

〈Article〉

Significance and Issues of the Subject-Based Teacher
Assignment System in Elementary Schools in Japan:
With a Focus on Classroom Culture and Legal Framework
of Elementary and Junior High Schools

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the significance and issues of the subject-based teacher assignment system in elementary schools in Japan by analyzing the current situation, focusing on classroom culture and legal framework of elementary and junior high schools.

Generally, in terms of organizing teachers for a group of classes, there is a classroom-based teacher assignment system and a subject-based teacher assignment system. Classroom-based teacher assignment is a system in which one teacher is in charge of one class and takes responsibility for teaching all subjects and guiding students. Since one assigned teacher handles all instruction in the class, it is sometimes called a “self-contained class.” In contrast, subject-based teacher assignment is a system in which each teacher is assigned to and takes responsibility for teaching a specific subject.

In Japan, elementary schools typically use the classroom-based teacher assignment system while junior high schools use the subject-based teacher assignment system. However, there has been increasing interest in introducing the subject-based teacher assignment system in elementary schools in recent years. This was prompted in 2002 when the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) announced five measures in “*Manabi no Susume* (advocacy for learning),” one of which was to enhance teaching under the subject-based teacher assignment system in elementary schools. Subsequently, a deliberation progress report (February 2006) by the Curriculum Committee of the Central Council for Education noted that “in terms of teaching methods, it is necessary to consider the subject-based teacher assignment system for the upper elementary grades” and indicated that “it is also necessary to proactively consider having junior high school teachers teach at elementary schools from the perspective of enhancing the cooperation between elementary schools and junior high schools.” Since then, an assessment of the subject-based teacher assignment system for the upper elementary grades has begun from the perspective of considering the transition from elementary to junior high school, leading to experimental initiatives around Japan.

With the amendment of School Education Law, compulsory education school was institutionalized on April 1, 2016, with the aim to provide integrated elementary and junior high school education. This made it possible to set flexible educational stages such as the 4-3-2 and 5-4 systems rather than the traditional 6-3 system, which consists of six years of elementary school and three years of junior high school, for a total of nine years of compulsory education. These educational stages are set for convenience to implement creative

curriculum organization and teaching methods. While the subject-based teacher assignment system had been traditionally considered a feature of junior high school education, initiatives to introduce this system to the upper grades in elementary school have also been observed. Meanwhile, the course of study for elementary school, which was revised in 2017 and expected to be fully implemented in fiscal year 2020, has established foreign language as a subject for fifth and sixth grades, creating a need for highly specialized English teachers. Therefore, considering subject-based teacher assignment for upper elementary school grades has become an urgent task. Given these situations, the Minister of MEXT approached the Central Council for Education in April 2019 and asked them to describe primary and secondary education in the new era and to assess the subject-based teacher assignment system for elementary school.

Advanced practices on the subject-based teacher assignment system in elementary schools have been reported in detail theoretically and empirically in papers such as those by Nasu and Katsura (2007) and Takashina (2006). In recent years, Asada and Nakanishi (2018) have shown that children who experience the subject-based teacher assignment system in elementary school have lower anxiety about teachers and about studying in junior high school than do children who only experience the classroom-based teacher assignment system. A research report by the Tsukuba City Council for Education Assessment (2018) also indicated that of the teachers who were surveyed at integrated elementary/junior high schools, 91.3% said they felt the effect of the subject-based teacher assignment system in elementary school. While there are studies that view the subject-based teacher assignment system in elementary school as positive in these advanced cases, studies such as Tanaka et al.'s (2017), after the first fiscal year of establishing compulsory education schools, point out that introducing the subject-based teacher assignment system in the fifth grade would require us to assess personnel exchange and placement in elementary and junior high schools. Although these studies on empirical cases and effects raise expectations for the subject-based teacher assignment system in elementary schools, there are challenges in nationwide implementation under the current system since the classroom culture and legal framework differ between elementary and junior high school.

Therefore, this study will focus on the classroom culture and legal framework of elementary and junior high schools in Japan, analyze the differences, and aim to examine the significance and issues of the subject-based teacher assignment system in elementary schools. Specifically, the uniqueness of classes in Japan will be considered in this paper while referencing previous studies on the history and management of school classes as well as the encyclopedias of pedagogy to understand the origins of the classroom system. Next, this paper will analyze Japanese legal frameworks related to class organization, the fixed number of educational personnel, and teaching certificates, and examine why the classroom-based teacher assignment system took root in elementary schools while the subject-based teacher assignment system took root in junior high schools in the first place. Then, this paper will analyze the state of the subject-based teacher assignment system implementation at the progressive elementary schools that have done so and their empirical reports, understand the reality of the subject-based teacher assignment system, and examine the significance and issues in introducing such a system.

2. Birth of the Class and Classroom Culture

(1) Origin of the Class

Before explaining how the classes unique to Japan were born, this paper describes the origin of classes across the world. “Class” is a system that is unique to modern schools. The Czech scholar Johannes Amos Comenius, who actively contributed to 17th century education philosophy, advocated in his book, *Didactica*

magna (1657), the need for “class” as a method to make everyone learn happily about everything. Comenius organized classes based on children’s ages (“grades”), systematically arranged the content of education according to these grade-based classes, and theorized the method to teach the entire class at once by using textbooks. After Comenius advocated the need for classes, classes began functioning as a means to provide school education to many people simultaneously.

According to Hamilton, whereas the class structure advocated by Comenius was one based on the grade system, Andrew Bell and Joseph Lancaster in early 19th century England advocated for ability-based class organization, based on the promotion system. Specifically, they advocated the monitorial system as a method to efficiently teach the “Three R’s (reading, writing, and arithmetic)” simultaneously. The monitorial system is an efficient teaching method in which students are divided into classes based on their abilities and relatively capable students are placed as monitors to substitute for the teacher (Hamilton, 1998, p.88). The students who became monitors acted as teachers and taught the Three R’s to the other students. This monitorial system functioned well when educational content was limited to the Three R’s; however, it came to an end as various subjects, such as geography, history, natural philosophy, music, and physical education, were incorporated into school education, because of the difficulty for student monitors to teach this variety of subjects (Yanagi, 2005, pp.62–63).

It was after the spread of the compulsory education system as public education in the 19th century when “class” in a modern sense was established. We can see from the idea of Comenius, who advocated the need for “class” as a method of making everyone happily learn about everything, as well as the monitorial system advocated by Andrew Bell and Joseph Lancaster, that the idea of wanting to disseminate education to many people underlies the origin of “class.”

(2) Birth of the Class and Classroom Culture in Japan

The Japanese public education system was launched when the Government Order of Education was promulgated in 1872. After that, schools adopted classes based on the promotion system. Ordinary elementary schools were divided into the upper and lower divisions and structured so that students advanced through grades ranging from “8 kyuu” to “1 kyuu” (8 kyuu is the lowest level, 1 kyuu is the highest level), according to their abilities. It had the same characteristics as the monitorial system which was disseminated as a promotion-based class. Since it was possible to skip a grade if the student’s individual scores on exams were good, the competition became intense. While some viewed the promotion system allowing advancement based on abilities as impartial because social status was irrelevant, the fact that some children could not advance and were forced to “drop out” was a problem.

Thus, the Secretary of the Ministry of Education at the time reasoned that one cannot acquire strong disposition and habits in a class based on the promotion system, and argued for the need of a class in which students could build their character and correct their habits with an intimate relationship with their teacher, not unlike the parent-child relationship. The regulations related to class organization were enacted in 1891, and classes based on the grade system were institutionalized to organize students of the same age into one class as a unit for educational activities, rather than as a class serving merely as a place for teaching knowledge. This grade-system-based class called for unity as Japanese citizens, and aimed to strengthen the discipline of students. The system was implemented so that the number of students per class prescribed by the regulation was less than 70 of the same age, with one teacher per class.

Even now, classes at schools under compulsory education regulation in Japan are organized by children of the same grade. In the classroom, they are required to form appropriate human relationships, making friends,

forming groups, and improving their daily interactions. The official curriculum guidelines (“Courses of Study”) for both elementary and junior high school list the objectives and contents of classroom activities under the chapter on special activities. The objectives of classroom activities include identifying issues in order to improve the class and life at school, hold discussions for resolution, and reach and implement agreements by sharing roles and cooperating. They thus develop the qualities and abilities to make decisions and self-actualize by voluntarily and practically resolving their own issues, and acting on their decisions regarding how to live their lives by applying classroom experience.

Thus, elementary and junior high schools in Japan aim to teach students how to collaborate with diverse people, understand the significance of collective activities, and master the ways of collective behavior. In addition, schools have designated times for cleaning activities and school lunch to reinforce the children’s performance of activities essential to daily life in the classroom unit. Classroom teachers teach the significance of cleaning duties and the meaning of work at clean-up activities, and teach basic dining habits during school lunch. Furthermore, they often participate in school events as a class, such as athletic competitions between classes, or group selection of an activity, such as a field trip.

As described, Japanese classes function not only as a place to study for children of the same age, but also as a place to live, as they spend time together in one class from morning to early evening (Yanagi, 2005, pp.19–26). A class exists as a base for the school life of students, and classroom teachers assume the role of directly engaging in educational and daily life guidance of students. This traditional way of the Japanese class is shared not only among elementary schools, but also junior high and high schools. When the classroom-based teacher assignment system is adopted under such a Japanese classroom culture, the time that children spend interacting with one classroom teacher increases dramatically. There is a concern that for a subject based system, the children are able to interact with different teacher per class, whereas for a classroom-based system, this interaction with the teachers are limited.

3. Legal Basis for the Classroom-Based and Subject-Based Teacher Assignment Systems

(1) Structure of Class Organization at Elementary and Junior High Schools

Classes in elementary and junior high schools in Japan are prescribed to be organized by students of the same grade with 40 students or less per class based on the Standards for Establishment of Elementary School (Articles 4 and 5) and the Standards for Establishment of Junior High School (Articles 4 and 5), respectively. However, based on the Law Concerning the Standards of the Class Size and Fixed Number of Educational Personnel in Public Compulsory Education Schools (hereafter “Compulsory Education Standards Law”), the national standards for public schools for compulsory education are stipulated to have 35 students or less per class only for Grade 1 at the elementary level, and 40 students or less per class for Grades 2 through 9.

After World War II, Japan enacted the Compulsory Education Standards Law (1958) in order to optimize class size and teaching staff allocation at public compulsory education schools. The law is intended to help maintain and improve the quality of compulsory education by establishing standards of class organization and the quota for teaching staff so that class size and teaching staff allocation are optimized (Article 1 of the Compulsory Education Standards Law).

As described, stipulating class organization and a fixed number of educational personnel under one law established a relationship in which the two are closely linked. Under the Compulsory Education Standards Law, the maximum class size is determined in order to optimize class size and educational personnel placement. The

number of classes is calculated in accordance with the number of students; this, in turn, determines the required number of educational personnel, which is used as the basis for fund allocation. Because this law stipulates that classes in Japan should be organized for students of the same grade, classes are organized based on grades.

Prior to the enactment of the Compulsory Education Standards Law, 60 to 70 students were taught in one class, a situation known in Japan as “packed classes.” To resolve this, the law for class organization was enacted to stipulate the maximum number of students per class based on the class organization standards defined by the government. In Japan, class size reduction has been implemented by reducing the national standard of class organization stipulated: 50 in 1963, 45 in 1968, and 40 in 1991, based on the aforementioned Compulsory Education Standards Law (See Table 1). As Table 1 shows, the standard for class organization was set at a 40-student maximum as a result of the fifth plan for improving the fixed number of educational personnel (FY 1980 to FY 1991). However, the subsequent sixth (FY 1993 to FY 2000) and seventh (FY 2001 to FY 2005) improvement plans did not revise the national standard. After that, the Compulsory Education Standards Law was amended in April 2011 based on the results of the eighth improvement plan (FY 2006 to FY 2010). As amended, the national standard for class organization was reduced, only for Grade 1, from 40 to 35. This reduction of the standard, which was the first in the 20 years since 1991, was a big step forward for the development of the educational environment. However, the revision to the standard for Grade 2 planned for the following year (April 2012) has not been implemented.

Compared with the educational environment in which more than 50 students studied in one class during the 1950s, the current 35-student class can be regarded as a big step forward. However, in today’s classrooms in Japanese schools, the needs are becoming more diversified, complicated, and serious in the age of respecting individuality where “being different is OK.” The burden on classroom teachers has grown like never before, requiring improvements in the educational environment even today to allow teachers to work with each and

Table 1: Improvement History of the Fixed Number of Educational Personnel for Public Compulsory Education Schools in Japan

Plan for improving educational personnel (Period)	Number of students per class	Points of improvement
1st (FY 1959 to 1963)	50	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Articulation of the standards for class organization and the fixed number of educational personnel ➤ Implementation of the 50-student class
2nd (FY 1964 to 1968)	45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Implementation of the 45-student class ➤ Establishment of the fixed number of educational personnel for schools for disabled children
3rd (FY 1969 to 1973)	45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Resolution of the issue of classes combining four or more grades
4th (FY 1974 to 1978)	45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Resolution of the issue of classes combining three or more grades ➤ Establishment of the fixed number of vice principals and school nutritionists
5th (FY 1980 to 1991)	40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Implementation of the 40-student class
6th (FY 1993 to 2000)	40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Established a fixed number of educational personnel for improving teaching method
7th (FY 2001 to 2005)	40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Lessons in small classes, increased multiple placement of vice principal and school nurse
8th (FY 2006 to 2010)	40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Improvement of the fixed number of teachers in an attempt to further promote small class education
9th (FY 2011 to 2018)	35 only for Grade 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Implementation of 35-student class only for Grade 1 (2011)

every student.

(2) Mechanism for Calculating the Fixed Number of Educational Personnel for Elementary and Junior High Schools

The Compulsory Education Standards Law prescribes the formula for calculating the fixed number of educational personnel in conjunction with the above-mentioned structure of class organization. It seems that the difference in these multipliers indicated in the calculation of the fixed number of educational personnel as prescribed by the law, might explain the institutional background for general classroom-based teacher assignment in elementary schools and general subject-based teacher assignment in junior high school. In terms of the total number of teachers to be placed in each prefecture, a multiplier is stipulated for each school size in Article 7 of the Compulsory Education Standards Law (see Table 2).

The Enforcement Regulation of the School Education Law (Articles 41 and 79) stipulates the standard number of classes at elementary and junior high schools as 12 to 18, while the Order for Enactment of the Act on State Subsidies to the Facility Expenses of Compulsory Education Schools (Article 4) stipulates the appropriate size of elementary school and junior high school to be 12 to 18 classes. The determination of 12

Table 2: Table for Calculating the Fixed Number of Educational Personnel at Elementary School and Junior High School

Elementary School		Junior High School	
School Size	Multiplier	School Size	Multiplier
School with 1 or 2 classes	1.000	School with 1 class	4.000
School with 3 or 4 classes	1.250	School with 2 classes	3.000
School with 5 classes	1.200	School with 3 classes	2.667
School with 6 classes	1.292	School with 4 classes	2.000
School with 7 classes	1.264	School with 5 classes	1.660
School with 8 or 9 classes	1.249	School with 6 classes	1.750
School with 10 or 11 classes	1.234	School with 7 or 8 classes	1.725
School with 12 to 15 classes	1.210	School with 9 to 11 classes	1.720
School with 16 to 18 classes	1.200	School with 12 to 14 classes	1.570
School with 19 or 21 classes	1.170	School with 15 to 17 classes	1.560
School with 22 or 24 classes	1.165	School with 18 to 20 classes	1.557
School with 25 or 27 classes	1.155	School with 21 or 23 classes	1.550
School with 28 or 30 classes	1.150	School with 24 or 26 classes	1.520
School with 31 or 33 classes	1.140	School with 27 or 32 classes	1.517
School with 34 or 36 classes	1.137	School with 33 or 35 classes	1.515
School with 37 or 39 classes	1.133	School with 36 or more classes	1.483
School with 40 or more classes	1.130		

*12 to 18 classes, the appropriate number for elementary and junior high schools, are shaded.
Prepared by the author based on Article 7 of the Compulsory Education Standards Law.

classes as the appropriate number at an elementary school refers to a school comprised of two classes per grade, up to Grade 6.

In other words, the basic fixed number of educational personnel including vice principal in the case of 12 classes—an appropriate size for an elementary school—would be $12 \times 1.210 = 14.52$ since the multiplier for 12 classes is 1.210. Because the number of teachers (senior teachers, chief supervising teachers, and teachers) placed in an elementary school is prescribed to be more than one per class, three teachers without an assigned classroom can be placed in addition to 12 classroom teachers when one classroom teacher is placed per class. Furthermore, in the case of an 18-class elementary school (three classes per grade), the basic fixed number is $18 \times 1.200 = 21.6$, since the multiplier for 18 classes is 1.200 and four teachers without an assigned classroom can be placed in addition to 18 classroom teachers.

In contrast, in the case of 12 classes (four classes per grade), which is regarded as an appropriate size for a junior high school, the number of teachers without an assigned classroom would be seven, in addition to 12 classroom teachers, since the multiplier for 12 classes is 1.570 and $12 \times 1.570 = 18.84$. In the case of an 18-class junior high school (six classes per grade), ten teachers without an assigned classroom can be placed, in addition to 18 classroom teachers, since the multiplier for 18 classes is 1.557 and $18 \times 1.557 = 28.026$.

The actual number of educational personnel would be the sum of this basic fixed number and the additional ration number. However, when we simply compare the basic fixed number of educational personnel between elementary and junior high schools, we can see that the number of teachers other than classroom teachers available to be placed in elementary schools is smaller than that of junior high schools. If we compare the case of the same 18 classes in an elementary school and a junior high school, the difference in calculating the fixed number of educational personnel is clear since ten teachers without an assigned classroom are placed in the junior high school when there are only four teachers without an assigned classroom in the elementary school. The Compulsory Education Standards Law was revised in fiscal year 2011 to allow utilizing additional teachers in order to introduce the subject-based teacher assignment system in elementary schools starting in fiscal year 2012. However, in terms of the basic number of educational personnel, although the fixed number is sufficient for junior high schools to implement the subject-based teacher assignment system, it is difficult for elementary schools to divide roles based on a specialized subject because the number of teachers without an assigned classroom is limited.

(3) Mechanism of Teaching Certificates in Elementary and Junior High Schools

The Educational Personnel Certification Law in Japan was enacted in 1949 with an aim to “define standards related to the certificates of educational personnel to maintain and improve the qualifications of educational personnel” (Article 1, Educational Personnel Certification Law). Article 3 of the Educational Personnel Certification Law stipulated that “educational personnel shall hold an appropriate certificate awarded per this law” so that teachers at kindergartens, elementary schools, junior high schools, high schools, and special needs education schools must, in principle, possess a teaching certificate for each type of school. This is called “*sōtō menkyo-jō shugi* (the principle of comparable certificates).” The purpose for this came about from the expertise of teaching professionals; since the expertise differs according to the developmental level of small children, pupils, and students, an appropriate certificate is needed for each level.

For this reason, teachers who have a teaching certificate for elementary school teach exclusively at an elementary school while teachers who have a teaching certificate for junior high school teach exclusively at a junior high school. In the case of a compulsory education school, you need teaching certificates for elementary

and junior high school. For a secondary school, you need teaching certificates for junior high and high school. That said, you are allowed for a while to teach subjects that correspond to the school type of the certificate that you have (Educational Personnel Certification Law, Supplementary Provision 16, Clause 19).

The current law also stipulates granting teaching certificates for junior high and high school per subject (Article 4, Clause 5, Educational Personnel Certification Law). Because the subject for which a junior high or high school teacher is certified to teach becomes his/her specialty, junior high and high schools organize teachers by using the subject-based teacher assignment system. In order to make the transition and coordination between elementary and junior high school more flexible, the Central Council for Education asked in the 2002 report, “*Kongo no kyōin menkyo seido no arikata ni tsuite*” (Implementation of the Future Educational Personnel Certification System) to expand the scope to allow junior high/ high school teachers teach an equivalent subject in elementary school to the one on his/her teaching certificate (The Central Council for Education, 2002). In the past, the special subject-based teacher assignment system in elementary school was limited to music, art, physical education, and home economics. However, the Educational Personnel Certification Law was amended in response to this report, allowing those who have a teaching certificate for junior high or high school to teach an equivalent subject in elementary school—even subjects such as science and math in addition to music and art (Article 16, Clause 5, the Educational Personnel Certification Law).

As described above, the institutional background in which the classroom-based teacher assignment system in elementary school and the subject-based teacher assignment system in junior high school took root as the traditional forms of teaching lies in the fact that the legal frameworks related to class organization, the fixed number of educational personnel, and teaching certificates in Japan were prescribed for each educational stage. In order to reexamine the form of teaching the upper elementary school grades, it is necessary to review these legal frameworks. In particular, as cooperation and smooth transition between elementary and junior high school are required, it became clear that there is an issue with the regulations regarding the method of calculating the fixed number of educational personnel.

4. State of the Subject-Based Teacher Assignment System in Elementary School

This section will analyze the state of the subject-based teacher assignment system in elementary schools based on its prior implementation at progressive elementary schools and their empirical reports.

According to the Results of the FY 2015 Study on the State of Organization and Implementation of Curriculum at Public Elementary Schools and Junior High Schools issued by the MEXT (2016, p.13), the subject-based teacher assignment system has been introduced in elementary schools for some subjects mainly for the upper grades (see Table 3). The implementation methods of this system include making the best use of the teacher's specialty, having junior high and high school teachers teach concurrently, and utilizing part-time lecturers.

Music is a subject for which many schools adopt the subject-based teacher assignment system; more than half of schools have a music teacher in place, including 60.2% of sixth grade classes, 57.4% of fifth grade classes, and 51.1% of fourth grade classes. While increasingly more schools are adopting the subject-based teacher assignment system for music, which is a major practical arts subject, only about 20% of schools have adopted this system for other practical arts such as arts and handicrafts, and the implementation rate is only about 10% for physical education.

The second most popular subject for which schools have adopted the subject-based teacher assignment

Table 3: Implementation of the subject-based teacher in elementary schools (FY 2015)

	Japanese	Social Studies	Math	Science	Living Environment Studies	Music	Arts and Handicrafts	Home Economics	Physical Education	Foreign Language Activities
Grade 1	3.3%		5.1%		1.3%	12.4%	4.8%		6.0%	
Grade 2	5.9%		7.1%		1.8%	20.8%	9.5%		7.0%	
Grade 3	10.3%	5.7%	15.5%	20.8%		42.5%	17.2%		7.9%	
Grade 4	11.1%	6.9%	17.6%	31.3%		51.1%	21.3%		8.7%	
Grade 5	11.6%	14.1%	20.8%	45.3%		57.4%	22.0%	34.7%	11.1%	12.9%
Grade 6	11.6%	15.2%	20.4%	48.9%		60.2%	22.9%	36.5%	12.2%	13.6%

Source: MEXT, 2016, p.13.

system is science; 48.9% and 45.3% of elementary schools have a science teacher placed for sixth grade and fifth grade, respectively. There are many elementary school teachers who are good at social studies and Japanese; however, when it comes to teaching upper grades where the teaching materials become advanced, utilization of teachers who specialize in subjects related to science and mathematics is desired. Since there are many elementary school teachers who feel particularly incompetent in teaching science classes, which often involve experiments, placing teachers who specialize in science also helps to prevent children from distancing themselves from science.

Foreign language activities also became a requirement for fifth and sixth grades in elementary school as of fiscal year 2011. This is often taught mainly by the regular classroom teacher, and the percentage of junior high/high school teachers or specialized teachers who are involved in teaching foreign language has been low. Given that foreign language activities will become a requirement starting in third grade and foreign language will become a subject starting in fifth grade under the new course of study that will be fully implemented in fiscal year 2020, placement of teachers specializing in foreign language will also become an urgent task. Since the current teaching certificate system now allows teachers with a teaching certificate for junior high or high school to teach subjects listed on their certificates, including science and mathematics and not limited to subjects such as music and art, placing teachers who specialize in certain subjects would also be an effective option to increase the expertise in subject education.

As described, public elementary schools have adopted the subject-based teacher assignment system for some subjects in recent years. However, many elementary schools affiliated with national universities have long used the subject-based teacher assignment system. According to “A Study on the State of Reform at the Schools and Kindergartens Affiliated with a University that Became a National University Corporation and Their Future Outlook” (March 2006) conducted by the Japan Association of Universities of Education, 77% of the 69 responding elementary schools affiliated with a national university have adopted the subject-based teacher assignment system. Subject-based assignment of teachers increases for all subjects as the grade level goes up; there are schools that have adopted the subject-based teacher assignment completely by fifth or sixth grade. Since these affiliated elementary schools have devoted themselves to studies of specialty subjects under the subject-based teacher assignment system from the perspective of researching how to deliver lessons and developing teaching materials, there is a lot we can learn from their accumulated studies.

For example, the Elementary School attached to University of Tsukuba, which is a national school, has long used the subject-based teacher assignment system in all grades. Tanaka, a former vice principal of the Elementary School attached to University of Tsukuba, believes that this system, which utilizes the expertise of

teachers, is an effective method since sufficient specialized knowledge and skills become necessary for teachers when teaching lessons in upper elementary grades (Tanaka, 2002). It becomes quite obvious whose lessons are engaging since children are taught each subject by a different teacher. Teachers compete to not be outdone by other specialized teachers and exert themselves in developing interesting teaching materials in an attempt to provide engaging lessons (Tanaka, 2002). While the subject-based teacher assignment system at this elementary school has been implemented at all grade levels, the number of hours taught by the subject teacher differs by grade. More hours are taught by the classroom teacher in the lower grades, and the hours taught by subject teachers increase in the upper grades. In the traditional elementary school system, the classroom teacher interacts with the children in his/her classroom, whereas in the subject-based teacher assignment system, the classroom teacher attempts to make effective use of educational activities or teacher interaction time outside of class hours, such as the time for morning activities before the first period starts, to enhance class management (Takakura, 2007). Takakura, a teacher at the Elementary School attached to University of Tsukuba, believes that more effective class management becomes possible when the classroom teacher proactively exchanges information with other teachers responsible for specialized subjects and applies it to class management, although the fact classroom teachers spend less time for class management under the subject-based teacher assignment system is an issue (Takakura, 2007).

5. Conclusion

As described above, this study focused on the classroom culture and legal frameworks of elementary and junior high schools in Japan, analyzed and examined the differences, and explained the reality of the subject-based teaching assignment system in elementary schools. Based on the above, significance and issues of the subject-based teacher assignment system in elementary schools.

Classrooms were created as a way to make students enjoy learning a variety of subjects. Teachers are expected to continually improve their teaching skills in order for all children to enjoy learning in the classroom. Since classroom teachers currently teach almost all subjects themselves in elementary schools in Japan, it takes considerable effort to prepare lessons for all subjects. In order to secure sufficient time to research how to teach lessons and develop teaching materials, it is necessary to limit the number of subjects they take on and focus on improving their skills to teach the subject for which they are responsible. As Tanaka (2002) noted in the previous section, it becomes necessary for the teachers to have sufficient specialized knowledge and skills for lessons in the upper elementary grades. Likewise, Takashina (2006) argues the need for a subject-based teacher assignment system in elementary schools by citing reasons such as more complicated lessons in the upper elementary grades requiring advanced and specialized ways of thinking. In order to deliver lessons that are engaging in a way to inspire children's curiosity, it is necessary to increase specialization of subjects in elementary schools and provide an educational environment that allows detailed research on the method of teaching. As ideas and improvement are called for in planning lessons, introducing the subject-based teaching system in the upper elementary grades would be a valuable educational environment provision as a measure to increase specialization in subject education.

In addition, the time that children interact with one classroom teacher is extremely long since one teacher is in charge of almost all subjects in elementary school under the classroom-based teacher assignment system in Japan, resulting in a situation in which the impact that the classroom teacher has on children is considerable. Given that a classroom in Japan functions as a base of school life, the introduction of the subject-based teacher

assignment system provides significance in allowing children to interact with multiple teachers other than their classroom teacher by learning specialized subjects. It becomes possible to support children with a multi-teacher system rather than handling children through the eye of one classroom teacher, even if something goes wrong.

With the formalization of compulsory education schools in 2016, it became possible to flexibly set educational stages over the nine-year period of elementary and junior high schools. Expectations are increasing for initiatives to introduce the subject-based teacher assignment system, which is characteristic of junior high schools, to elementary schools by changing educational stages. However, there are issues with the legal frameworks. This study made it clear that trying to implement educational environment improvement across educational stages would result in issues because of the Japanese legal frameworks related to class organization, the fixed number of educational personnel, and the teaching certificates required for each educational stage. It is difficult to assign teachers to a specialized role in order to implement the subject-based teacher assignment system in elementary schools, particularly under the current scheme of calculating the fixed number of educational personnel because the number of teachers available for assignments other than classroom teachers is small. In order to realize the subject-based teacher assignment system in elementary school, it is necessary to bring the multiplier for elementary schools set by the Compulsory Education Standards Law closer to the multiplier for junior high schools. It is also necessary to implement the subject-based teacher assignment system by securing a sufficient number of teachers within the basic fixed number since the additional ration varies depending on the budget of municipality.

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Significance and Issues of the Subject-Based Teacher Assignment System in Elementary Schools in Japan: With a Focus on Classroom Culture and Legal Framework of Elementary and Junior High Schools

Masumi HOSHINO

The purpose of this study is to examine the significance and issues of the subject-based teacher assignment system in elementary schools in Japan by analyzing the current situation, focusing on classroom culture and the legal framework of elementary and junior high schools. Specifically, this paper considers what the unique features of classes in Japan are while referencing previous studies on the history and management of school classes as well as the encyclopedias of pedagogy to understand the origins of the classroom system. Next, Japanese legal frameworks related to class organization, the fixed number of educational personnel, and teaching certificates are analyzed, and why the classroom-based teacher assignment system took root in elementary schools while the subject-based teacher assignment system took root in junior high schools in the first place is examined. Then, implementation of the state of the subject-based teacher assignment system at progressive elementary schools and their empirical reports are analyzed and an understanding of the reality of the subject-based teacher assignment system is given. Finally, an examination of the significance and issues in introducing such a system is made.

As a result, this study pointed out that introducing a subject-based teaching system in the upper elementary grades would be a valuable educational environment provision as a measure to increase specialization in subject education. In addition, given that a classroom in Japan functions as a base of school life, the introduction of the subject-based teacher assignment system provides significance in allowing children to interact with multiple teachers other than their classroom teacher by learning specialized subjects. On the other hand, this study made it clear that trying to implement educational environment improvements across educational stages would result in issues because of the Japanese legal frameworks related to class organization, the fixed number of educational personnel, and the teaching certificates required for each educational stage. It is difficult to assign teachers to a specialized role in order to implement the subject-based teacher assignment system in elementary schools, particularly under the current scheme of calculating the fixed number of educational personnel because the number of teachers available for assignments other than classroom teachers is small.

日本の小学校における教科担任制の意義と課題 —小・中学校の学級文化と法制度に着目して—

星 野 真 澄

本研究の目的は、日本の小・中学校の学級文化と法制度に着目してその違いを分析し、小学校における教科担任制の意義と課題を考察することである。具体的には、まず、日本独自の学級とは何か、学級史と学級経営の先行研究と教育学事典を資料としながら、学級制度のはじまりを紐解いた。次に、そもそもなぜ小学校では学級担任制が根付き、中学校では教科担任制が根付いているのか、日本の学

級編制，教職員定数，教員免許状に関する法制度を分析した。そして最後に，先進的に実施した小学校における教科担任制の実施状況と実践報告を分析して教科担任制の実態を解明し，教科担任制導入の意義と課題を考察した。

その結果，本研究では，小学校高学年で教科担任制を導入することは，教科教育の専門性を高める方策として意義ある教育環境整備であることを指摘した。日本の学級が学校生活の拠点として機能していることを踏まえれば，教科担任制の導入は，学級担任以外に教科の指導を通じて複数の教員と関わることができるという意義を有している。一方で，本研究は，日本の学級編制，教職員定数，教員免許状に関する法制度は，学校段階ごとに定めた規定であるため，学校段階区分を超えて教育環境整備を実施しようとする問題が生じることを明らかにした。とくに現行の教職員定数の算出の仕組みの下で小学校の教科担任制を実施するには，担任以外に配置できる教員数が少なく，専科として役割分担することが困難であることを指摘した。