

# Professor laments decline of academic standards across board

By KENZO MORIGUCHI  
Staff writer

**KYOTO** — Academic Kazuo Nishimura is convinced that Japan will face devastating consequences if the government continues to dilute the academic curricula of elementary and junior high school students.

Nishimura, a professor at Kyoto University's Institute of Economic Research, said in a recent interview with The Japan Times that the level of understanding required under the latest curricula, introduced in April, is 30 percent lower than under

"This can be attributed to the policy of 'easing education' put forward by the Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Ministry and to the introduction of multiple choice exams for university entrance," he said.

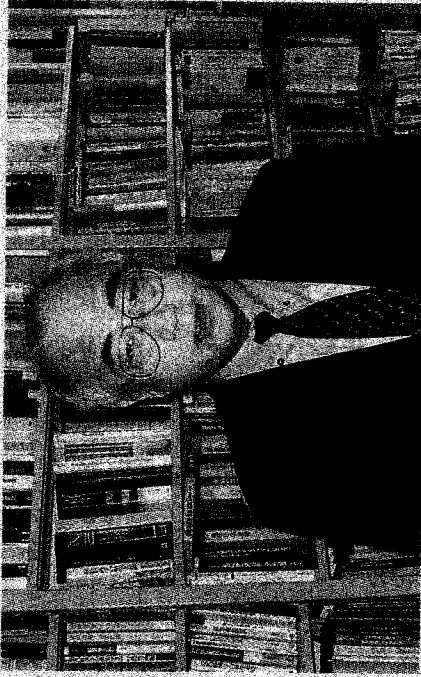
Beginning in 1980, the ministry has been reducing class hours and study courses at elementary and secondary schools. The multiple choice exam format was first introduced at national universities in 1979.

Since 1990, private universities have also been allowed to use this exam format, while students across the board have been allowed to choose the subjects featured in their multiple choice tests.

Nishimura noticed a decline in students' academic performance around 1985. Moreover, the results of math tests conducted by the professor at several universities in 1998 showed that a considerable number of freshmen, particularly those who did not take math as an entrance exam subject, could not solve simple problems.

He sensed an even sharper drop in 1999, when freshmen who were taught under the second set of revised curricula entered university.

"If this policy of relaxing education is not reversed im-



**KAZUO NISHIMURA**, a professor at Kyoto University's Institute of Economic Research, is concerned at the falling academic abilities of university students. KENZO MORIGUCHI/PHOTO

## WEEKEND WISDOM

the previous system.

This will only lead to a deterioration in the already low intellectual capabilities of Japanese students, he warned.

A specialist in the field of complex economics, Nishimura cited the dangers stemming from falling academic standards among university students in his 1999 book "Bunshu ga dekinai daigakusei" ("University Students Who Cannot Solve Fractions").

He claimed, however, that the situation has only worsened since then.

"That would just allow students to finish school with insufficient academic achievements."

While Nishimura is hopeful that the academic workload on younger children will be reviewed for the better in future — with the latest changes having been met with more public criticism and concern than in the past — he is still critical of Japan's education policy.

"Young unemployed people calling themselves 'freeters' (individuals who drift from part-time job to part-time job) cannot find full-time jobs because they have not been trained nor have sufficient academic achievements," he charged.

"They are the victims of the (education) ministry's lazy policymaking," which failed to give students sufficient professional guidance and made them feel they had no option other than to pursue higher education, he added.

Nishimura argued that the fundamental solution to the problems in the education system is to decentralize the ministry's power.

"The decentralization of the educational system would mean greater supervision by local voters," he said.

"Under their watchful eyes, such a mess would not be tolerated."

tion," he said.

But Nishimura believes this problem can be averted if the academic volume of the school curricula is reinforced to its level in 1981, at the very least.

This would help college graduates start their careers as more reliable employees, he said.

He added that a volume increase of this kind should be accompanied by more comprehensible textbooks that students can study on their own, and by the introduction of smaller classes.

"We have to first guarantee that schoolchildren can repeat their learning until they understand, rather than just allowing working people to return to school anytime," he said.

mediately, globally competitive companies in Japan will hire more intelligent and able foreigners in place of Japanese, which is already happening in the field of corporate research and development," he said.

"This will inevitably lead to higher unemployment, which in turn results in social instability."

He added that some wealthy, wary parents have already started sending their children overseas in the hope that they may benefit from a higher level of education.

"I would not be surprised to see more foreign schools opening branches in Japan for Japanese children once the World Trade Organization allows free trade in edu-

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