

**Where is the teacher shortage headed in Japan as a shrinking society?**

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According to a UNESCO report, teacher shortages are a global policy issue. Following the UNESCO definition, 44 million teachers will be needed by 2030 to achieve Sustainable Development Goal No. 4 “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”

Although this special issue does recognize this global shortage of teachers, its focus is on the teacher shortage in Japan. Japan is a member of the developed world, but its birthrate is declining and its population is aging, while the government debt keeps growing. Though Japan scores exceptionally high in international assessments of academic ability for a country with a population of more than 100 million and considerable north-to-south geographic size, indicators such as labor productivity, women’s status, and IT activities are among the lowest in the world. By disseminating findings from research on the Japanese teacher shortage while considering the country’s demographics, this special issue intends to spark international discussion and contribute to solving the global teacher shortage.

After a survey by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in 2018, teacher shortages were recognized as a policy issue in Japan; however, it was not until January 2022, when more results were published, that they were highlighted as a serious policy issue.

Teachers in East Asia characteristically perform a wide range of tasks, including extracurricular activities and paperwork, beyond classroom lessons, and Japanese teachers are no exception. Teachers’ busy schedules in Japan became a policy issue in the early 2010s, even before the teacher-shortage issue. The Japanese education system has always been determined at the constitutional level, with the central government paying teachers’ salaries in the compulsory education sector, making it possible to hire the national minimum number of teachers independent of the financial capacity of local governments.

The Japanese teacher shortage cannot be fully understood by observing the current education sector alone. Teachers who joined the workforce around 1980, when the second baby boom generation, which peaked in 1973, began entering elementary school, started to retire around 2020. This demographic change in the teacher job market is one of the reasons behind the Japanese teacher shortage.

Nonetheless, various sectors of Japan other than education are also facing labor shortages owing to Japan’s declining birthrate and aging population. Several questions require attention, such as “Is the teacher shortage more acute compared to those of other sectors?”, “Are teachers’ long

working hours exacerbating the teacher shortage?”, “What kind of measures should be implemented in teacher training programs?” and more.

Thematic examples:

Historical context of the teacher shortage

International comparison of teacher shortages (with a focus on Japan)

Policy analysis of the teacher shortage

Measures to address the teacher shortage in teacher training (teacher socialization)

Teachers' workload

Teachers' mental health

Robot teachers