
Introduction

The Scope of Public Education in Japan and Germany with a Focus on "School Absenteeism"

Kemma TSUJINO*

Keywords: scope of public education, compulsory schooling, cross national analysis, "School Absenteeism", international comparison, Germany and Japan

Abstract

Under the international collaboration between Japan and Germany, authors from both countries try to clarify the "scope of public education". In the featured articles, researchers from the University of Oldenburg and Osaka City University took the first step towards international collaborative research for public education by focusing on "school absenteeism". In this first article, the whole structure and aim of the featured articles by researchers from both countries are explained. Although the common research question among all authors of "The Scope of Public Education" is a very broad and abstract theme, by overcoming an insider's paradigm through international collaboration it is possible to address this question.

I. Approach to The Scope of Public Education

As society changes rapidly and globally in every aspect such as politics, economics, the natural environment, social security, science and information technologies amongst others, education in such an era is expected to create a society opened-up to global welfare and to work on the capability of every person. Public education in each country, however, seems to be accelerated into the global competition/conflict and there is an international phenomenon that every nation state is returning to its domestic paradigm (Green 1997). As the result, "competency" "standards" "quality assurance" "professional development" "active learning" "leadership" "inclusion" and so on seem to be the well-worn terms.

Through the last decade, however, the fruits of many reforms seem to be more and more a variation of tests and evaluations. This leads to a strict limitation of public education itself. Now the classical question arises again "Why do children have to go to school?" It means the legitimacy of public education is questioned more seriously than ever before and it radicalizes in the area of compulsory schooling.

The following featured articles aim to clarify the "scope of public education". Under the international collaboration between Japan and Germany, where compulsory schooling system is implemented under the laws¹, the authors from both countries try to think about "Why children have to go to school?" The University of Oldenburg, where German authors Schultze, Ricking and Meise work, is the one of the pioneers that has been engaging in "school absenteeism" in Germany. The Osaka City University, where Japanese authors Soeda and Tsujino work, is also proceeding in research for "school absenteeism" in its local district. In addition, Fukawa, who works at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies in Japan, is a critical researcher of German school education. In featured articles, the

1. Compulsory schooling is called "Syugaku Gimu (就学義務)" in Japan and "Schulpflicht" in Germany. Compulsory schooling and public education in detail in Japan is described by Yuki (2012), and those of Germany is done by Avenarius & Füssel (2010).

* Associate Professor, Department of Education, Graduate School of Literature and Human Sciences, Osaka City University.
3-3-138 Sugimoto, Sumiyoshi-ku, Osaka-shi, 558-8585, Japan
E-mail: tsujino@lit.osaka-cu.ac.jp

researchers from both countries took the first step towards international collaborative research for public education².

The following articles are represented as four topics: “School absenteeism” in Germany (Article 2), “school absenteeism” in Japan (Article 3), Japanese school education from a German perspective (Article 4), German school education from a Japanese perspective (Article 5). The detailed structure of the featured articles is as follows:

[The structure of the featured articles]

Article 1: Kemma Tsujino; The Scope of Public Education in Japan and Germany with a Focus on “School Absenteeism” – Introduction

Article 2: Heinrich Ricking & Gisela C. Schulze; Research and Management of School Absenteeism in Germany: Educational Perspectives

Article 3: Haruo Soeda et. al.; Investigation and Research of School Absenteeism in the Sumiyoshi Ward – Investigative Report (March 31, 2017) –

Article 4: Sabine Meise; Aspects of self-exclusion in the Japanese education system

Article 5: Ayumi Fukawa; The Changing Meaning of Schools for Children – Focusing on All-day Schools in Germany

Article 6: Kemma Tsujino; The Scope of Public Education in Japan and Germany with a Focus on “School Absenteeism” – Conclusion

Article 2 by Schultze & Ricking deals with German theory and analysis of “school absenteeism”. Article 3 by Soeda et al. gives concrete suggestions to the local administration in Japan³. In article 4 and 5 German and Japanese researchers give insight into their counterpart countries from a counter perspective instead of insider’s one. In other words, while Article 2 and 3 take “insiders’ perspectives”, Article 4 and 5 take “outsiders’ perspectives”. The authors name this interactive comparative approach as a cross national analysis. Article 6 by Tsujino suggests the outcome of this first trial for the purpose of the further international collaboration.

II. International Comparison between Germany and Japan

Since school education is a familiar cultural structure in each country today, it is rather difficult to clarify the legitimacy of compulsory schooling within the domestic paradigm. International comparison devotes to not only make “strange patterns familiar” in foreign countries, but also make “familiar patterns strange” in one’s own country (Bray 1999).

International comparative research always brings difficulties with “comparability”. It is questioned “how much is it possible to compare among different countries with different contexts?”. There are also certain differences between Germany and Japan such as the education system, school culture, social expectation on the school system, and so on.

In comparison with Japan where school curricula are authorised by one national Ministry (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology: MEXT), Germany is a federal republic nation made up of 16 federal states (*Länder*). Each German state has been entrusted with the authority relevant to education and cultural administration (*Kulturhoheit*: Independence in matters of education and culture). German Federation Fundamental Law (*Grundgesetz*) as the constitution clearly says that “The entire school system shall be under the supervision of the state.” (article 7, clause 1.) This traditional principle is called ‘state supervision of school (*staatliche Schulaufsicht*)’. Today, however, in the area of school education there is remarkably limited authority by the federal state (Tsujino 2016)⁴.

2. “School absenteeism” has been used as the unified word throughout the featured articles in the broadest meaning of “non-attendance school” in both countries. Since the phenomena in both in Japan and Germany are diverse, proper translation into English is not easy and needs further discussion. The authors hope that the featured articles as a whole will help to clarify the complexity surrounding this.

3. Article 3 by Soeda et. al. is the English translation of the original report in Japanese which was published in Japan in 2017.

4. Taking the Federal Ministry for Education and Research (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung) which deals with vocational education and scholarships as an exception, instead there is the conference of ministers of education from all states (*Kultusministerkonferenz*;

In spite of many reforms in the school education area since the 2000's with competencies based, standards oriented, 'output control', new public management (NPM) or new controlling policy (*Neue Steuerung*) and so on, the fundamental principles still remain in both countries. From this perspective, "school absenteeism" could question the legitimacy of compulsory schooling. If there is no more automatic need for compulsory schooling, its legitimacy should be re-defined and its scope should be clarified. Through these featured articles, German and Japanese researchers attempt to clarify the "scope of public education" as the very first step to international collaborative research.

"School absenteeism" is never a problem for those who do not attend school, but it could illuminate further diverse problems inherent in the public education system. Most of all, "school absenteeism" creates a fundamental question "Why do children have to go to school?". This question comes with the counter question of "Why is public education rejected?" Since school education is a familiar cultural structure in each country today, it is rather difficult to clarify the legitimacy of compulsory schooling within the domestic paradigm. International comparative research for "school absenteeism" suggests critical questioning as to the legitimacy of compulsory schooling itself.

Bibliography

*All English titles inside '[']' are translated by Tsujino.

Avenarius, H. & Füssel H.-P. ed. (2010), *Schulrecht*, 8th ed., Link Verlag Kronach.

Bray, M. (1999), *Comparative Education: Continuing Traditions, New Challenges, and New Paradigms*, Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Green, A. (1997), *Education, Globalization and the Nation State*, Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Tsujino, K. (2016), Professional Responsibility of School Teachers in Public Education; An Analysis of German Educational Administration from a Japanese Perspective, in; JOURNAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR TEACHER EDUCATION, Vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 32-42.

Yuki, M. (2012), *Nihonkokukenpo to Gimukyoyiku (The constitution of Japan and Compulsory Education)*, Seizansya.

KMK). Consequently, the authority for 'state supervision of school' belongs to each federal state.