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UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF KARATE IN JAPAN

Abstract:

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perception of Karate in Japan. The author is planning to investigate this in order for Karate to become established as a leading Budo in Japan.

Karate is a Budo that originates, and was developed, in Okinawa Prefecture, Japan. People who practice Karate do not use weapons, but instead their whole body. Punches, kicks and defense are the three basic movements of Karate. In 2016, Karate was chosen as a new Olympics sport for the games to be held in 2020 in Tokyo. It is said that there are more than 130,000,000 Karate fans all over the world. Though Karate is spreading across the world, the actual situation of Karate in Japan is not clear. In Okinawa Prefecture, 81.8% of junior high schools offered Karate classes in 2012. However, with Okinawa Prefecture as the exception, it is very rare for junior high schools in Japan to give Karate classes. Instead, people take lessons in private Karate schools.

There had been no investigation of the perception of Karate in Japan, except for in Okinawa Prefecture. Therefore, the author conducted an opinion poll among university students. The participants were 30 freshmen in a university in Western Japan. The results of the questionnaire showed that very few young people were interested in Karate. In addition, most students were not able to recognize even the basic elements of Karate.

The author then created a 20-minute presentation about Karate for the students. The lesson covered the history of Karate and what Karate is about. A video of the scene in which Karate is being practiced also formed part of the lesson.

According to the post-lesson questionnaire, student interest in Karate increased. They wanted to know more about Karate, and wanted to watch the Karate match. The results showed that perception was significantly altered, even by the presentation alone. It seems that one of the reasons why students were not interested in Karate is that they had little opportunity to understand what Karate is.

It would appear that Karate is not firmly established in Japan, except for within the Okinawa Prefecture. The author suggests that Karate organizations in Japan should try to increase awareness of Karate all over Japan. They should also offer more opportunities to enjoy practicing and watching Karate.

Reference: Tetsuhiro Hokama, *The 7 Samurai of Okinawa Karate*, Ryukyu Shimpo Co., 2015.

Keywords:

Karate, Budo Education, Cultural Studies, Japanese Culture