

AN OVERVIEW OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING MODEL OF JAPAN

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Abstract:

Japanese education and training from establishment to maintenance is responsibility of local Government Board. The Education and training system of Japan is based upon the personality development with reference to body and mind of the living souls, who are experiencing rapid growth in science technology and economic development with social changes. This paper is broadly covering the education system, curriculum development, teachers' education and examinations and financing including issues and remedies.

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Japan consists of nearly 4,000 large and small islands, stretching along the northeastern coast of the Asian continent, the longest span being 3,000 kilometers. The total area is 378,000 square kilometres (145,945 square miles), only one-fifth of which can be inhabited.

Administratively, Japan is divided into 47 Ken (prefectures) and further subdivided into 3,256 Shi / Cho / Son (municipalities). The 1947 Local Autonomy Law provides that local-assembly members and heads of the prefectures and municipalities should be elected directly by the people.¹

The establishment and maintenance of public schools and other educational facilities is the responsibility of board of education in each local government area, with members of the boards appointed by the head of the local prefecture or municipality with the consent of the local assembly.²

Goals of Education

The goals of education in Japan are enunciated in the Fundamental Law of Education (1947). Article one of the law states:

Education shall aim at the full development of personality, at rearing the people sound in mind and body, to love truth and justice, esteem individual values, respect labour, have a deep sense of responsibility, and are imbued with an independent spirit as the builders of a peaceful state and society.³

Since the issue of this Fundamental Law of Education, the general aims of education have periodically been cast in more

specific forms as laws and recommendations of various councils, including the Central Council for Education, which advise the minister of education. The most recent statement of aims for Japanese education is the recommendations, made by the central council for education in 1971 as the guide lines for the reform fundamental law of education 1947 and identifies goals suitable for Japanese youth who are citizens in a global society that is experiencing rapid progress in science and technology, rapid economic development, and radical social changes.⁴

The objective of education for the recommendation states the development of personality should be to help people acquire the abilities for building a satisfactory and spontaneous life, for adapting to social reality, and for the creative solution of difficulties. The Japanese people, showing tolerance for the values of others, should realize their national identity and, on the values of basis of the rules of democratic society and national tradition, should contribute to the peace of the world and to the welfare of mankind through the development of a distinct but universal culture.

Schooling in Japan emphasizes the development of basic abilities in young people rather than a set of specified vocational skills, in the assumption that they should be prepared to cope flexibly with rapid progress in science and technology and with rapid changes in society.

Structure of the School System and Size of the Education Effort

The educational system in prewar Japan was a multi-track system, in which diversification of course started at the age of 12, when children left the six-year elementary school. This system was completely changed in the postwar reform of education.

Kindergarten

A Majority Of Children Attend Kindergarten or Nursery School. Kindergarten is an Educational Institution under the Jurisdiction of the ministry of education for children aged 3 to 5 years, while the nursery school is regarded as a social welfare institution under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare for children up to 5 year old. Activities at nursery schools for children of three years old and above are more or less the same as those provided at kindergartens.⁵

Elementary Education

At 6 years of age, children begin to attend elementary school, which is compulsory for all. Elementary school lasts six years and is an educational institution to provide children with basic education relevant to their physical and mental development. The standard number of periods for school programmes per year is 1,015, varying from 850 periods in grade 1 to 1,015 periods in grades 4 to 6. Promotion from one grade to the next is practically automatic. Almost all children of this age group are enrolled and 99 percent are in public schools.⁶

Secondary Education

Lower-secondary school is compulsory and lasts three years. Promotion from elementary to lower-secondary-school is automatic as far as public school is concerned. Only 3 percent of children attend private school at this level. In addition to the subject matters taught at the elementary school, prevocational education subjects are provided at the lower-secondary school. A foreign language is also one of the elective subjects but in practice almost all lower-secondary schools teach English as a foreign language. The total number of periods given at the lower-secondary school is 1,050.⁷

After compulsory schooling, three to four years of upper-secondary school education is provided. An entrance examination is taken and 94 percent of graduates from lower-secondary schools enter upper-secondary school, however, 28 percent of upper-secondary school students are enrolled in private institutions. Approximately 70 percent of students are enrolled in the general education course; technical and vocational to the general education is provided. Part-time as well as correspondence three years for daytime courses.⁸

Higher Education

After upper-secondary school, students proceed to Daigaku (University) or Tanki-daigaku (junior college), which requires passing an entrance examination. Students wishing to proceed to the national and public universities take first the common entrance examination, which is an achievement-type test, and then the entrance examination, which comprises interviews,

essay test, and other examinations organized by each individual university. A final decision on entrance is based on the two tests and the upper-secondary-school report. Private universities select their entrants by their own examination.

Daigaku or university course lasts four years except for medical and dental courses. Tanki-daigaku or junior college courses last two to three years. Some 75 percent of Daigaku students and 90 percent of tanki-daigaku students are in private establishments. In 2005, 53 percent of Daigaku students were enrolled in social science and humanities courses and 27 percent in science and technology courses. Another type of higher institution of learning is Kotosenmon-gakku, lasting five years, which requires as a qualification for entry graduation from lower-secondary school. This is mainly for technical and vocational education.⁹

Nonformal Education

In Japanese, Nonformal Education is known as social education. Law as organized educational activities are not provided by formal schooling. Learning courses for different segments of society (adult schools, youth classes, women's classes, courses for the aged, etc.) correspondence courses for basic-skill development, courses for hobbies, and leisure-time activities, extension courses conducted by upper-secondary schools and universities are organized by local boards of education. These social education programmes are under the jurisdiction of the ministry of Education. The ministry is also in charge of special training schools and miscellaneous schools which are nonformal education institutions providing

technical/vocational train courses equivalent to those at the upper-secondary and junior levels. The ministry of labour establishes several types of institution for vocational training and the ministry of agriculture, forestry, and fishery provides various training opportunities in agriculture, fishermen, and forestry, mainly for young farmers, fishermen, and forestry workers.

There are many radio and television programmes for general education and skill training purposes. Learning courses on various subjects are also provided by non-governmental bodies such as newspaper companies, broadcasting companies, and departmental stores in large urban areas.

Opportunities for distance learning are supplied by institutions at the upper-secondary level and the University of the Air, but these programmes are all within the framework of formal education.¹⁰

Administration

At the national level, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture is the principal agency, which shares responsibilities with the cabinet and the diet for preparing budget estimates, drafting educational legislation, and formulating educational policies. The ministry allocates financial aids to prefectural and municipal boards of education and assists such boards with advice and technical guidelines for curriculum, and credit requirements for kindergarten through higher education. Curricular standards for elementary and secondary schools are described in the form of "courses of study" issued by the

ministry. The ministry is also responsible for authorizing textbooks in all elementary and secondary schools.¹¹

Each of the 47 prefectures has a board of education to administer local education affairs. The five-member boards administer prefectural institutions of education and social education programmes established by the prefecture. In addition, the prefectural boards supervise personnel matters for public educational institutions, provide in-service training for teachers, purchase and manage instructional materials, promote special education activities, protect cultural assets, and offer advice to municipal boards of education.

Each municipality maintains a three-to five-member board of education whose major functions are to establish and manage municipal educational institutions, administer personnel matters in such institutions, adopt textbooks for municipal elementary and lower-secondary schools and provide advice and guidance to educational institutions.¹²

Finance

The current system of educational administration provides for national, prefectural, and municipal sharing in the financing of educational activities, with funds obtained from taxes and other revenue sources. In 1981, a total amount of 17.9 billion yen (approximately us\$77,800 million) was spent on education reached 15 billion yen (approximately us\$65,400 million), which represents 19.6 percent of the total expenditure for government services in Japan. A total of 15.9 billion yen (i.e., public and private funding) was spent on schooling, from

kindergarten to higher education, of which 28.7 percent was from the national government, 53.7 percent from local government, and the remaining 17.6 percent from the private sector including parents. From this total of 15.9 billion yen, 54.1 percent was allocated to compulsory education, 18.1 percent to upper-secondary schools, and 21.2 percent to higher education.¹³

Teacher Education

Teachers for elementary and secondary schools are trained in higher education institutions, including university, graduate schools, and junior colleges sanctioned by the ministry of education. Teaching certificates prescribed by law are granted for life by prefectural boards of education and are valid in all prefectures. An elementary-school teaching certificate qualifies a teacher to teach all subject matters in an elementary school, whereas secondary-school teaching certificates authorize teachers to teach specified subject fields only.

To obtain a post in a public elementary or secondary school, a candidate must take a recruitment examination. The appointment is made by the prefectural board of education on the basis of the recommendation of the prefectural superintendent, who usually takes into consideration the results of the recruitment examination. The teachers in public elementary or secondary schools are designated local public officials. Promotion to administrative posts such as deputy principal or principal in public schools usually requires a candidate to pass a series of examinations for promotion and to complete specified inservice training.¹⁴

Curriculum Development

The school curriculum is based on the course of study prescribed by the Ministry of Education, in which the basic framework for curriculum at each grade level including objectives, instructional content, and standard time allotments are stated. The prefectural and municipal boards of education prepare guidelines for curriculum development in the schools and are required to organize their own detailed instructional programmes on the basis of the courses of study and the guidelines.

At the beginning of the 2000s, the educational programmes in the elementary school comprised instruction in Japanese language, social studies, arithmetic, general science, music, art and handicrafts, physical education and home working (for grades 5 and 6). In addition, moral education is compulsory for one period a week in public schools and can be replaced by religious education in private schools. Special activities are another area of education in elementary schools, and such programmes may contain home-room activities, children's assembly, club activities, sports meeting, school excursions, etc. in the lower-secondary school, subjects are in two categories: compulsory and elective. Japanese language, social studies, mathematics, general science, music, fine arts, health and physical education, prevocational /homemaking are compulsory, and elective subjects include foreign languages, music, fine arts, health and physical education, and prevocational subjects and homemaking. Moral education and special activities are also conducted in the lower-secondary schools.¹⁵

The school year begins in April and ends in March, and one school year consists of three school terms. The first is from April to July, the second from September to December, and the third is from January to March.

The courses of study produced by the ministry of education are formulated in the following way. The curriculum council, the minister's advisory organ on matters of school curriculum, prepares the basic guidelines, upon the request of the minister, for revising a course of study. The guidelines prepared by the council are utilized by the ministry subject matter. A course of study is revised approximately every 10 years. Teacher's guidebooks for each grade level and subject are typically prepared by curriculum specialists in the ministry with the assistance of teachers who are involved in the deliberations of the curriculum council.

The textbooks authorized by the ministry and adopted by the local boards of education for use in schools serve as the main instructional material in the classroom, the textbooks are developed by commercial publishing companies and once adopted then are distributed free of charge to children in compulsory schooling, i.e., thorough lower-secondary school.

Examinations, Promotion, and Certification

At all levels of the school system, tests of various types and several other sources of information are used to judge whether students should be promoted to higher grade, should be enrolled in a given school, or should be certified as having completed a course, in elementary schools, the decision about

promoting pupils from one grade to the next and of graduating them is based entirely on internally administered tests and other measures. No external tests are given. Legally, pupils can be required to repeat a grade if they have not attended more than half the total number of school days in the year, if their subject matter achievement is unsatisfactory, or if they have a record of misbehavior. However, in practice, promotion is automatic from grade to grade within compulsory education.

Public upper-secondary schools select their qualified entrants on the basis of the results of the scholastic ability tests administered by the relevant boards of education and the reports for each applicant are submitted by the lower-secondary schools. The system of submitted evaluation in upper-secondary schools is almost the same as that for lower schools. Since upper-secondary schooling is not compulsory, students are required to repeat grades or are expelled for poor achievement or misbehavior.¹⁷

Entrants into universities and junior colleges are selected by each receiving institution on the basis of a minimum of 12 years of formal schooling, of an acceptable entrance examination score, and of a satisfactory upper-secondary school record.

Major Issues Worth Solution

There are several problems facing Japanese education. The population trend governing the size of the 18-year-old age group (the age at which pupils graduate from secondary school) is now the focus of particular concern. The range of the

increase and decrease in the size of the 18-year-old age group will be about 300,000. Such a swing in the population causes various problems, particularly for upper-secondary education in urban areas and for higher education planning. At the elementary level, however, the population has begun to decline and this decline may be utilized for the improvement of instructional conditions at that level. The population increase, together with the continuing increase in technological sophistication within the nations expand industrial complex, will cause pressure for an expansion of higher education enrolment. This pressure is backed by the wealth of society and the enthusiasm of people for education. Currently the enrolment ratio in higher education is around 38 to 39 percent, and it is anticipated that the student population of the four-year universities will be over 2 million by 2010 if this enrolment ratio continues. But this figure is probably low, since continuing pressure to raise the educational level of the workforce to meet advanced technological requirements and the overwhelming demand for higher education opportunities among the population will require the proportion of an age group in higher education institutions to increase.

Progress in science and technology and changes in the sectoral distribution of the workforce will also require a change in emphasis in school educational programmes. Instead of knowledge-based instruction at school, emphasis will be on the creativity and character development of individual children.

There appears to be a widespread belief within the Japanese population that the present-day educational system is producing youths exhibiting two serious short-comings.

People express astonishment at what they perceive to be young people's lack of basic knowledge and skills, and of a 'proper attitude toward life'. A variety of indicators suggests that neither the school nor the home is teaching children a suitable way of life. Such indicators are: less respect for elders, increased self-centred and willful behavior, impoliteness, capriciousness, a decline in physical strength and fitness, non-participatory attitudes towards social affairs, and rising rates of juvenile delinquency.

Thus, improving the quality of school education, expanding and qualitatively developing higher education, and providing diversified educational opportunities in and out of the formal schooling systems are among the major tasks to be tackled by Japanese society.

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