

Title

Temporal Governance and Institutional Plasticity in Upper Secondary Education: Rethinking Inclusive Education through the Reorganization of School Time

Research Overview

This study reconceptualizes inclusive education as a problem of temporal institutional design. Focusing on upper secondary education in Japan, it examines how school time structures participation and exclusion, and how reorganizing schedules, assessment cycles, and progression pathways fosters institutional plasticity and more equitable and inclusive educational trajectories.

Research Objectives

This study develops a structural account of inclusive education by foregrounding the temporal organization of schooling. While inclusion has often been discussed in terms of access, participation, and pedagogical support, the institutional conditions that regulate these processes remain underexamined. Modern schooling is organized through temporal arrangements—lesson units, age-graded progression, assessment cycles, and attendance norms—that appear neutral but function as mechanisms for coordinating learning and allocating legitimacy. These structures define how students are recognized as progressing appropriately.

The first objective is to conceptualize **temporal governance** as a constitutive dimension of educational institutions. Temporal governance refers to the institutional configuration through which schooling is structured, synchronized, and legitimated in time. This perspective explains how inclusion and exclusion are produced not only through policy or pedagogy but also through routine temporal structures embedded in school organization.

The second objective is to theorize **institutional plasticity** as the capacity of educational systems to redesign temporal arrangements in response to diverse participation needs. Rather than adapting learners to fixed conditions, the study examines when institutional time becomes subject to negotiation, redesign, and learning.

The third objective is to contribute to international debates by proposing a framework linking temporal governance, temporal friction, and institutional plasticity. This reframes inclusion as a structural reorganization of institutional time and highlights temporal

redesign as a mechanism for advancing equity and inclusive participation.

Research Methods

The study adopts a qualitative comparative case study design in upper secondary education in Japan. Cases were selected to capture variation in temporal organization across institutional settings, including collaborations between different school types and a multi-shift, credit-based school as a contrasting reference.

Data were collected from three sources. First, institutional documents—including timetables, curricula, assessment schedules, attendance regulations, internship calendars, and progression requirements—were analyzed as evidence of how time is formally organized. Second, semi-structured interviews with educators, coordinators, and career support personnel examined how temporal arrangements were enacted and negotiated. Third, observations of school practices and transition-related contexts traced how temporal coordination functioned in practice.

Analysis proceeded through iterative coding and comparison. Temporal mismatches were treated as central institutional phenomena. Particular attention was paid to moments when schedules, assessment cycles, participation rhythms, and certification requirements conflicted. These were coded as **temporal friction**, referring to intersections of distinct temporal regimes lacking coordination. The analysis examined whether such frictions were addressed through temporary adjustment or led to institutional redesign.

Results and Discussion

The analysis yields four findings.

First, barriers to inclusion cannot be explained solely by attitudes or insufficient support. A significant source of exclusion lies in temporal standardization. Students are expected to follow synchronized schedules, uniform assessment timing, and continuous attendance patterns. When trajectories diverge, students are positioned as irregular or deficient, even within inclusive discourse. Inclusion and exclusion are therefore temporally structured.

Second, **temporal friction** reveals institutional limits. Mismatches between school calendars, lesson schedules, internship periods, evaluation timing, and credit systems disrupt participation. These frictions show that school time is a regulative structure shaping access, recognition, and transition, and thus a mechanism through which inequity is

sustained.

Third, temporal arrangements are neither natural nor fixed. In some cases, actors reorganized schedules, diversified assessment timing, modularized learning sequences, and created flexible progression routes. These changes did not merely accommodate individuals but redefined the institutional logic of schooling. Inclusion emerged through institutional transformation rather than individual adjustment.

Fourth, these processes illuminate **institutional plasticity**, defined as the structured capacity of educational systems to reconfigure temporal organization in response to diverse needs. Unlike ad hoc flexibility, it involves durable changes in how time is allocated, coordinated, and recognized. This distinction is critical, as schools may appear flexible interpersonally while remaining rigid institutionally.

Overall, inclusive education should be reconsidered as a problem of temporal institutional design. By centering temporal governance, this study provides a structural framework for understanding how inclusion is enabled or constrained. It offers a pathway for redesigning upper secondary education toward more just, inclusive, and sustainable educational trajectories.

Keywords

Inclusive education; temporal governance; institutional plasticity; upper secondary education; school time