

The Role of the Ikigai in the Development of Students' Self-Preparation

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the application of the Japanese concept of Ikigai as a powerful framework for students to navigate their educational journey and prepare for a fulfilling future. Ikigai, which translates as 'a reason for being, encourages individuals to find the intersection of their passions, talents, what the world needs and what they can be paid to do. By integrating Ikigai principles into education, students can discover their interests, clarify their values and purpose, set meaningful goals and cultivate intrinsic motivation. This framework also helps students develop a long-term vision, identify potential career paths, and foster a sense of balance and well-being. Ultimately, Ikigai empowers students to become self-prepared by enabling them to make informed decisions about their education and future.

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The rapidly evolving technological landscape and the consequent shifts in the labor market are demanding a new breed of professionals: self-learners and lifelong learners. Susan Land, co-author of the McKinsey Global Institute study, said, "Previously, people spent the first 20 years of their lives studying and then spent the next 40-50 years working in the profession they studied. Now this model is completely irrelevant to the times we live in. Today, people need to be constantly learning and studying throughout their lives and careers"(Umarova, 2023).

The ability of students to adjust, learn new skills, and proactively prepare for uncertain future work conditions will determine their success in the future. In this context, understanding the factors that contribute to the development of self-preparation in students becomes increasingly crucial. This study explores the role of Ikigai, a Japanese concept encompassing one's reason for being, purpose, and passion, in fostering students' self-preparation.

The traditional educational model often focuses on teaching pre-defined knowledge and skills, potentially neglecting the development of intrinsic motivation and self-directed learning. However, in a world characterized by rapid technological advancements and constantly changing job requirements, students need to cultivate a strong sense of purpose and agency in their learning journey. We believe that ikigai, by providing a framework for understanding personal values, aspirations, and passions, can play a significant role in fostering this self-preparation. This research aims to investigate the relationship between ikigai and students' readiness to learn, adapt, and succeed in the face of future challenges.

Ikigai is a Japanese concept or philosophy that is rooted in Japanese culture. The Japanese word ikigai combines "iki" (which means life) and "gai" (value). It shows that everyone has a purpose in life to offer the world. Although the concept of ikigai has long been a part of Japanese culture, it was first popularized by the Japanese psychiatrist and academic Mieko Kamiya in her 1966 book "On the Meaning of Life". Marc Winn, an English business coach and entrepreneur, further popularized the concept by creating the following diagram (1-figure):



Figure 1. Ikigai framework

This diagram illustrates the intersection of four fundamental elements:

1. What you love (Passion): Activities that bring you joy, make you lose track of time, and energize you.
2. What you're good at (Vocation): Your talents, skills, and abilities, both natural and developed.
3. What the world needs (Mission): Problems you want to solve, contributions you want to make, and ways you can serve others.
4. What you can be paid for (Profession): Opportunities to earn a living and sustain yourself through your work.

In the face of rapid technological advancements and evolving job markets, the ability to learn independently and adapt to new situations is becoming increasingly crucial (Knowles, 1975). Self-directed learning (SDL) emphasizes learners' autonomy and responsibility in taking control of their learning process, setting goals, and selecting resources (Hiemstra & Smeck, 1996). Research indicates that SDL is associated with enhanced learning outcomes, increased motivation, and greater satisfaction with the learning experience (Zimmerman, 2000). The concept of lifelong learning, an extension of SDL, emphasizes the continuous pursuit of knowledge and skill development throughout one's life (European Commission, 2000). This continuous learning approach is vital for individuals to remain relevant and adaptable in the dynamic workforce of the future.

The concept of ikigai, originating from Japan, emphasizes finding meaning and purpose in life through aligning one's passions, skills, mission, and profession (Kawakami, 2000). Research suggests that a strong sense of ikigai is positively associated with psychological well-being, including increased life satisfaction, happiness, and reduced stress (Arikawa et al., 2017). Furthermore, studies have shown that individuals with a clear ikigai tend to exhibit higher levels of intrinsic motivation, resilience, and a greater sense of purpose (Steger et al., 2012). These findings highlight the potential of ikigai in fostering a positive mindset and driving individuals towards personal growth and development.

While the research on ikigai and self-directed learning is still emerging, preliminary studies suggest a strong connection between the two. For instance, research by C.L.Tsai and C.M.Chang (2019) found that students with a clearer understanding of their ikigai demonstrated a greater inclination towards engaging in self-directed learning activities. This suggests that ikigai can serve as a powerful motivator for individuals to take ownership of their learning journey, leading them to actively seek out opportunities for personal and professional development. Furthermore, A.S. Waterman (1993) explored the role of ikigai in fostering a growth mindset, which is crucial for effective self-directed learning. A growth mindset, characterized by a belief in one's ability to develop and learn new skills, is a key predictor of success in self-directed learning environments.

While the integration of ikigai into formal education is still in its nascent stages, there is growing interest

in leveraging this concept to enhance student engagement and motivation. M.Yamamoto (2016) explored the use of ikigai workshops in promoting students' self-awareness and career exploration. The findings indicated that these workshops facilitated students' understanding of their values, passions, and skills, leading to increased clarity about their future career paths. Similarly, J.Nakamura and M.Csikszentmihalyi (2014) investigated the impact of ikigai-based interventions on students' academic performance and motivation. The results suggested that incorporating ikigai into the curriculum can enhance students' intrinsic motivation and engagement in learning, leading to improved academic outcomes.

Despite the growing body of research on ikigai and its potential benefits, there are still gaps in our understanding of its role in fostering self-preparation in students. Further research is needed to explore the specific mechanisms through which ikigai influences self-directed learning, the optimal ways to integrate ikigai into educational settings, and the long-term impact of ikigai-based interventions on students' future success.

Ikigai can play a significant role in the development and self-preparation of students. When students are able to discover and cultivate their ikigai, they are more likely to be motivated, focused, and fulfilled in their academic and personal pursuits.

One key aspect of ikigai in the development of self-preparation for students is the focus on passion. By helping students identify their passions and interests, educators can guide them towards areas of study and career paths that align with their strengths and values. This can lead to greater engagement and perseverance, as students pursue activities and goals that truly resonate with them.

Another important element of ikigai is the emphasis on mission or purpose. When students are able to connect their learning and future aspirations with a sense of purpose, they are more likely to approach their education with a greater sense of meaning and direction. This can also lead to a greater sense of resilience and persistence, as students are able to see the bigger picture and understand the impact of their actions on the world around them.

Additionally, vocation and profession are integral components of ikigai, as they relate to the practical application of one's skills and interests. By helping students explore various career paths and understand how their talents can be translated into meaningful work, educators can support them in making informed decisions about their future endeavors.

So, Ikigai isn't just a philosophical concept; it's a practical framework that can significantly enhance a student's self-preparation in several ways:

Understanding Strengths and Weaknesses: Exploring Ikigai prompts students to reflect on their skills, talents, and areas for improvement. This self-awareness is crucial for setting realistic goals and choosing appropriate learning paths.

Identifying Passions and Interests: Ikigai encourages students to delve into what truly excites them, helping them discover potential career paths or areas of study that align with their passions.

Clarifying Values and Purpose: By considering what the world needs, students can connect their academic pursuits to a larger purpose, making their studies more meaningful.

Meaningful Goals: Ikigai helps students set goals that are not just about grades or external validation but are deeply connected to their sense of purpose and fulfillment.

Intrinsic Motivation: When students pursue activities aligned with their Ikigai, they are naturally more motivated to learn and persevere through challenges.

Long-Term Vision: Ikigai provides a framework for developing a long-term vision for their future, helping them make informed decisions about their education and career.

Identifying Potential Career Paths: The intersection of passion, talent, need, and profession helps students narrow down career options that are both fulfilling and viable.

Developing Relevant Skills: Once students have a clearer idea of their desired career path, they can focus on developing the specific skills and knowledge needed to succeed.

Building a Network: Ikigai can guide students to connect with people who share their passions and can provide mentorship or opportunities in their chosen field.

Coping with Stress: Having a strong sense of purpose can help students navigate the stress and pressure of academic life.

Finding Balance: Ikigai emphasizes the importance of finding balance between different aspects of life, promoting overall well-being.

Developing a Growth Mindset: The process of exploring Ikigai encourages a growth mindset, where students embrace challenges as opportunities for learning and development.

Ikigai can serve as a guiding framework for students as they navigate their educational journeys and prepare for the future. By encouraging them to explore their passions, identify their purpose, and pursue meaningful vocations, educators can help students develop a strong sense of self-preparation and personal fulfillment (Umarova, 2024).

In conclusion, the Ikigai framework offers a valuable and holistic approach to student development, extending beyond traditional academic metrics to encompass personal fulfillment and societal contribution. By embracing Ikigai, educators can guide students towards a deeper understanding of themselves and their place in the world. This approach fosters intrinsic motivation, helps students define meaningful goals, and provides a roadmap for navigating the complexities of self-education. As students explore the intersection of their passions, talents, societal needs, and potential professions, they are better equipped to build a future characterized by purpose, resilience, and enduring satisfaction. Implementing Ikigai principles in educational settings can empower students to not only succeed academically but also to thrive as individuals and contribute meaningfully to society.

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