

Policy-Driven Student Displacement and Schooling in Transition: Decision-Making and Policy Implementation after the 2024 Noto Peninsula Earthquake

Nagomi Nakamaru¹ (corresponding author), Kyoko Ariyoshi², Masayuki Shibano³, Tohru Boushita⁴

¹ The University of Tokyo, Japan

² Department of Crisis Management, Suita City Office / Kansai University / Hyogo Earthquake Memorial 21st Century Research Institute, Japan

³ Department of Crisis Management, Suita City Office / Nihon University / Hyogo Earthquake Memorial 21st Century Research Institute, Japan

⁴ Wajima City Office, Japan

Submission type: Poster (Physical Poster) — WERA 2026 Focal Meeting

Research Overview

This study examines a policy-driven student relocation after Japan's 2024 Noto Peninsula Earthquake, in which 250 lower secondary students were transferred from Wajima to Hakusan. Drawing on 33 teacher interviews and INEE standards, it analyzes how top-down decision-making produced fragmented, multi-track schooling and shifted implementation burden onto frontline teachers.

Purpose of Study

This study examines a policy-driven form of collective student relocation implemented after the 2024 Noto Peninsula Earthquake in Japan, in which approximately 250 lower secondary school students were relocated from Wajima City to Hakusan City. Conceptualizing this initiative as an education policy rather than an emergency response alone, the study analyzes both its decision-making process and its implementation in practice. Research in Education in Emergencies (EiE) has extensively explored how displacement caused by conflict and disasters affects access to education, as well as the disruption and continuity of learning. A substantial body of literature has highlighted the importance of providing stable learning environments, protecting learners'

well-being, and ensuring equitable access under conditions of crisis. However, most existing studies focus on refugees, internally displaced persons, or humanitarian-led forms of educational provision, often situated in contexts where formal education systems are weakened or disrupted. In contrast, policy instruments involving system-internal, administratively designed and implemented forms of collective school-based relocation remain under-theorized, particularly in high-income or institutionally stable contexts. Addressing this gap, this study bridges EiE scholarship and policy implementation research by examining how a policy-driven form of displacement operates within an established public education system.

Research Methods

The analysis draws on selected minimum standards of the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE)—particularly participation, inclusion, and continuity of learning—as a normative and analytical lens through which to examine the policy process and its outcomes. Following the earthquake, approximately 250 students voluntarily relocated away from their families to accommodation facilities in Hakusan City in order to sustain access to schooling. This arrangement was organized and coordinated by local education authorities as a means of maintaining educational continuity despite severe infrastructural damage in the affected area. The study draws on semi-structured interviews with 33 teachers involved in the formulation and implementation of this initiative, examining how a strongly top-down decision by the local board of education was enacted under conditions of extremely limited preparation time and ambiguous operational guidance. Particular attention is paid to the ways in which policy intentions were translated into practice, and how frontline actors interpreted and adapted policy directives in situ.

Results and Discussion

The analysis yields three key findings. First, while the policy itself was widely regarded by teachers as a necessary and unavoidable response under emergency conditions, the decision-making process was strongly top-down, with teachers largely excluded from meaningful participation. The extremely short preparation period—often only a few days—meant that implementation relied heavily on ad hoc, on-site decision-making, raising concerns from the perspective of participation as emphasized in INEE standards. Second, although framed as "collective evacuation," the policy functioned in practice as an optional system, resulting in the

dispersion of students across multiple pathways: relocation to Hakusan City, remaining in the local community, or participating in online learning. This led to the emergence of a multi-track structure of educational provision, generating disparities in access to learning resources, variations in learning environments, and uneven academic progression. These outcomes highlight significant challenges in relation to both inclusion and continuity of learning. Third, gaps in policy design were effectively compensated for by teachers, who assumed responsibility for both students' daily living arrangements and multiple modes of instruction, including face-to-face, online, and hybrid formats. This resulted in substantial emotional, physical, and professional burdens for teachers, who functioned as frontline implementers of the policy under highly demanding conditions. Taken together, these findings point to a policy dilemma in which efforts to ensure educational continuity through centralized decision-making inadvertently produce fragmented and uneven educational practices in implementation. The study contributes to the analysis of education policy in emergency contexts by demonstrating the need to move beyond a focus on policy legitimacy and intended outcomes, and to examine the disjunctures, adaptations, and inequalities that emerge during implementation. It also highlights the importance of critically engaging with international normative frameworks such as those proposed by INEE, not only as standards to be achieved, but as lenses through which to understand the complexities and contradictions of policy enactment in real-world crisis contexts.

Keywords

education policy; policy implementation; education in emergencies; student displacement; governance