

Teachers and Teacher Education in Japan

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Abstract: In 1949, a teacher certification law was established, and teacher education began in Japanese colleges and universities. National, public and private four-year colleges and universities, and junior colleges have supplied secondary school teachers, whereas national colleges of teacher education have been a key provider of teachers of elementary schools in which homeroom teachers teach all subjects. Types of teacher education institutions and the functions have been diversified: private colleges of education, child education and human development have begun supplying many elementary school teachers, and professional schools of teacher education have been established for pre-service and in-service education at the graduate level. The quality of new teachers has been maintained through a highly competitive “open system” of teacher employment which mandates passing examinations. As teachers are government officials, their status is guaranteed. Various opportunities for professional development are provided to educators. In addition, large staff rooms where all teachers gather to engage in school-wide practical and cooperative research may contribute to the improvement of teacher’s skills and expertise, foster teamwork among teachers, and positively impact school administration.

Key words: Teacher, School, Certification, Teacher Education, Japan

1. Structure of Education System of Japan

Education system

After the Second World War, Japan’s schooling system was drastically reformed under the American influence. For secondary education, boys’ liberal secondary school, girls’ secondary schools, and vocational schools were unified to form new high schools in 1948. In addition, junior high schools (3 years) were newly-created after elementary school (6 years, enrollment at 6 years of age) , and the number of years of compulsory education was extended to nine years.¹⁾

For higher education, normal schools got four-year college status. National liberal and professional colleges and universities within the same prefecture were merged into new national universities in 1949, with some exceptions in larger prefectures.²⁾ Graduate schools were established at select universities in 1953. Institutions for short-cycle higher education were established: junior colleges (tanki daigaku) in 1950, colleges of technology (kosen) in 1962 , and special training schools (senshu gakkou) in 1977.

Teacher Education System

In 1949, a teacher certification law was established. There were three types of certification: a normal certificate (Class 1 and Class 2), a provisional certificate, and a temporary certificate. Class 1 certificates were awarded to those who graduated from four-year institutions, while Class 2 certificates

were awarded to junior college graduates. There were five types of normal and provisional certificates: elementary school teacher, junior high school teacher, high school teacher, kindergarten and special need school teacher certificate as well as certificates for principals, superintendents, and supervisors. Certificates for teaching in junior high and high schools were further classified by each subject.³⁾

Graduates who completed the coursework required by the law were awarded a teaching license from a prefectural board of education, regardless of his or her university or field of study. This was referred to as an “open system” of teacher education. Many teachers were supplied by national, public and private colleges and universities. However, among them, national colleges of teacher education have been the key providers of compulsory school teachers.

2. School Organization and Teaching

Administration and finance of School Education

As a general rule, public elementary and junior high schools are established by a city, town or village. These compulsory schools are governed by a local board of education. These local governments construct school buildings, buy facilities, cover utility costs, and hire necessary administrative personnels. However, school principals, vice principals and regular teachers are hired by the prefectural boards of education. Prefectural boards of education allocate these teachers and administrative official to each school. They are expected to change schools every several years.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) pays one third of the salary for teachers and administrators in compulsory schools, and also subsidizes costs of school construction, and necessary school equipment. These financial mechanisms help to maintain equal access to educational opportunities for those living in both richer and poorer local governments.

Public high schools are established and governed by the prefectural or large city boards of education. These boards of education hire all the teachers, administrators, and supplementary staff, and they also manage the rotation of their workforce among the various high schools in the prefecture. A small subsidy is provided to private high schools by national and municipal governments.

School and Class size

School size varies greatly from school to school. The standard compulsory school size is, by law, set from 12 to 16 classes per school. The average school is composed of 12 classes with 300 students in elementary and junior high schools, and 15 classes and 600 students in high schools. However, class size and school size tend to smaller in rural areas.

Classes are the basic units for coursework and school life. By law, the maximum class size for public elementary, lower secondary, and high schools is set at 40, and at 35 for the first and second grades in elementary school. Most elementary schools have a class size of 26 to 30, while most junior high schools have a class size of 31 to 35.

The number of regular teachers in each public compulsory school is determined by the number of classes in the school, according to the public school standard law. Prefectural and local boards of education can assign additional teachers so long as they can provide the requisite funding.

Curriculum

All schools, from kindergarten to high school, design their courses of study according to the national course of study (national curricular standards) designed by MEXT. Teachers are required to use textbooks approved by MEXT in their classes. The national course of study regulates the number of class hours (or units for high schools) for each subject and other activities divided by grade level, and the corresponding educational objectives that must be achieved. Table 1 shows the teaching

mandated subjects in elementary, junior high, and high schools.

Private high schools provide unique education to meet the needs of their students and parents/guardians based on their independent educational policies. Even so, private schools, from kindergarten to high school, are subject to the national course of study set by MEXT.

Table 1 Structure of Curriculum in compulsory School and High School

Area	Elementary school			Junior highschool	Highschool
	1 2	3 4	5 6		
Subjects	Japanese			Japanese	Japanese
	Life	Social Studies		Social Studies (Geography, History and Civics)	Geography and History
		Science			Science
	Mathematics			Mathematics	Mathematics
	Music			Music	Arts (Music, Fine Art, Craft, Calligraphy)
	Drawing and Craft			Fine Arts	
	Physical Education			Health and Physical Education	Health and Physical Education
	Foreign Language Activities			Foreign Language	Foreign Language
	—	Home Economics		Industrial Arts and Home Economics	Home Economics
	—				Information Technology
	—			—	Professional subjects: Engineering, Business, Agriculture, and so on.
Educational Activities	Moral Education			Moral Education	
	Special activities			Special activities	Special activities
	Comprehensive Studies			Comprehensive Studies	Comprehensive Studies

source: by the author

Organization of Teaching and Learning

Elementary School

In elementary school homeroom teachers teach all subjects for a class from morning to afternoon. However, at large schools, subjects such as physical education and music are taught by specialized teachers at the higher grades. Moreover, additional full-time and part-time teachers are assigned for team teaching or small-group studies mainly in Japanese languages and arithmetic. Elementary schools have large faculty rooms shared by all teachers and staff. This type of arrangement allows for easy communication between faculty members, and is effective for cooperation and coordination of faculty throughout the entire school.

Junior high school

At junior high schools, homeroom teachers are assigned to a class and they visit their class at the beginning and the end of the school day. However, all teachers teach classes in their specific academic subject area. Science, music, and home economics classes may be held in special classrooms where is smaller faculty rooms. However, large faculty rooms with desks for all faculty members can be found at almost all junior high schools.

High School

There are approximately 5,400 high schools in Japan; 4,100 are public, 1,300 are private, and a mere 18 are national schools. There are three major types of departments in high schools: general, professional and comprehensive departments. The national curricular standard for high schools is specified in MEXT's course of study. At least 74 credits are required to graduate. One third of those

credits must be earned in compulsory subjects, while the remaining two thirds can be determined at the discretion of the school.

General department high schools offer liberal arts subjects. The majority of high schools is high school with only general department, and called “futsu kokou” (general highschool).

Professional department high schools are further divided into subject-area specific departments such as engineering, commerce, agriculture, nursing and welfare, and so on. Engineering departments are further subdivided into areas such as mechanics, electricity, industrial chemistry, and construction. High schools consisting of only professional departments are called “senmon kokou” (professional high school). Among these schools, “kougyou kokou” (engineering high school), “shougyou kokou” (business high school) and “nougyou kokou” (agricultural high school) are most popular. According to the national standard for curriculum of high schools, the credits earned in professional subjects should be greater than 25. The curriculum differs among professional high schools.

Comprehensive departments provide a wider range of liberal arts and professional subjects. High schools with only comprehensive departments are called “sogosei kokou” (comprehensive high school). Comprehensive high schools were established as a model of high school reform from 1994. They offer several programs from humanities, social sciences, math and science, sports, international studies, technologies, and other professional or interdisciplinary fields. Credits for common core subjects are limited, and students are expected to study many elective subjects.

Not all high schools have just one department. There are many high schools with multiple departments. In spite of the differences among the departments, all high school graduates have the same right to enter all types of higher education institutions.

3. Teacher Certification

Open system and accreditation system

The Educational Personnel Certification Law promulgated in 1949 allowed anyone who had earned the required academic degree and earned the required credits to be certified as a teacher, regardless of their university or field of study. This was called an “open system” of teacher training. Teacher certificates were awarded by prefectural boards of education in every prefecture of Japan. Major changes to the Educational Personnel Certification Law occurred in 1954, 1988, 1999.

In 1953, an accreditation system for teacher education programs was introduced in order to improve the quality of new teachers. Teacher candidates had to earn the credits in professional and academic subjects at institutions accredited by the Educational Personnel Training Council which operated under the purview of the Ministry of Education. All teacher education programs needed approval from MEXT's Educational Personnel Training Council. Any changes to the programs or instructors required council approval.

Present Qualifications and Number of Credits Required for Teaching Certification

The qualifications and number of credits required for teaching certification as of 2015 are shown in Table 2. Advanced certification is, in general, conferred to those who have earned a master's degree at graduate school. Class 1 certification is conferred to those who have earned a bachelor's degree at university, while Class 2 certifications is conferred to those who have earned an associate degree at junior college. The Class 1 certificate is the most popular of all types in terms of the number of individuals who apply for teaching posts and who are currently employed. Applicants for elementary school teachers must earn at least eight credits related to elementary school subject matters, forty-one credits of teaching, and ten credits in specific subject matters or teaching. Applicants for junior

high school teachers have to earn at least twenty credits of junior high school subject matters, thirty-one credits of teaching, and eight credits of subject matters or teaching. The teaching certification law determines teacher education programs at colleges and universities in Japan.

Table 2 Basic Qualifications and Number of Credits Required for Teaching Certification (2014)

Type of certification		Basic qualifications	Minimum number of credits			
			Teaching	Subject Matters	Teaching OR Subject	Special Education
Elementary school teacher	Advanced certificate	Master's degree	41	8	34	
	Class 1 certificate	Bachelor's degree	41	8	10	
	Class 2 certificate	Associate degree	31	4	2	
Junior high school teacher	Advanced certificate	Master's degree	31	20	32	
	Class 1 certificate	Bachelor's degree	31	20	8	
	Class 2 certificate	Associate degree	21	10	4	
Highschool teacher	Advanced certificate	Master's degree	23	20	40	
	Class 1 certificate	Bachelor's degree	23	20	16	
Special needs school teacher	Advanced certificate	Master's degree and elementary, junior high, highschool or kindergarden teaching certification				50
	Class 1 certificate	Bachelor's degree and elementary, junior high, highschool or kindergarden teaching certification				26
	Class 2 certificate	Elementary, junior high school, high school or kindergarden teaching certification				16
Kindergarten teacher	Advanced certificate	Master's degree	6	35	34	
	Class 1 certificate	Bachelor's degree	6	35	10	
	Class 2 certificate	Associate degree	4	27		

Content of “teaching” is shown in Table 3. In teaching area, applicants for future elementary school teachers must earn at least forty-one credits in teaching courses. These include at least two credits in the significance of teaching, at least six credits in the basic theory of education, at least twenty-two credits of curriculum and teaching methods, and at least four credits in student guidance, educational counseling, and career guidance. They must also complete five weeks of student teaching and, finally, earn two credits in a teaching practicum seminar. Teaching practicum seminars are designed to summarize and reflect upon all knowledge and skills learned through college coursework and during their student teaching experience.

Content of “subject matters” is shown in Table 4. In subject matters area, applicants for future elementary school teachers must earn at least eight credits in Japanese language (including handwriting), social studies, arithmetics, science, life environment studies, music, drawing and handicrafts, homemaking, physical education. Applicants for junior high school Japanese language teachers must earn at least twenty credits of Japanese, Japanese literature, calligraphy.

4. Types of Teacher Education Institutions and the Programs

There are several types of teacher education institutions in Japan: Schools of teacher education in national universities, “semi” schools of teacher education, graduate schools of education, professional schools (departments) of education, other schools/colleges than education schools, junior colleges, advanced programs to be completed after a bachelor’s or junior college program, and teacher education programs of specialized training colleges recognized by MEXT.

Table 3 Subjects and Number of Credits Required for Teaching: Class I certificate

Area and contents of courses		Elementary school	Junior high school	High school
Significance of teaching	Significance of teaching and roles of teachers	2	2	2
	Duties of teachers			
	Providing opportunities that contribute to career selection			
Basic theory of Education	Theory, history, and philosophy of education	6	6 (5)	6 (4)
	Processes of student development and learning			
	Social, systemic, and managerial issues of education			
Curriculum and methods of teaching	Significance of curriculum and methods of organization	22	12 (6)	6 (4)
	Methods for teaching subjects			
	Methods for teaching moral education			
	Methods for teaching special activities			
Student guidance, counseling, and career guidance	Theory and methods of student guidance	4	4 (2)	4 (2)
	Theory and methods of educational counseling			
	Theory and methods of career guidance			
Student teaching	Preliminary and final guidance	5	5 (3)	3 (2)
	Student teaching			
Teaching practice seminar		2	2	2

(Note: Figures shown in parentheses indicate teachers in subjects such as art and music.)

Table 4 Courses Required in Subjects Matters

		Required subjects (one or more credits per subject)
Elementary school		Japanese language (including Calligraphy), Social studies, Arithmetics, Science, Life Environment studies, Music, Drawing and handicrafts, Homemaking, Physical education
Junior high school	Japanese language	Japanese, Japanese literature, calligraphy
	Social studies	Japanese history and world history, geography, law, economics, philosophy, ethics, and religion
	Mathematics	Algebra, geometry, analysis, probability theory and statistics, computer science
	Science	Physics, Physics lab, chemistry, chemistry lab, biology, biology lab, earth science, earth science lab
	Music	Solfege, singing, instrumental music, conducting, music theory, composition, and music history
	Fine arts	Painting, sculpture, design, industrial art, art theory and art history
	Health and physical education	Athletics, athletic fundamentals, psychology of physical education, athletic business administration, and athletic sociology, kinesiology, physiology, sanitary science and public sanitation, school health
	Health	Physiology and nutrition, sanitary science and public sanitation, school health
	Industrial arts	Wood processing, metal processing, mechanics, electricity, cultivation, information and computer science
	Home economics	Household management, garments and clothing, food, living environment, child-care
Foreign languages	English, English and American literature, English communication, cross-cultural understanding	

Schools of Teacher Education in National Universities

These schools educate future compulsory school teachers at a comprehensive university or as an independent university for teacher education. As of 2016, there are 44 schools of teacher education among the 47 prefectures of Japan. These schools are the major providers of compulsory school teachers in each prefecture. Students of teacher education program are required to fulfill courses and credits to get teaching certificates. Graduates of these schools are leaders and major players in every prefecture. They also contribute to staff development in prefectural boards of education. These graduates suffered from lower employment during the 1990s and early 2000s, however the size of teacher education programs is expanding again slowly due to increased demand for teachers. Larger independent schools often have several teacher education programs and as many as 150 or more faculty. Ordinal education schools have a single and comprehensive teacher education program with less than one hundred faculty.

“Semi” Schools of Teacher Education

Teachers are educated in a department of teacher education. Four schools were reformed from

“full” schools of teacher education at national universities several years ago. The size of teacher education programs at these schools is now smaller than that of “full” schools of teacher education. Along with the teacher education departments, there are several non-education departments. Sometimes these schools or colleges do not have the name of “education”.

In addition, many schools of education, child education, and human development and so on have been established at private universities since 2004, due to a possible increase in demand for elementary school teachers in the next decade. These schools may be accredited as elementary school teacher education programs, but students are not required to earn teaching certificates.

Schools of Education at Research Universities

Schools of education at research universities teach and conduct research in areas like educational studies and educational psychology, and such universities deliver academic doctoral programs. A few of schools of education, such as Hiroshima University and the University of Tsukuba, are comprehensive schools which incorporate large teacher education programs.

Graduate Schools of Education

Graduate school divisions of teacher education schools at national universities have traditionally been composed of academic master’s degree programs of education. However they have recently been adding professional teacher education programs.

Professional Schools (departments) of Education

New professional master’s programs are under development at national teacher education schools. They have two objectives: Educating new teachers with practical abilities and developing staff or “school leaders” with both theoretical and practical abilities. The basic idea of these programs is to integrate theory and practice, explore innovative teaching methods (like case studies, role play and fieldwork), the provision of practical education and advice by the faculty.

The educational program is composed of five common cores and specialized subjects as follows: design of school curriculum, practical teaching of subjects, student advising and counseling, school/classroom management, and contemporary school and teachers issues. A master’s thesis is not required, but students must complete more than ten credits of student teaching or clinical experiences in public schools or related institutions.

The universities make agreements with boards of education and public schools on student teaching. Mentor teachers and faculty jointly supervise student teachers at the public school. At least 40% of faculty of professional schools or department should be experienced teachers or professionals at schools or related institutions. Students who complete 45 or more credits for two years are awarded a “Masters of Education (Professional)” degree.

In 2008, 19 professional schools (departments) of education were newly established. In 2017, professional teacher education programs will be established at all teacher education schools in national universities.

Other Schools/Colleges than Education school

Accredited teacher education programs also exist at most colleges/schools of literature, science, law, economics agricultures and so on. Students must complete the required teacher education courses in addition to the academic and professional courses offered in their department. This is true in master’s programs in graduate school as well.

Junior Colleges

Junior college departments of childhood education may be accredited as a elementary school teacher education programs. Also, departments of literature are accredited as a junior high school teacher education programs. In the 1960s and 1970s graduates of junior colleges found teacher jobs in the school. Now, however, many of them find work as nursery teachers in day care centers.

5 . Teacher Recruitment, Careers, and Staff Development

Obtaining certification

Students who have completed the coursework required to obtain teaching certification from an accredited school or department then submit their teaching certification application and academic transcript to the prefectural board of education by the early March via their university. The board of education reviews the documentation, and issues a teaching certification to the applicant by the end of March. College graduates receive their teaching certification at the same time they receive their graduation diploma.

Table 5 shows the number of certified teachers and of certifications issued by the types of institutions of the new graduates as of 2014. At first, it shows that many graduates get teacher certifications through different types schools. Typically, graduates of national schools of teacher education will get certifications of elementary, junior high and high school teachers. Graduates of other schools/colleges than teacher education will get certifications of junior high school and high school teachers. Second, number of certifications issued is bigger in junior high and high schools than that in elementary schools. The reason for this is that the number of institutions accredited is bigger for junior high and high schools than for elementary schools. Third, the number of certified teachers and certifications is bigger in private than in national universities. The reason is that many private universities with new “semi” schools of teacher education have been accredited successfully to be elementary school teacher education programs since 2004.

Table 5 Number of Certified Teachers and Certifications issued in JFY 2014

	Number of Certified Teachers	Number of Certification Issued		
		Elementary School	Junior High School	High School
National Universities				
School of Teacher Education	12,671	9,260	10,595	9,906
Other School/College	6,031	329	2,903	6,065
Public Universities	2,666	319	1,369	2,123
Private Universities	51,457	11,032	27,164	35,489
Junior Colleges	29,029	689	659	-----
Graduate Schools				
National School of Teacher Ed.	2,206	1,073	1,761	1,879
Other Graduate Schools	3,632	192	2,523	3,519
Total	110,800	23,027	47,063	59,077

Reference: “Conferment of Teaching Certifications”, *Monthly Report of the Board of Education*, The Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture, June 2016,p.39.

Recruitment, employment examination and employment

Teacher recruitment begins every May. Students entering their fourth year of university are busy with the start of a new school year and begin preparing to search for employment. The boards of education in prefectures and large cities announce their recruitment information for teacher employment testing from the end of April until mid-May. Candidates apply for teacher employment testing from mid-May until the beginning of June.

Teacher employment examinations are normally performed in two stages. The first is given over two to three days in July, and includes a written test covering areas of teaching, such as pedagogy and educational laws and regulations, a written test covering general education, a short essay, and an aptitude test. Successful candidates from the first test are announced at the beginning of August. They can then sit for the second examination during the end of August or the beginning of September. The second examination includes a micro-teaching, a practical examination, interviews and a written

test. Successful candidates from the second examination are announced from the end of September or October, and their names are registered on the list of those scheduled for employment.

In February or March of each year, successful candidates scheduled for employment receive their employment notification from the board of education. At the end of March they receive their school assignment, and they begin working as new teachers at their assigned school on April 1st.

Teaching career

The annual salary for new teachers is approximately 3.5 million yen. This salary increases each year, to approximately 7 million yen at the age of 40. When teachers reach the retirement age of 60, their annual salary is approximately 9 million yen. It is said that teacher salaries are approximately 4% higher than the average college educated civil servant.

Most teachers hired as a regular teacher, as a public official, continue working until immediately before retirement at 60. Approximately 2% resign in their 20s, and approximately 1% in their 30s and 40s. This ratio increases for 50 year olds, and rises rapidly after 55. For elementary, junior high, and high schools, more than half of retiring teachers quit at or just before retirement age. During the past 30 years, the ratio of teachers leaving their career before retirement age has reduced, and the ratio of teachers who worked until retirement at 60 or just before retirement has increased.

Throughout their long careers, regular teachers are required to change schools every several years. They must work at a small school in a rural area at least once in their career. Of course, they can request to change the school to the prefectural board of education. It is believed that during long term employment as a public servant the fluent change of the workplace for public school teachers contributes to their professional growth and expertise.

Staff development

Japan's public school teachers are legally obligated to engage in continued professional development. New regular teachers at public schools are hired conditionally for one year, during which time they must receive the new teacher development program implemented by the prefectural board of education. In-service education for newly recruited teachers consists of two sub-programs. The first is in-school training in which they work as a class teacher, receiving guidance and advice from an experienced guidance teacher (for 6 or more hours per week). The second type of development is given at staff development centers at the board of education for more than 25 days.

Following that are 2nd-year, 3rd-year, and 6th-year teacher training, as well as the training for teachers with ten years of teaching experience. After that are various training programs divided by teacher career track. These consist of curriculum coordinators, directors, department supervisors, vice principals, and principals. Additionally, teachers endorsed by a school principal can receive training in management skills or educational guidance expert training. Many teachers participate in seminars offered by schools, universities and educational research association.

Staff development and in-service education is conducted in each school in the form of school-wide cooperative research called "*konai kenshu*" (school-wide professional development). In every school, all teachers participate in joint research to improve education at the school. The topic and method of research is determined by the faculty. Results are shown in public meetings at the school, and many teachers from outside the school often visit such meetings held by more well-known schools. Reports are printed and distributed to other schools and local boards of education. This cooperative and practical research may contribute to the improvement of teacher skills and expertise, foster close teamwork among teachers, and positively impact school administration.

In Japan's elementary and junior high schools, the entire faculty shares a single large faculty room. This single faculty room allows teachers to exchange information with other teachers, and

to coordinate planning between classes and grades is carried out. In other words, it is an area that facilitates cooperation among the faculty members to create a united school environment. The faculty room also provides a spatial area for in-school training (lesson study). All teachers at one school will carry out practical collaborative research. The staff development program provided by boards of education alone may be not sufficient. Lesson study work carried out in actual schools with the participation of the entire teaching staff functions as on-the-job training.

Reference

- 1) High schools expanded due to the economic growth and increases in average household income. The rate of enrollment in high school increased from 50% to 60% between 1950 and 1960. By 1970 the rate of enrollment was 80% , and by 1975 it was at 90% . As of 2015 the rate is 98.5% .
- 2) University and junior colleges expanded dramatically during the 1960's, especially in the private sector. Rate of advancement to university and junior college of high school graduates also increased from 10% in 1960 to 20% in 1970, reached 37% in 1980, was 36.3% in 1990 and 49.1% in 2000. The ratio was 56.5% in 2015 and 79.8% when special training schools were included. Some 75% of students study in private universities, colleges, and junior colleges.
- 3) In order to procure a Class 1 certificate for teaching elementary school, college graduates were required to earn a bachelor's degree and complete at least 36 credits in general education and 49 credits in a specialized field, with 24 of those credits related to the field and the other 25 credits related to teaching.

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