

[Keynote Speech]

“Issues concerning Japanese Teachers at Compulsory Education Level”

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1. Outline of the institutional systems concerning Japanese teachers at compulsory education schools

First, I would like to explain the outline of the institutional systems concerning Japanese teachers at compulsory education schools (elementary and junior high schools) to illustrate the institutional conditions related to the issues of improving the quality of teachers.

First of all, with regard to the pre-service teacher training system, students can receive teacher training at the universities accredited to conduct such training. While elementary school teacher training is mainly conducted at teacher training colleges, faculties and departments (almost 60% of elementary school teachers), secondary school (junior and senior high school) teacher training is conducted at regular universities as well. The educational reform after World War II has enabled students at regular universities to obtain a teacher's certificate (*Gakusei Hyakunenshi* [A 100-year History of the School System], Ministry of Education, 1972, p.760). More than 80% of senior high school teachers and more than 60% of junior high school teachers are graduates of regular universities.

Secondly, most compulsory education schools are municipal public schools, and 98.4% of elementary school teachers and 93.5% of junior high school teachers teach at these public schools (The 2011 Basic School Survey).

Thirdly, most of the salaries for teachers at municipal schools are paid by prefectural governments, and one-third of this prefectural government budget is provided by the national government. With regard to the number of teachers, the Act on Standards for Class Formation and Fixed Number of School Personnel of Public Compulsory Education Schools stipulates that the class size at elementary schools and junior high schools must not exceed 40 (35 for the first grade of elementary school). This system was introduced to ensure equal educational opportunities by securing the financial resources for personnel expenditure that account for more than 70% of the total educational expenditure (88% of the total consumptive expenditure) as municipal governments cannot cover these expenses on a stable basis.

Fourth, public school teachers of compulsory education are appointed by prefectural governments or by “government-ordinance-designated cities”, which have a population of 500,000 or more. These local governments have appointive power. They assign teachers to schools and decide their promotion, demotion, employment and dismissal. Teachers at municipal schools are public employees of the municipal governments, but they can be transferred to other municipalities (the wide-area personnel system).

Fifth, public school teachers are public employees, but unlike other public employees, they are categorized as “educational public employees”. All public employees have a probationary term. Usually it is six months, but for teachers, it is one year. There are other differences between teaching personnel and other public employees. For example, receiving training is obligatory for teachers while it is a right for other public employees; the salary and allowance system gives teachers special advantages including the “salary adjustment for teachers”, and there are unique obligations arising from the status of educational public employees (e.g. restrictions on political acts).

2. Recent institutional reforms related to teachers

Next, I would like to discuss the recent institutional reforms related to teachers.

First, basically speaking, school teachers from primary to secondary education must have a teacher's certificate

issued by the accredited universities or colleges (the certificate principle), but in 1988, a special part-time teacher system was introduced to allow more flexibility in employing teachers who do not have a teacher's certificate. In the same year, a special certificate system was introduced in order to recruit people with excellent knowledge and skills from outside schools. In 2000, another system was introduced to employ principals, their deputies and vice-principals who do not have a teacher's certificate or teaching experience. In 2008, the "teaching profession graduate school system" was introduced to upgrade teacher training, and in 2009, the teacher's certificate system was reformed to introduce a term of validity, which required teachers to receive training every 10 years to renew their certificates.

Secondly, in order to make compulsory education schools (mostly public schools) more competitive, the Standards for Establishing Elementary and Junior High Schools were set up in 2002 to promote establishing private schools. In 2004, a special measure was introduced to permit joint-stock companies and incorporated NPOs to establish schools. Until then, only national and local governments and school corporations could establish schools.

Thirdly, with regard to the compulsory education expenditure including teachers' salaries, the national government changed the budgetary system in 2004 from providing a "fixed amount" allocated to a fixed number of school personnel to providing a "total amount", which is used at the discretion of local governments. This allowed local governments to employ more full-time and part-time teachers than the standard level by, for example, lowering the salary standards.

Fourth, the School Education Law was revised in 2007 to add new job titles, such as "deputy principals" who share principals' job responsibilities; "chief teachers" who support deputy principals and vice-principals and under their orders manage some school affairs and teach some classes; and "teacher advisors" who give advice and supervision to other teachers to improve their teaching and guidance skills.

Fifth, in order to improve the quality of teachers and to win people's trust in school education, in 2000 prefectures started to establish teacher evaluation systems in order to properly evaluate teachers' capabilities and achievements so that teachers can review their own teaching activities and voluntarily improve their teaching practices. Teacher recognition systems have also been introduced to commend excellent teachers and to identify teachers deemed insufficient in teaching ability.

The issues concerning the quality of teachers must be discussed with these institutional reforms in mind.

3. Issues concerning the quality of teachers at compulsory education schools

3.1. Pre-service teacher training to address the issues at school

On August 28, 2012, the Central Council for Education issued a report titled "Comprehensive Measures to Improve Teachers' Quality and Ability throughout their Teaching Careers". In order to develop students' ability to live in the rapidly changing society in the 21st century, the report says that teachers must be trained to support learning of new things by students and that an image of teachers who continue to learn must also be created. For that purpose, the report says that reforms must be carried out jointly to provide continuous support to teachers who keep on learning throughout their teaching careers.

In relation to the improvement of the quality of teachers, the report mentions the following needs: 1) to deal with various issues such as bullying, violent behaviors and non-attendance; 2) to improve special needs education; 3) to address the needs of foreign students; and 4) to effectively use information and communication technology (ICT). These are the very issues teachers face today.

With regard to bullying, the number of cases peaks in the seventh grade (the first year of junior high school). Therefore, organizational efforts are particularly needed at junior high schools. In the day-to-day efforts to stop bullying at school, teachers try to have a shared understanding of the issue, collaborate with school counselors and other staff and help improve students' personal relationships. In this way, teachers are playing a major role.

In the case of non-attendance, too, the successful cases in which students have returned to school show that making various efforts to communicate with students and parents and fostering a shared understanding of the issue among all teachers are effective.

Therefore, improving teachers' communication abilities is a key to addressing the educational agenda of today, including special needs education to support students with possible developmental disorders in regular classes, addressing the needs of foreign students and the effective use of ICT.

3.2. Issues related to recruiting teachers

As mentioned earlier, public school teachers are recruited based on the Act on Standards for Class Formation and Fixed Number of School Personnel of Public Compulsory Education Schools. The number of recruited teachers has differed greatly, depending on the number of students. As of February 2013, more than 26,000 elementary and junior high school teachers are around 54 years old. On the other hand, only slightly more than 7,000 teachers are 25 years old. In several years, many teachers will reach the mandatory retirement age of 60, and as young teachers will be newly employed, it is critical to establish a system within schools to support them.

The teacher employment examinations and the employment rates by prefecture and municipality in 2010 indicate that the highest competition rate for teaching jobs at elementary schools is more than ten times the lowest. In big cities, the competition rates are notably low, and whether or not excellent teachers can be secured in the future is an issue.

In order to increase the number of teachers at public compulsory education schools, an improvement plan comes out approximately every five years to change the fixed number of teachers. Efforts are made to increase the number of teachers in order to introduce small classes and other measures, but the number of students is decreasing at a faster pace,

Comprehensive Measures to Improve Teachers' Quality and Ability throughout their Teaching Careers

(Report by the Central Council for Education, August 28, 2012)

As our society is rapidly changing with globalization, informatization, low birthrate and the aging society, teachers must deal with more complex and difficult issues. School education must be able to respond to these changes as the type of human resources in demand is changing.

Therefore, in order to develop students' ability to live in the 21st century, school education must place greater importance on fostering the ability to think, to make decisions and to express oneself; motivation for learning; and the ability to form a wide range of human relationships. We must keep in mind that these abilities can be effectively developed through various linguistic and cooperative learning activities.

Teachers must be trained to support learning of new things by students, and an image of teachers who continue to learn must be created.

At the same time, teachers must deal with various issues such as bullying, violent behaviors and non-attendance; improving special needs education; and the effective use of ICT.

In this situation, boards of education and universities must work together and jointly carry out reforms to provide continuous support to teachers who keep on learning throughout their teaching careers.

Comprehensive Measures to Improve Teachers' Quality and Ability throughout their Teaching Careers

(Report by the Central Council for Education, August 28, 2012)

➤ More complex and diversified issues of school education

- Diversified issues teachers must deal with, including student guidance; improvement of special needs education; support for foreign students; and the effective use of ICT
- Need to establish closer collaboration with parents and local people
- Need to strengthen teachers' ability to provide practical guidance and to communicate

➤ Changing environment surrounding schools

- Diminishing trust in teachers (scandals, incapable teachers, etc.)
- Relatively lower social status of teachers as more people have higher education
- Weaker collegiality among teachers (the culture of giving mutual advice among colleagues is dying out)

so the number of newly recruited teachers has not increased as expected. There is a plan to hire 51,800 new teachers from 2011 to 2018 to promote smaller classes. However, due to the decreased number of students, the number of teachers will decline by 32,400. Therefore the net increase is expected to be only 19,400. There is also a plan to increase the number of teachers by 40,000 in five years from 2014 by increasing the basic fixed number of teachers in order to enhance educational standards and by increasing the number of teachers in charge of student guidance. Hopefully these plans will bring about the expected results. If so, the pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) at elementary schools will improve from today's 17.7 to 16.4, and at junior high schools from 14.1 to 13.0, reaching the standard level of OECD countries. Improving the quality of newly employed young teachers, however, will be an extremely important task.

3.3. Issues concerning diversified duties of teachers

In this section, I would like to discuss teachers' heavier workloads and their mental health.

As teachers' workloads depend greatly on their initiative and creativity, it is thought that the overtime payment system applied to other public employees is not suitable for teachers. Instead, a special allowance equivalent to 4% of the monthly wage is given to teachers. However, teachers are probably working much longer overtime on a routine basis at school and at home than compensated by this special allowance. They spend a lot of time working on holidays, too, preparing teaching material and doing other work. According to a survey on teachers' work, many respondents felt that their workload has increased for the following reasons particularly: 1) more individualized instruction for each student is required; 2) there is a greater demand for well-planned lessons; 3) more students need discipline; 4) teachers have more paperwork and documents to prepare; and 5) teachers have to spend more time communicating with parents and local people (Tomoko Matsuda, *Bulletin of Kyoto Koka Women's University, Junior College*, Vol. 46, "Responding to parents at public compulsory education schools of today: an analysis of parents' demands, protests and complaints," p.170, 2008).

Needless to say, the more complaints parents and local people make against schools, the more stress teachers feel. A survey of teachers shows that 78.4% of respondents said that parents who complain to schools are increasing (Benesse Educational Research & Development Center, *Report on the Fourth Basic Survey of Educational Guidance*, 2007, quotation. Matsuda, op. cit.).

Of public school teachers taking sick leave, 39% were on sick leave due to mental disorders in 1998. This rate increased to 62% in 2007. In order to provide support for teachers' mental health, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology held the first meeting of the committee on teachers' mental health in January 2012 and issued an interim summary in October titled "Teachers' Mental Health Measures". In addition to preventive support, the committee proposes rehabilitation support to offer individualized programs to help teachers return to school.

4. Issues related to improving the quality of compulsory school teachers to address the educational issues of the 21st century

The August 28 report, as mentioned above, indicates the more complex and diversified issues teachers must deal with. The report also refers to the need to establish closer collaboration with parents and local people and the need to strengthen teachers' ability to provide practical guidance and to communicate. Furthermore, the report mentions the changing environment surrounding schools such as diminishing trust in teachers; the relatively lower social status of teachers as more parents and local people also have higher education; and weaker collegiality among teachers.

Among the new graduates of regular universities accredited to give teacher's certificates, about 50,000 have obtained a junior high school teacher's certificate, and more than 70,000 have a senior high school teacher's certificate. Statistically, only 7% of the new graduates who have a teacher's certificate actually become teachers (only 3.5% of

those who have a senior high school teacher's certificate, but 67% of those who have an elementary school teacher's certificate). The overwhelming majority are so-called "paper teachers", who have a teacher's certificate but no teaching experience. They have a good understanding of school education, but at the same time are sometimes critical of it. But we must regard this as a condition that enables management of schools through collaboration among schools, parents and local people.

One of the practices in Japanese school education culture that can be introduced to other countries is "lesson study", a kind of school-based in-service training. Through lesson study, teachers of the same school discuss what they do in their classrooms and accumulate good practices to improve their teaching skills. This culture of mutual guidance among colleagues is said to be disappearing. As explained, the age structure of teachers will change drastically in several years. We must take action now to prepare for the changing environment.

In recent years, there has been a call for collaboration among and integration of schools across different levels such as unified elementary-junior high schools, unified junior and senior high schools and kindergarten-elementary school collaborations. These also require strengthening of communication abilities as mentioned above.

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