website regarding that these opportunities are not affiliated with the United States and hence qualifications, salary levels, and benefit packages do vary ("Teaching in International," 2018).

One resource provided by the U.S. Department of States are job fairs and overarching websites that showcase job openings available abroad ("Teaching in International," 2018). One of the job fairs that was intriguing was that of University of Northern Iowa (UNI) Overseas Teaching Service ("Teachers & Educators," n.d.). This service provides licensed teachers connections with over one hundred international schools within fifty different countries. They not only have a recruiting fair once a year, but also an employment database which contains ample useful resources. The database has job openings, reviews of the schools, guidance

on how to set up interviews, and access to communicating with their international schools. Lastly, they provide support services and publications. The only set back is this can cost up to seventy-five dollars per year in order to attend their job fair, access to their database, and access to services and publications (“Teachers & Educators,” n.d.). Combining the above research for the 5 countries with the UNI Overseas Teaching Service could aid any teacher seeking employment abroad to be extremely knowledgeable and easier access to their preferred country and school.

Other websites on the U.S. Department of State are Educators Overseas and Search Associates (“Teaching in International,” 2018). Educator Overseas is a free website that has a comprehensive list of tutoring, nannyng, educating, and administrating opportunities (“Educators Overseas,” n.d.). They believe teaching abroad not only allows you to see the world, but they believe you will enjoy your job and have the chance to build your career. This website is unique in that it explains benefits for each continent, type of schools available, and a comprehensive list of resources to gain knowledge about that continent (“Educators Overseas,” n.d.). Search Associates is similar to the UNI Overseas Teaching Services. Search Associates provides job fairs for international opportunities based on a city (“Job Fair,” n.d.). Both of these websites have plenty of opportunities in Europe, Asia, Middle East, South America, and even Canada. Again, combining the research around the five countries in this thesis with the access of job opportunities theses websites provide will allow you to find the most suitable placement and a thorough understanding of that country.

Personally, this research has shown that education is swiftly evolving in numerous countries; there is a unique opportunity in this century to not only travel and experience new and exciting cultures, but to live in a foreign country where you can not only impact young children’s

academic career and lives but gain invaluable experience as a teacher. America and the countries researched show a passion for improving their education system. Some countries have been reported to even outperform American students academically. In this century, Americans have an invaluable chance to teach abroad, and learn the strategies, practices, and curriculum that enhance those foreign students' performance. I believe countries like Japan, Poland, South Korea, Thailand, and Vietnam have paved a way for new ideas in education and proven its efficiency and sufficiency. Teaching abroad simply is the first step in making a difference in the world with one student, one idea, and a lifetime experience for not only the teacher but the communities they serve.

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### **Biographical Note**

Jaira Gibson's hometown is Danville, Indiana. She decided to attend Southern Illinois University Carbondale to study Elementary Education, due to her love for the Common Core State Standards and working with kids. Through her undergraduate she learned about the competitiveness within countries on academic performance. From there grew her passion for international education and the need for curriculum and teaching practices/ strategies to be adjusted. Jaira has acquired a passion for service and for traveling. This has grown stronger with her participation in spring break service trips like Pay It Forward Tour and The Long Haul. She hopes to combine her love for education, traveling, and service to soon join the Peace Corps after graduating from SIUC.