

A Comparative Policy Analysis of Chronic Absenteeism in South Korea and Japan

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Abstract

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Research Overview: This study analyzes an educational policy to deal with chronic absenteeism in Japan and South Korea. Using literature review methodology of academic and policy documents, it clarifies that two countries adopt entirely different perspectives on the chronic absenteeism and approaches to its resolution. **Purpose of Study:** Although chronic absenteeism had already begun to emerge as an international issue, it has become an urgent challenge for schools since the spread of the Coronavirus pandemic. This phenomenon is also evident in some East Asian countries. In response to this situation, East Asian nations are rapidly implementing policies to promote school attendance. These policies include efforts to assess the actual state of chronic absenteeism and utilise alternative educational settings. Furthermore, East Asian nations are sharing information on their respective policy initiatives with one another. However, the extant literature provides only limited coverage of comparative analyses of the perception of "chronic absenteeism" as a challenge and the policies to address it. Therefore, this study employs an analytical framework to examine two case studies: Japan has a distinctive approach to the issue of "chronic absenteeism", regarding it as a policy concern and recognising its unique characteristics within the East Asian context. In contrast, South Korea adopts a similar stance to that of Western countries in addressing school dropout rates resulting from chronic absenteeism. This study examines trends since the 2000s, when legislation pertaining to chronic absenteeism countermeasures was enacted, to elucidate how chronic absenteeism is perceived as a social issue and which policy initiatives have been implemented in response. The objective of this analysis is to draw parallels between the characteristics of the chronic absenteeism problem in South Korea and Japan. **Research Methods:** This study employed a literature review methodology. Through the analysis of research papers and policy documents addressing "chronic absenteeism" in South

Korea and Japan, this study examined how “chronic absenteeism” has been described and perceived as a problem. In Japan, “chronic absenteeism” has been called “futoko” as an educational issue under the narrow concept of chronic absenteeism. Therefore, using the term “futoko” as a keyword, I searched for relevant literature on the academic search engine Citation Information National Institute of Informatics (CiNii Research). In South Korea, policy documents and official statistics use the term “school dropout” rather than “chronic absenteeism.” Furthermore, since policies refer to children who do not attend school as “youth dropped out of school” or “out-of-school youth,” these terms will be the focus of this analysis. Drawing on the analytical methods of Heo and Yoo (2019), this study searched for relevant literature on the academic search platforms Research Information Sharing Service (RISS) and the Korean Education Research Information Service (KERIS). ***Results and Discussion:*** The analysis revealed that in Japan, the narrower concept of “futoko (chronic absenteeism)” was addressed as a social issue rather than that. While the government viewed school refusal as a phenomenon that could happen to anyone and implemented measures to facilitate students’ return to school, the adoption of the “Act on Securing Educational Opportunities Equivalent to Ordinary Education at the Stage of Compulsory Education” in 2016 advocated for guaranteeing learning opportunities outside of school. Consequently, the policy focus shifted from ensuring school attendance to ensuring learning opportunities for children who do not attend school. In contrast, South Korea views school dropout and delinquency—consequences of chronic absenteeism—as social issues. As democratization progressed in the 1990s and movements to reform the authoritarian education system emerged, the increase in school dropouts became a social problem. In 2013, the System for Deliberation on School Withdrawal was introduced. Under this system, school principals offer children with long-term absences a grace period of 2 to 7 weeks before

withdrawal—during which attendance is recorded—by suggesting they utilize specialized counseling agencies. In 2014, the “Act on Support for Out-of-School Youth” was enacted, and measures for students who have interrupted their studies were implemented simultaneously.

Based on the above findings, it has become clear that even in South Korea and Japan—where school cultures share many similarities regarding the phenomenon of “chronic absenteeism”—the two countries adopt entirely different perspectives on the issue and approaches to its resolution. On the other hand, there is a common trend toward recognizing diverse learning environments to address chronic absenteeism. This suggests that, provided the social context of both countries is understood, their respective measures for addressing chronic absenteeism can serve as valuable points of reference for one another.

Keywords: Chronic Absenteeism, A comparative study, A policy analysis