

- Title

Co-creating Educational Knowledge at District Level: The Presence and Role of Local Educational Research Institutes in Modern Japan.

1- Research Overview (English 50 words or Chinese 75 words)

Recognizing the importance of knowledge-brokering bodies linking educational research and practice at district level, our study focuses on Japan's Local Educational Research Institutes (LERIs). Based on our nationwide survey, we analyze how LERIs contribute to teacher training, curriculum development, and research–practice partnerships, and discuss their implications through international comparison.

2- Purpose of Study:

This study aims to offer implications for delivering educational knowledge brokerage in a professional, effective, and sustainable manner. Drawing on the main findings from our nationwide survey, we illustrate the local presence and role of Japan's Local Educational Research Institutes (LERIs).

3- Research Methods

1) Bibliographical review: Must-read books as Tara Fenwick & Lesley Farrell (eds.) (2011) *Knowledge Mobilization and Educational Research: Politics, Languages and Responsibilities*, Joel Malin & Chris Brown (2019) *The Role of Knowledge Brokers in Education: Connecting the Dots Between Research and Practice*, Lucy Rycroft-Smith (2022) “Knowledge brokering to bridge the research–practice gap in education: Where are we now?” *Review of Education*, 10(1), and various reports of UNESCO, and so

on, form our basis for inquiry. Through reviewing such existing bibliographies, we could problematize the presence and role of LERIs as something near to the knowledge broker.

2) Questionnaire and interview surveys: Our team conducted two original questionnaire surveys: the first in 2025 with 68 prefectural-level LERIs, and the second in 2026 with about 1,700 municipalities. Data analysis was partly manual and partly automated.

3) International comparison: Utilizing the results of bibliographical and survey studies, some unique features of the LERIs in Japan are found.

4- Results and Discussion

Bibliographical studies show that countries differ in how they support research–practice linkages at the district level, suggesting that local government institutes, such as Japan’s LERIs, are institutionally distinctive.

The nationwide questionnaire and interview surveys on LERIs yielded unique data, while even the correct number of them had remained unknown. Showing the key findings of the survey, we will see the characteristics of the Institutes in terms of how they function as “knowledge brokers” training teachers, developing local curriculum, and fostering Research-Practice Partnerships (RPPs) in the district. The survey analysis includes over 70 items to reveal LERI’s founding history, organization, governance, staffing, activities, contributions, evaluation, and other aspects. Some cross-analyses will explore causal links—such as how teacher service range relates to municipal population size, or whether an institute’s name aligns with its stated mission.

Findings should be compared internationally to understand the pros and cons of different approaches of supporting local innovations. The research does not step in to provide evidence at this moment, but will propose some research questions relating to international comparisons. For example, while

occidental countries or regions tend to think of “Knowledge Brokerage” as a role (not as an institution), Japanese local authorities tend to think of it as an institution (not as a role).

Main problems left for discussion are as follows:

- 1) What are further possible points of international comparison?
- 2) What are the pros and cons for having LERIs in many cities and towns?
- 3) What are the historical factors/contexts that made LERIs develop in modern Japan?
- 4) Which countries or regions have similarities/dissimilarities with Japan, and what are their suggestions?

Thus, by introducing the unique features of Institutes in Japan and proposing important and unique perspectives for further research, this paper will make a distinctive contribution to existing research on co-creating educational knowledge at the district level. We hope to have a discussion that explores effective and sustainable ways to foster valuable “knowledge brokers” in districts, with the aim of “co-creating” educational knowledge at the district level.

- Keywords (maximum five)

Educational Research, Educational Research Institute, Japan, Knowledge Brokerage, Local Education