

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

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Abstract

By looking back on each article in the featured articles, a common foundation is summarized here as the final article in order to explore further international collaboration. Since the featured articles are the first step for international collaborative research, the main "outcome" here is preparing a common platform to compare internationally. Most of all, there are certain paradigms for public education each in Japan and Germany, the scope of public education is described by taking an example of "school absenteeism". Firstly, (1) the outline of the main points of each article is summarized, then (2) implications and suggestions through all articles are clarified. And (3) the remaining challenges are compared and reflected on. Finally, (4) the necessary preconditions for further collaborative research are described in detail. Taking international comparison through the featured articles, all authors are ready to explore the further international collaboration to deepen the common research interest in the scope of public education.

I. Summary of the featured articles

In the featured articles, "school absenteeism" and the scope of public education in Germany and Japan are thrown into the common question. The first article by Schultze & Ricking clarified the definition, fundamental theoretical background and research approach to "school absenteeism" in Germany. The authors have been engaging in this theme for many years and their research outcomes are now in the stage of international collaborative research among all authors. Although Schultze & Ricking defined the word "school absenteeism" into different sub-categories such as "Truancy" "School Refusal (School fear and School phobia)" "Parental-Condoned Absences/Withdrawal" in German context, such sub-categories are not common in Japan yet. It means that Japanese "school absenteeism" (*futoko*) might be also categorized depending on diverse phenomenon in Japan.

The second article by Soeda et al. gave concrete suggestions about Japanese "school absenteeism" to the local administration based on their field research. This report is conducted by the researchers and students of Osaka City university in cooperation with the municipal administration *Sumiyoshi Ward* where the university is located. The authors pointed out 11 recommendations to the administration. Because of the information protection, the authors described the meta structure of "school absenteeism" by recognizing the issues being at a policy and system level rather than giving advice to schools. This article regards "school absenteeism" as not a single issue for each school but complex one within the macro network of public education system itself. In further international collaborative research, such perspective beyond recognizing a school as a unit organization should be needed more.

The third article by Meise gave critical analysis to Japanese education from a German perspective. The author conducted questionnaire surveys in 1997, 2007 and 2017 in Japan, and considered "self-exclusion" in the school education in Japan. The situation in Japan regarding "school absenteeism" has been rapidly changing in recent years. This change is not only on a school level, but also at a municipal and central policy level. Although it is not

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easy to catch up with this change as a whole from an outsider's approach, international collaboration will make it possible to deepen analysis. As the author referred, the relation between "self-exclusion" and "inclusive school" is highly needed to be clarified in order to define the scope of public education.

The fourth article by Fukawa took a differing approach to the former article. German school tradition was focused on and the shift from the half-day school (*Halbtagschule*) to all-day school (*Ganztagschule*) system. While the half-day school system is familiar in Germany, the all-day school system is familiar in Japan. The article showed how many differences exist among both models of schooling. Fukawa's approach, in addition to Meise's one, took a cross national analysis which contains "outsiders' perspectives" to their counter-part country to overcome an insiders' paradigm.

II. Implications from the cross national analysis

International comparative research always brings difficulties with "comparability". There is the question of "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 spite of such limitations, the cross national analysis in these featured articles suggests some concrete options to overcome the insider's paradigm within one country.

Most of all, by setting a common topic "school absenteeism", the diverse phenomenon and approach to school education can be seen. "School absenteeism" in the broadest meaning is understood as school non-attendance in both countries. From there, the legitimacy of public education can be questioned. Since compulsory schooling is implemented as a public education system in both countries, school non-attendance is regarded as a "problem" in each society. Why however, does every child regularly have to go to school?

The obligation to attend school means that the parents are obligated to send their children to school in both countries. Although this obligation belongs to parents, and although children have rights to education, there was almost no room for children to choose alternative education other than school. In Japan, the law enacted in 2017 made it possible to open to a way to choose alternative education other than school, the substantial change in actual society has not occurred yet.

As a result, children still have to attend school regularly, take prescribed subjects under laws and public regulations, pass examinations successfully and receive evaluations depending on national standards. These lead to one common meta-question; "What is the legitimacy of the obligation for regular school attendance?". This legitimacy should not be off-limit but must have scope with certain borders.

While a half-day school paradigm in Germany has a relatively clear border of school education, all-day school paradigm in Japan is symbolized as "borderless" or "off-limit". In German half-day school tradition of public education is placed in the morning and social education or family education is placed in the afternoon. In Japanese all-day school tradition, children attend not only lessons until afternoon but also club activities after school. After the "PISA-Schock" German public education moved toward an all-day school system. Due to this direction, there are some criticisms such as "borderless school", the "off-limit role of teachers", "Melting borders among education, care and preparing", "diminishing the responsible area of the school, home and youth care", "crisis of teacher's professionalism/professionality"(Nerowski, 2015).

Such phenomena, however, has already been seen for a long time in Japan. The borderless role of school or off-limit role of teachers has been regarded as familiar issues inside Japanese society traditionally. The reform regarding this situation is just getting started today at the political level as well as at a school level. However, the magnetic fields of historically created domestic paradigms are strong, and it is not easy to redefine the scope of public education. It is necessary to be socially explicit on what people expect for school education and what they have to give up. If "schooling society" (Illich 1971) is expanding, it could accelerate "nationalization of education" (Tsuji 2016). Further international collaborative research will devote to overcome the domestic paradigm within each society.

III. Preconditions for further collaborative research

“The Scope of Public Education” as the common research question among all authors is a very broad and abstract theme. Focusing on “school absenteeism” from Germany and Japan is the first step, for further international collaboration and will require clearer preconditions to compare complex situations in both countries. As the foundation of public education in each country, how much autonomy and control on school education exists can decide the legitimacy of public education.

For one symbolized example, while Japan has one national ministry of education called the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), Germany has a de-centralized structure of 16 ministries in 16 federal states (Länder). Furthermore, the legal concepts such as “school autonomy” “educational participation by teachers, parents and students” “pedagogical freedom” needs to be questioned inside the distributed governance structure in the democratic society. The following Figure (Tsuji & Suematsu 2016) shows school administration and management structure among Germany and Japan.

		Germany	Japan
school administration	national level	Federal ministry ‘BMBF’ has almost no authority. Activities based on agreements with each state are possible. Conference of ministers of education from all states (KMK) sets the education-standards.	Education Ministry ‘MEXT’ has authority for educational contents (Ex.) Course of study, official approval of textbooks, nationwide achievement tests, basic plan for education promotion, etc.
	state level	Supreme Supervising Agency = State Ministry of Education (Ex.) Educational plan, Educational standards, official approval of textbooks, etc.	Prefectural Board of Education (Ex.) Personnel affairs
	municipal level	Senior Supervisory Agency = School Supervision Agency Subordinate Supervisory Agency = Bureau of School * Some states do not distinguish between the two. Mission: ‘state supervision of school’ to each school	Municipal Board of Education (Ex.) Authority for facilities and equipment
school management	decision making	Supreme decision-making body = school conference School conference consists of teachers, parents and students.	Supreme decision-making body = headteacher Teacher’s conference is unified by headteacher PTA and student council has no legal participation right.
	headteacher’s authority	Headteacher is the chairman of school conference.	Headteacher has supreme authority.
	teachers authority	Participation in school management with voting rights. ‘pedagogical freedom’ is legally secured. Teacher status is a public official with lifelong employment. * Employment contract ‘Angestellte’ also expanded.	Teacher’s conference is a subsidiary organization. The teacher is a local public official with lifelong employment. * Teacher has no authority for participation in school management legally. (In reality teacher’s conference has a certain influence.)
	educational participation	Parents and children have rights for educational participation. * Participation by local residents is not assumed.	Educational participation is partly legislated (school councilor system etc.) * When a school designated as a ‘community school’, parents and local residents also have the rights for participation and deliberation.

Figure: Precondition of School Administration and Management Structure among Germany and Japan

In spite of many reforms in the school education area since the 2000's with competencies based, standards oriented, 'output control', new controlling policy and so on, the fundamental structure still remains in each country. What has been changed and what has not changed under the many reforms? How will the future society where children live change? If there is no more automatic need for compulsory schooling, its legitimacy should be re-defined and its scope should be clarified.

Furthermore, today's society needs to change toward both the direction of globalization and localization, and not nationalization alone anymore. Under such 'de-nationalized' society, students have to think and act on their own feet to live with help by the public education system. Young (2000: 52) wrote "Democracies frequently violate this norm of inclusion." Such dilemma shows how complicated the compulsory schooling relates with democracy. Compulsory schooling, however, needs to be innovated toward global welfare.

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