

From Teaching to Other Professions: Investigating Career Change Among Japanese Public School Teachers

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As indicated by the "School Teacher Statistics Survey" – a triennial survey conducted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT)– there has been a steady increase in the percentage of public school teachers in Japan who change careers for reasons other than retirement. Until recently, it was generally accepted that teachers in Japan would remain in this profession for their entire careers. However, while career changes have increased in recent years, the reasons and factors behind these changes, such as why teachers chose their new jobs, are not included as items in the aforementioned survey, and the details remain unclear (MEXT, 2022).

Compared with other countries, the issue of a shortage of teaching staff in Japan has only recently become evident (Maeda, 2025). This is because the recruitment of public school teachers is conducted at the prefectural and designated city levels, rather than at the school level. Japan has a unique system of teacher recruitment, in which local governments are responsible for the allocation of teachers to schools. The placement of teachers in each school is handled by the local government's board of education and education office. Consequently, planned and equitable placement is a possibility. Conversely, it has been posited that this personnel transfer system engenders a discordance between individual teachers' preferences and the specific characteristics of schools (Kawakami, 2022).

A detailed examination of the past five editions of the "School Teacher Statistics Survey," encompassing the categories of "due to illness (including mental illness)," "due to career change," and "due to family circumstances," reveals a pronounced increase in the number of teachers departing due to career change, reaching approximately 2.8 times the number leaving due to illness (MEXT, 2022). Although the number of teachers changing careers to other professions is increasing quantitatively, the details of this phenomenon are still not widely known in Japanese society, and their specifics remain unclear. There has been prior research on "career changes from other professions to teaching" in Australia (Veradharajan, Buchanan, 2021). However particularly, despite surveys showing that 38% of Australian teachers do not intend to work until retirement, little attention is being paid to teachers transitioning to other professional fields (AITSL, 2025). In Japan, the relationship between teachers' mental stress and resignation is being investigated, particularly in the field of psychology (Kohashi, 2012). Therefore, this presentation aims to identify the factors that lead teachers in Japan to change careers of their own volition for reasons other than psychological distress.

The presenter introduced the term "overflowing" to describe teachers who left their posts in education spontaneously, despite their passion for the teaching profession. The primary reason

given for changing jobs by these teachers was not "physical or mental health issues." Through the utilization of semi-structured interviews, the presenter analyzed the triggers for career changes and the mechanisms leading to them.

The findings revealed that first, the responses of school administrators (personnel management) played a significant role. Discussions revealed discrepancies in the manner in which administrators addressed applications for permission to hold multiple positions and the intricacies of administrative procedures.

Secondly, regarding remuneration, teachers in Japan frequently receive a comparatively high salary compared to other professions within the same age group. However, note that their salaries often decrease following a change in employment. However, the salary level of their previous teaching position did not act as a deterrent; some teachers reported managing to maintain a similar salary level by holding multiple jobs afterward.

Third, the limitations on the dissemination of novelty and the expression of creativity were discussed. The reasons cited for teachers "overflowing" from schools included limitations on the dissemination of novelty and the expression of creativity within schools, a lack of places to embrace innovation, and a lack of collegiality.

Fourth, some teachers addressed the variation of job responsibilities in the context of teacher transfers and promotions. It was posited that such changes in responsibilities can act as a catalyst for teachers considering a change in their professional roles. Examples of the challenges faced by the school leader included emotional toll of the role, the loss of autonomy in terms of classroom management, the potential for career progression to a management position, and the subsequent difficulty in balancing work and family obligations. Additionally, the loss of support from trusted colleagues during transfers was also highlighted.

Fifth, the increased use of social media during the 2020 Coronavirus Disease pandemic, when individuals sought to minimize direct interpersonal contact, exerted an influence on the environment that fosters the emergence of novel employment opportunities. It was posited that the exploration of novel forms of education has been influenced by role models and information encountered through social media.

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