

The Japanese Overseas Education: Its Current State and Problems

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Abstract. The purpose of this article is to discuss the current state of Japanese overseas education, including government policy and overseas educational institutions, and the problems it faces. Along with the economic growth in the postwar period, the number of overseas Japanese residents has consistently increased. In parallel, overseas educational institutions for Japanese children have increased. The Japanese government, Japanese companies, overseas Japanese residents have made efforts to maintain and improve the education for their overseas juvenile compatriots for decades. However, Japanese overseas education is today struggling with various problems, which are chronic or recent.

Keyword: Japan, Education, Overseas Education.

1. Introduction

The history of education for overseas Japanese children can be split into two phases. Before the end of the Second World War, along with Japanese overseas expansion and migration, many overseas educational institutions were founded on the eastern edge of the Eurasian continent, including, for instance, the Chinese mainland, Southeast Asia, the Pacific islands, North and South Americas. The educational institutions ranged over various levels from supplementary schools for Japanese language to four-year colleges. When the Japanese colonial empire collapsed with its capitulation to the Allied Powers in the summer of 1945, over 750 Japanese educational institutions for Japanese children and youths existed all over worldwide [22]. With the return of millions of overseas residents to Japan after the war, Japanese overseas education virtually ceased. In the postwar period, however, along with the economic recovery and the resurgence of the Japanese presence in the overseas market, the number of overseas Japanese children and of overseas Japanese educational institutions has continued to increase since the late 1950s.

For approximately 60 years, the Japanese government, Japanese private firms, relevant official or private organizations and overseas Japanese residents have endeavored to found and manage different types of educational institutions and to provide quality education conforming to the standard curriculum at home for their juvenile compatriots living overseas. However, the current state of overseas education is not necessarily satisfied with the educational needs of the overseas Japanese residents. Overseas Japanese educational institutions have in fact been struggling with various problems that are chronic, recent (or new), and particular to a certain area or country. This article will discuss the current state of Japanese overseas education and the problems it is facing and has to overcome.

2. The Current State of Japanese Overseas Education

On the whole, the number of Japanese children at the age of compulsory education (6-15 years) living overseas has shown a consistently increasing trend in since the 1950s [3]. The trend is in parallel with the increase of the overseas Japanese population, primarily accompanying Japanese overseas business expansion in the postwar period. It never ceased even after the Japanese economy had plunged into the downturn known as the “lost ten years” or “twenty years” with the collapse of the “bubble economy” in the beginning of the 1990s [3]. According to the annual statistical report of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) on overseas Japanese residents in 2012, the overseas Japanese population, including long stay (more than three months) and permanent residents, had reached 1,182,557 in October 2011 [3]. In Japan, education is compulsory at the level of elementary and junior high schools, and the number of overseas school-aged Japanese children for compulsory education numbered 64,950 in the same year. It is about 2,400 fewer than

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that of 2011, which recorded the maximum but is still about 3,500 more than that of 2010. A decrease of around 4%, despite the increase in Asia, was primarily due to the decline in Europe and North America whose economies are in crisis [3].

The elementary and high school-levels of educational institution for overseas Japanese children can be categorized into three types. The first type is a full-day elementary and junior high-level school called Japanese school (*Nihonjin gakko*). It is founded and managed by either a steering committee whose members are local Japanese residents or a Japanese residents' association in accordance with the educational statute of the home country [10]. After the Second World War, the first full-day Japanese school was founded in Bangkok in 1956, and about 14,753 elementary and 4,163 junior high school students are studying with textbooks used in their home country at 88 schools located in 51 countries and regions today [29]. The second type is a supplementary weekend school (*hoshu jugyoko*) for the children who go to local schools on the weekdays. It is also founded and managed in the same way as the full-day school and opened on the weekend, mostly on Saturday. The primary objective of this school is to maintain Japanese children's ability to speak their mother tongue, but it also offers not only Japanese language courses but also other major subject courses taught at home [10]. The first supplementary school was founded in Washington, D.C. in 1958, and 13,269 elementary and 3,308 junior high school students are studying, also with the same textbooks used at home, at 203 schools located in 56 countries and regions, after spending weekdays at local schools [29]. The third type is an overseas private school (*zaigai shiritsu gakko*) founded by a Japanese school corporation. There are nine full-day schools in the world today [29].

The teaching staff are supplied to the overseas Japanese school in the following three ways. First, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) dispatches certified teachers to the full-day and supplementary weekend schools. This system started with the dispatch of a national elementary school teacher to Bangkok in 1962 [24]. In 1966, the ministry introduced public application system to public school teachers, and eligible applicants are chosen annually with a recommendation from a national or public school, which they work for, by passing the ministry's document screening and interview process [22]. The selected applicants are dispatched to the overseas educational institutions at their request after pre-departure orientations [12] [17]. The dispatch period is two years in principle but can be extended to up to four years [17]. In 2007, the MEXT introduced the senior dispatch system and started to dispatch the teachers, who are less than 65 years old in principle and have previous experience in being dispatched overseas.[20] Second, the overseas schools locally employ the teaching staff in case that the dispatch system cannot satisfy their needs. The local employment is practiced by the supplementary schools more commonly than the full-day schools. Most of the teaching members are dispatched teachers at the full-day schools, while the maximum number of the dispatched teachers to the supplementary schools is three. Since their duty assigned by the MEXT is, furthermore, not teaching but management as a principal or a vice principal, the supplementary schools indispensably have to depend on the locally-employed teaching staff.[22] Third, Japan Overseas Educational Services (*Kaigai Shojo Kyoiku Shinko Zaidan*, JOES) has advertised annually for, and dispatched, certified kindergartners and teachers overseas since 2001. For example, in 2012, JOES advertised for five to ten certified kindergartners and 70 to 80 certified elementary and junior high school teachers who are expected to start to teach at overseas full-day schools with two to three years tenure in April 2013 [5].

The Japanese government provides support for the education for overseas Japanese children with various measures, including the dispatch system. The MEXT recognizes that overseas education is a primary concern for overseas expatriates and that its enhancement is necessary for Japanese activities overseas [10]. Although the MEXT shows the stance that overseas education is essentially up to the voluntary efforts of Japanese expatriates for the reason that the Japanese government is unable to educate overseas juvenile compatriots beyond the sovereignty of the country in which they reside, [10] it, along with the MOFA, takes measures to back up overseas education with maximum support [9]. Besides the dispatch of the teaching staff to overseas full-day and weekend supplementary schools, the Japanese government offers financial support to rental charges for schools, costs needed for safety measures in unsafe countries, the allowances and travel expenses for the dispatched teachers, the salaries of locally-employed teachers, and the costs for workshops for the locally-employed teaching staff of weekend supplementary schools [10]. The MEXT has applied the policy of free offer of textbooks to elementary and junior high schools at home to the overseas educational

institutions since 1967 [21]. It takes further budgetary steps to hold conferences and workshops of the principals of the full-day schools and the teachers dispatched to the weekend supplementary schools [12]. In 1997, it opened the website named CLARINET for the purpose of providing information of education for overseas and returned Japanese children [9].

In association with the government, official and unofficial organizations and overseas Japanese residents support the overseas educational institutions. Tokyo Gakugei University (*Tokyo Gakgei Daigaku*) has the Center for Research in International Education (*Kokusai Kyoiku Senta*) and conducts research on overseas and returned Japanese children [9][15][21]. JOES plays a supplementary role in supporting overseas education and offers various services to overseas Japanese children and parents. This public interest incorporated foundation (*koeki zandan hojin*) is a non-profit foundation approved by the MEXT and the MOFA and was established with the support of Japanese corporations for the purpose of promoting the education for overseas Japanese children in accordance with the government policy in 1971[7]. Besides advertising for and dispatching certified teachers to full-day schools with two to three years' tenure, JOES has been entrusted with the distribution of free textbooks by the MEXT, offers free counseling services and pays for correspondence courses in such primary subjects as Japanese language and mathematics, and also organize pre-departure workshops and seminars for children and their parents [21]. The All Japan International Educational Research Conference (*Zenkaiken*) takes a different approach to support overseas education. This non-profit organization was originally founded in 1974 and is managed by the teachers who have experience in being dispatched overseas. The objective of *Zenkaiken* is to provide support not for overseas children and parents but for the same profession who are overseas or considering applying for the overseas dispatch [30].

Furthermore, overseas Japanese education would not be sustainable without various ways of overseas Japanese residents' support and involvement in school management. First of all, it is overseas Japanese residents who establish and manage the full-day and weekend supplementary schools. In most cases, they organize a steering committee, some of which are under a Japanese association or a local Japanese chamber of commerce and industry [29]. Although the Japanese constitution stipulates compulsory education is gratuitous, overseas residents have to pay tuition for the overseas schools. In some cases, the membership fees of the Japanese organizations are allotted to the school budget. In other cases, the school finance also depends on the Japanese companies whose Japanese employees send their children to the schools. Some of those companies partially bear the educational expenses of their Japanese employees. In the case of the weekend supplementary schools, especially, the teaching staff are mostly the local Japanese residents who have legal eligibility to work.

3. The Problems with Japanese Overseas Education

Although the current state of the Japanese overseas education is thus the result of accumulated governmental and non-governmental efforts in the past several decades, the overseas educational institutions are today struggling with a variety of problems which are chronic or recent as follows:

- For many overseas schools, one of the most crucial and chronic problems is their financial fragility and instability. Since governmental financial support partially covers expenses, the school finance has to depend heavily on tuition and donations from Japanese companies. However, it is not easy for the Japanese schools to predict student enrollment whose fluctuation is subject to given loan and international conditions [6][8] [17].
- The weak financial background makes it difficult for Japanese schools to be equipped with enough school facilities and teaching materials. This problem is especially more serious in the weekend supplementary schools, which rarely have their own school buildings and have to rent buildings or classrooms from local schools [13] [18].
- The Japanese government cannot afford to allocate more budget for overseas education in the middle of the current critical fiscal and economic conditions. As a matter of fact, the budget allocated to the MEXT and the MOFA for overseas education has been reduced in recent years. For example, the total budget for the fiscal 2012 was cut by 7% and as a result reduced to 21,526,000,000 yen [2].

- Many schools are struggling with securing the necessary teaching staff. The MEXT has also been reducing the number of teachers to dispatch overseas in recent years perhaps because of the fiscal difficulty of the Japanese government [26] [27]. Most of the teaching staff of the full-day schools are supposed to be those dispatched, but in reality some are in trouble with securing enough teaching. Regarding this problem, the situation of the supplementary schools is more serious. As a matter of fact, merely c.20% of the supplementary schools receive certified teachers from Japan because of the MEXT regulation that a supplementary school whose enrollment is less than 100 is not eligible to receive dispatched teachers [4]. Even the teachers of the eligible schools are mostly those who are locally employed. It is not, however, easy to find those who have working qualifications in accordance with local laws and regulations.
- The quality of teachers is furthermore a matter of utmost concern for overseas Japanese schools. No matter how able and experienced dispatched teachers are at home, there is no guarantee that they are suitable for overseas Japanese schools. In fact, there are some reported cases that dispatched teachers caused friction with school steering committees or have incurred distrust among students' parents [14][27]. In the case of senior teachers also dispatched by the MEXT, some schools point out that their past overseas experiences do not necessarily contribute to the overseas schools and that overseas service might impose excessive burden on those who are in their later 50s or early 60s [28]. The teachers dispatched by JOES contrarily tend to be too young and inexperienced. Locally employed teachers do not necessarily have Japanese teaching certificates. Even if they have them, some have no or limited actual teaching experience. All the supplementary schools literally have to depend on the Japanese who are naturalized in, or have a right of, permanent residence of the countries in which they live, because local statutes on working permission often prevent the schools from employing those who are potentially qualified [23]. However, the locally-employed teachers tend to lack proper teaching skills [19].
- The tenure of teachers dispatched by the MEXT might be too short to offer consistent quality education. Most of the teachers go back to Japan in three years [16][25]. However, such short-term shifting would not be enough for the dispatched teachers to understand the overseas Japanese residents and communities and could cause the overseas schools, especially the supplementary schools in which the experienced professional teachers are expected not to teach but to supervise the inexperienced locally-employed teaching staff, inconsistent school management and teaching guidelines or do-nothingness, such as blind following of their predecessors [16].
- The current overseas education has not been able to cope with the diversification of overseas Japanese children effectively. The lengthening of Japanese businessmen's overseas appointments has increased the demands for high school programs which are excluded from the government support [21]. In recent years, the increasing number of the students whose parents are permanent residents of other countries or not necessarily Japanese has been posing the overseas schools, especially at the supplementary schools, a new challenge in terms of the original objective of overseas education [11].

4. Conclusion

The Japanese overseas education has improved in certain aspects in the past several decades since the 1950s but has been faced with various problems. The Japanese government – the MEXT and the MOFA – appears to be aware of some of the problems discussed above, such as the overseas schools' brittle foundations and recently-emerging problems such as the abovementioned changing school local environment surrounding the overseas schools [1]. On the other hand, the government seems unaware of other problems also discussed above, such as the problems that the dispatch system contains and unready to take remedial or reform measures, including additional budgetary steps. Under the current serious fiscal pressure, it is quite unlikely that the government will give up the retrenchment stance regarding the budget for overseas education. Some internal circumstances within Japanese schools at home also seem to prevent the tenure of dispatched teachers from being extended. Local laws and regulations beyond Japanese sovereignty will inevitably continue to be hurdles for the weekend supplementary schools to find able local teaching staff. However, assuming that the future of stagnant or declining Japanese economy depends on further overseas

business expansion, there would need to be a strategic reconsideration by the government towards overseas education, which is overseas Japanese residents' primary concern for their children. It would furthermore have to cultivate further cooperation with Japanese companies and any other relevant organizations and stir up public support.

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