

Abstract

Title

Teacher Recruitment for Elementary Schools During Periods of Teacher Shortage in Japan: A Focus on Kanagawa Prefecture from the 1960s to the 1970s

Research Overview

This study examines how Kanagawa Prefecture addressed the shortage of elementary school teachers in Japan during the 1960s and 1970s, drawing on literature and interview data. It offers implications for addressing global teacher shortages from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to clarify how elementary school teachers were secured in Japan during the 1960s and 1970s, when some local governments faced teacher shortages. This study focuses in particular on Kanagawa Prefecture, a representative case of rapid population growth, where the shortage was especially severe.

In recent years, teacher shortages have become a social issue in Japan; however, such shortages have occurred repeatedly in the past. One notable period was the 1960s and 1970s, when rapid urbanization led to a sharp increase in the number of students and a corresponding shortage of teachers in urban areas and surrounding municipalities. Despite this, teacher training and recruitment during this period have not been sufficiently examined. While some local governments established temporary teacher training institutions, Kanagawa Prefecture did not adopt this approach. This study therefore examines how Kanagawa secured teachers, with particular attention to how it sought to ensure both the quantity and quality of its teaching workforce.

In recent years, teacher shortages have become a global issue, with increasing emphasis not only on the number of teachers but also on their quality (e.g., UNESCO, 2024). By analyzing the case of Kanagawa Prefecture during the 1960s and 1970s, this study identifies its practices, advantages, and challenges, and offers implications for addressing global issues of teacher recruitment.

Research Methods

First, this study outlines the teacher training system in Japan at the time and the supply–demand conditions for elementary school teachers, highlighting the characteristics of

Kanagawa Prefecture. It then examines teacher supply–demand policies in Kanagawa Prefecture from the 1960s to the 1970s, drawing on official documents and newspaper sources.

Based on these findings, the study conducts a literature review of Keihin Women's University, a private university that is considered to have played a significant role in supply–demand adjustment in Kanagawa Prefecture. It also carries out interviews with six individuals involved in order to clarify more concrete aspects of educational content and curricula.

Finally, the study analyzes the advantages and challenges of these measures from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives of elementary school teacher provision, and considers their implications for global issues of teacher recruitment.

Results and Discussion

In Japan at the time, elementary school teacher training was conducted at universities, and the number of trainees was primarily controlled by the national government. However, in Kanagawa Prefecture, where teacher shortages were particularly severe, national adjustments were insufficient to secure an adequate number of teachers. To address this, individuals who already held lower or upper secondary teaching licenses but not elementary school licenses were encouraged to enroll in auditing programs at private universities to obtain elementary school certification. Although these programs required approval from the Ministry of Education, as with regular programs, they involved lower entry barriers and less stringent enrollment controls. This arrangement enabled flexible control over the number of certifications awarded and allowed rapid responses to fluctuations in teacher supply and demand.

Interview data show that many participants in these auditing programs had obtained their lower or upper secondary teaching licenses from private universities. One common reason for enrolling was the high competition for teaching positions at those levels. Some participants were already working full-time as assistant teachers in elementary schools while attending the program. These findings suggest that the system effectively incorporated individuals aspiring to become teachers who had not yet obtained the appropriate certification, while maintaining quality by granting formal licenses. Allowing individuals to work as assistant teachers while obtaining certification can be understood as a strategy that first secured teacher numbers and subsequently ensured quality. In addition, the curriculum emphasized practical subjects, with students completing more credits than required by certification regulations. This indicates an intention to ensure the competencies necessary for elementary school teaching, taking into account differences in prior certification and

school level.

At present, teacher training capacity in many countries, particularly in Asia, is often regulated by the state. However, these findings suggest the potential value of systems with less rigid enrollment controls. Furthermore, in ensuring both the quantity and quality of teachers, an approach that prioritizes quantity first and subsequently ensures quality may be effective. In particular, when utilizing individuals holding licenses for other school levels, it is necessary to develop curricula that foster the expertise required for elementary school teaching.