

A Comparative Study on Guaranteeing Learning Opportunities for “Out-of-School Children” in Compulsory Education
: Focusing on the “Diversification of Learning opportunities” in Japan and Thailand

Research Overview

This study comparatively analyzes educational guarantees for out-of-school children in Japan and Thailand. It examines curriculum flexibility and inter-agency collaboration through Japan’s “Diversified Learning Schools” and Thailand’s “1-School-3-Models”. Findings reveal Thailand’s stronger orientation toward utilizing non-formal mechanisms compared to Japan’s school-centric approach to diversifying compulsory education.

1. Research Background and Purpose

Despite the global commitment to Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all, recent data indicates that approximately 273 million children and youth worldwide remain deprived of their right to education (UNESCO, 2026). Developing equitable educational systems that address individual needs and allocate resources effectively has become a critical international priority. In this context, Japan and Thailand have emerged as significant cases, both demonstrating innovative policy shifts to address the rising number of Out-of-School Children (OOSC). This study comparatively examines the current policy on “Diversification of Learning Opportunities” in both Japan and Thailand, defining the term as both the diversification of formal schooling and the inclusion of non-formal learning as part of public education.

2. Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative documentary analysis, gathering and examining legal frameworks and implementation guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) in Japan and the Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC) in Thailand. The analysis focuses on two primary initiatives: Japan’s “**Diversified Learning Schools**” (Manabi-no-tayouka-gakko) and Thailand’s “**1-School-3-Models**” (๑ โรงเรียน ๓ รูปแบบ) approach. The comparison is conducted across two dimensions: (a) the flexibility of the curriculum and (b) the relationship between formal schools and education providers outside the formal system.

3. Case 1: Japan — Diversified Learning Schools (Manabi-no-tayouka-gakko)

In Japan, the number of OOSC has reached a record high of over 350,000. In response, the *Act on Securing Educational Opportunities Equivalent to Ordinary Education at the Stage of Compulsory Education (2016)* paved the way for specialized schools called “Diversified Learning Schools” that cater to students experiencing school non-attendance.

- **Curriculum Flexibility:** These schools maintain the "Article 1" status but are permitted to deviate from the national Course of Study. Many reduce standard instruction hours by 20–30% and utilize online delivery to allow participation from outside the classroom, focusing on rebuilding social skills within a school framework.
- **External Relations:** Collaboration is primarily administrative or supportive. Schools work with welfare departments for job-seeking guidance and hire private sector instructors for special vocational classes. Support also extends to families through School Social Workers (SSWs) and parent networks.

4. Case 2: Thailand — 1-School-3-Models (๑ โรงเรียน ๓ รูปแบบ)

Thailand's *Equitable Education Fund (EEF)* led the "Thailand Zero Dropout" initiative (2024), utilizing data-matching between the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Education to identify OOSC. Following identification, multidisciplinary and inter-agency collaboration is organized at the administrative village level to conduct fieldwork for situational analysis and to develop and implement individualized care plans based on specific needs—a process known as the "Case Management System" (CMS). and connect them to flexible pathways. Through these essential supports, children are connected to "flexible education and learning opportunities" including 1-School-3-Models.

- **Curriculum Flexibility:** Grounded in Section 15 of the *National Education Act (1999)*, a single institution can offer formal, non-formal, and informal education modes simultaneously. Learning outcomes are mutually transferable. Schools can modify the *Core Curriculum (2008)* to focus on life competencies and community-specific needs.
- **External Relations:** The model highlights the importance of "network partners" (*phaki khrua khai*). Unlike Japan, these external actors (private enterprises and community groups) are deeply integrated into the actual pedagogical practice, co-providing learning environments both on and off-site.

5. Conclusion and Implications

The study reveals that while both countries are in a transitional phase toward more inclusive compulsory education, their strategies differ significantly. Japan's approach remains **school-centric**, seeking to diversify the *internal* mechanisms of formal schools while keeping the school as the primary site of education. In contrast, Thailand exhibits a stronger orientation toward **de-centering the school**, actively utilizing non-formal and informal mechanisms to guarantee learning. These findings suggest that for Japan to further diversify, it may need to look toward Thailand's model of deeper integration with non-formal "network partners" to reach children for whom the school framework itself remains a barrier.

References

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