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Education In Japan And The U.S.

THE United States finds in Japan a tough Competitor. One of the reasons of Japan's success in various fields including technology is believed to be its education system. In Japan, not only literacy is cent per cent, it has an education system that makes a student work very hard and for longer hours. The United States wants to see if the Japanese system of education has something to offer to it. Similarly, the Japanese also are eager to improve its own system, learning from the American system, if there is something to learn.

It is quite interesting that these two most advanced nations of the world today are probing each other's system of education, with the objective of reaching further heights of academic achievement. And achievements in the academic field certainly leads to development in all other fields, for education is the key to all development. Michael Binyon from Washington, in a recently published despatch in The

Times, throws light on the two nation's efforts to learn from each other.

The despatch is quoted below:-

An unusual US Government report on the Japanese education system, published recently, praised the emphasis on a basic curriculum, but found that the system was inflexible and universities were not up to world standards.

It also described Japan as a "learning society of formidable dimensions" and said ties between schools and the job market were closer and more effective than in most other industrialized nations.

The study arose out of a conversation between President Reagan and Mr. Yasuhiro Nakasone, the Japanese Prime Minister, in 1983. They agreed their countries would benefit from a look at both school systems.

However, the Japanese study of the US system, released simultaneously in Tokyo, found no particular aspect of American education worth emulating. It suggested

the cultural and bureaucratic differences were too great for the US experience to have any immediate relevance to Japan.

The Japanese researchers appeared baffled by the variations from state to state. But they observed that the United States where education efforts a generation ago were spurred by "sputnik shock", was now, suffering from "Toyota shock". A Ministry of Education official who led the study suggested that it was really the Americans who could learn from the Japanese.

American researchers noted that Japanese pupils consistently scored higher on international tests of educational achievement. They attributed this to well-defined curricula, parental involvement, the high status of teachers, and hard work by well-behaved Japanese children.

But the team, headed by Mr. Chester Finn, an Assistant Secretary of Education, was critical of what it saw as the straitjacket of the Japanese system. All pupils moved

at the same pace and the system assiduously avoided making distinctions between them. "A basic characteristic of Japanese secondary education... is the view that there is only one right answer."

The report said educational reform was a big political issue in both countries. But it noted, ironically, that they were going in opposite directions: while the United States was seeking greater uniformity and tougher testing, Japan was pushing for greater decentralization and diversification.

The biggest disappointment was the Japanese university system. Once an applicant was accepted, he was virtually assured of a degree and did little work.

The US report comes at a time of debate here over low standards in schools. Japanese industrial success has been attributed to superiority of the school system. But the US team found that much of the Japanese system could be traced to American influences during the occupation after the Second World War.