Recent Trends on Teacher Education Reform in Japan

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1. Problems and Status Quo

1) Fifty Years of “Open System” - two types of institutes

It is a well-known fact that the two major principles of teacher education in Japan are "Teacher Education at Universities" and "Open System for Teachers' License".

"Teacher Education at Universities" means that the basic status for school teacher is Bachelor Degree, four years after secondary education. Although there are three certificate level according to degrees, 1st class license with BA degree is regarded as the standard to be a school teacher. Present advanced/premier license with MA degree has not so much priority in the status as a school teacher.

2nd-Class License: Undergraduate Diploma = two years after secondary education
1st-Class License: Bachelor Degree = four years after secondary education
Premier License: Master Degree = six years (4+2) after secondary education
*Primary school teachers' license for all subjects
*Secondary school teachers' license for one specialized subject
(Math, Social Studies, Science, Home Economics, English,....)

“Open System for Teachers’ License” means that all the qualified institutes can certificate and provide various kinds of teachers’ licenses and all the institutes are treated as equal under Education Personnel Certification Law (1949). Former Normal Schools (師範学校) and Higher Normal Schools (高等師範学校) have no priority in licensing system now.

Under these two principles, now over 500 institutes (universities/colleges) have their own teacher education and certification course in Japan. But in fact, there are two types of institutes which have teacher training course as follows. Although teachers’ licenses of these two types of institutes are treated as equal, systems are slightly different.

Type A: Universities and Faculties of Education (47 organizations)

Before 1949, each Japanese province (prefecture) had its own Normal School which was specialized for the training of primary school teachers. Graduates of these Normal Schools had to get teacher’s license and be primary school teachers for several years.
These Normal Schools has turned into national universities which have BA degree course since 1949 and they are now called “Universities and Faculties of Education”. Only these universities and faculties have special course for teacher training, whose students have to get some kind of teachers’ license for primary or secondary schools. But graduates of these universities and faculties no longer have any duties to be teachers.

**Type B: Other Colleges and Universities (459 or more organizations)**

Besides these national “Universities and Faculties of Education”, there were many national, private and provincial (municipal) colleges and universities which have optional course to get teachers’ license. Students of these colleges or universities are not necessary to get the license, and this is the point of deference from Type A institutes. Most of these Type B institutes provide teachers’ license for secondary schools, but approximately 50 of them now provide license for primary schools.

The share ratios of teachers from these two types are as follows (on 2000).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Type A</th>
<th>Type B &amp; Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary School (G1-6) Teachers</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Secondary School (G7-9) Teachers</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Secondary School (G10-12) Teachers</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>85%</td>
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At the beginning of “Open System”, there was severe lack of school teachers in Japan, especially for lower secondary school (G7-9) which has become compulsory for all the children from 1947. So the “Open System” for teacher education was a solution for the lack, and it has a big merit until now to gather many school teachers from various types of institutes who have many various majors. But, according to the increase of the persons who get teachers’ license under this system, some problems have occurred.

For example, there has been a problem called “Teaching Practice Pollutions” since 1960s because many students experience teaching practice at primary and/or secondary schools but actually few of them have become school teachers, so mentor teachers at primary/secondary schools have to work hard with little rewards.

From other point of view, since the way to get teachers’ license is not so difficult, the dignity of the license has become less than before, so children and their parents pay less respect for teachers.

In addition, when the number of children in Japan is decreasing year by year, the competition ratio in screening to be a full-time teacher is very high and many Japanese youth can not get their job as school teachers.

**2) Minimum Standard for Teachers’ Quality**

Among the problems of the “Open System” of teacher education in Japan, the biggest one is that we can hardly find any minimum standards to be a school teacher in
In Japan, the way to be a primary/secondary school teacher has two major steps, license certification and screening for employment.

Under the Education Personnel Certification Law (1949), the Ministry of Education in Japan qualifies the suitable institutes to provide teachers’ license. For example, the general requirements to get 1st class license for primary and lower secondary school (compulsory education) teachers are as follows.

**Total Credits: 124+**
- **Subjects for education:** 41+ (for primary school teacher)  
  31+ (for lower secondary school teacher)  
  Ex. basic theories, teaching methods, school management, curriculum structure, teaching practice (2-4 weeks) and so on
- **Subjects for school subjects:** 8+ (for primary school teacher)  
  20+ (for lower secondary school teacher)  
- **Additional subjects of these two groups (each institute’s choice)**  
  10+ (for primary school teacher)  
  8+ (for lower secondary school teacher)  
- **Nursing care experience:** 7days (without credits)

According to these guidelines, each of the institutes provides some kind of teacher training course. But the Law only has general guidelines and the policies and criteria in detail depend on each institute. So each institute, each teaching staff has own criteria for the evaluation of students’ work, so there are no solid minimum standard to get teacher’s license certification.

Concerning the screening for employment as public primary and secondary school teachers, each Provincial (Prefecture) Government has its right and own way of screening.

So each institute, each teaching staff has its own criteria for students to be teachers and each provincial government or private school has its own way of screening. There is no answer to the question “who can be responsible for minimum standards for school teachers?”

### 3) Institutes’ Accountabilities for Teacher Education

Since we can hardly find any kinds of minimum standards to be school teachers, the requirements for accountabilities of each institute have been increased.

Concerning the status quo of the principle “Teacher Education at Universities”, unfortunately there is little consensus in institutes which have teacher training courses.

For example, there are two types of teaching staffs in Japanese universities which
are called ‘Academicians’ and ‘Educationists’. Most of ‘Academicians’ emphasize academic knowledge as the most important factor to be a teacher, but most of ‘Academicians’ emphasize academic knowledge but most of ‘Educationists’ emphasize teaching skills as crucial factor.

Thus, most of the people outside the institutes do not regard universities or colleges as suitable for teachers to get practical teaching skills.

Recently, the balance of power between the institutes who are responsible for licensing and the provincial governments who are responsible for screening is changing, and the principle “Teacher Education at Universities” seems to be in crisis.

For example, Tokyo Metropolitan Government has started the program named ‘Tokyo Cram School for Teacher Training’ (東京教師養成塾). The program aims to recruit excellent young teachers for public primary schools in Tokyo Metropolitan area. Only one hundred of selected fourth year students can participate in the program, and they can have priority in screening. The program contains special teaching practice, seminars, experience of social services, vocational internship, etc. over the span of one year. Whole the program is organized by Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education, so the program has a meaning of an alternative to undergraduate education by universities.

On November 2001, Committee for the Future Status of the National Universities of Education in Japan, a consultative committee of Ministry of Education, has made a final report after their discussion about one year and a half.

The report offered many suggestions about teacher education and the future status of “Universities and Faculties of Education” (Type A) in Japan. Major issues the report pointed are as follows.

(a) To merge some universities or faculties of education into a bigger one
(b) To merge or abolish of some kind of attached school
(c) To improve teachers’ in-service training at graduate schools
(d) To arrange some solid model for teacher education in universities.

Concerning (d), the Committee has argued who has the responsibility to keep teachers’ quality and they came to a conclusion that it is better the universities themselves should have the responsibility than national government. In addition, among Japanese higher education organizations, there are some movements of making up curriculum model by universities themselves in other fields such as medicine, nursing, technology, literature, and so on. So the report pointed that universities who can certificate teachers’ license have to develop some kind of curriculum model for teacher education.

As the role for arranging some model for teacher education curricula, the report says universities themselves should made the guidelines for accredit each course for teacher training. There seems to be the principle “Teacher Education at Universities” as the background of this report. In Japan, universities who have academic freedom are regarded as independent from the government, and for teacher education curricula, it is
not suitable way that Ministry made national guideline like those of former Normal Schools.

So JAUE's trial with working group for teacher education curricula has started. J.A.U.E. (Japan Association of Universities of Education, 日本教育大学協会) was established in 1949 and its main office is at Tokyo Gakugei University. The Association organizes about fifty universities and faculties of education (mainly Type A) and attached schools. The final report of the Committee pointed that JAUE has the responsibility to make some kind of curriculum model for teacher education in universities.

2. Recent Trends on Curriculum Reform for Teacher Education

1) Conflicts among the Teaching Staffs for Teacher Education

For discussing about teacher education curricula in the institutes, there are some conflicts which have been carried out for long time.

As mentioned above, there is a conflict between 'Academicians' and 'Educationists' and unfortunately we could not get any clear conclusion of this issue until now. That is why each teaching staff in various universities has own policy and criteria to teach each subject and evaluate students’ work. Most of the teaching staff can not imagine any minimum standards for school teachers, especially those for primary school teachers.

For example, teaching organizations for the license of primary school teacher at the universities or faculties of education (Type A) depend on each subject, even for primary school teachers who teach all subjects. We call the organization system as 'Peak-System'. The aims of 'Peak-System' are following two.

(a) To get some kind of a frame of reference based on one academic field
(b) To make some strong point for teaching skill

Most of ‘Academicians’ believe (a) is the most important factor to be a teacher and most of ‘Educationists’ believe (b) is the most important. And there is no consensus in each university. In addition, especially in big universities, there are so many teaching staffs who take a charge to some part of teacher education that total management of curricula in these universities usually have many difficulties such as to coordinate, to collaborate, and so on.

Another conflict is between the institutes of ‘Type A’ and ‘Type B’. For example, the standing points for teacher education reform of these two are quite different. Most of the staffs of ‘Type A’ institutes, most of which are former Normal Schools, regard that they should have some priority for teacher education. However, most of the staffs of ‘Type B’ institutes, which include various universities and colleges, believe that the principle of ‘Open System’ is important and all the institutes should be treated as equal. As mentioned above, the share ratio of these two types is comparative each other, so ‘Type A’ may be no longer the main stream to be school teachers.
2) JAUE’s Working Group for Curriculum Model

According to the report of the Committee for the Future Status of the National Universities of Education in Japan, Japan Association of Universities of Education (JAUE) has organized a special working group to consider the issues about curriculum model for teacher education on 2001. JAUE contains about 50 universities and faculties of education (most of the members are Type A) and attached schools.

At first, the working group contained 13 members (most of them have a major in education) and main coordinator of the group was a staff of Curriculum Center for Teachers (CCT), Tokyo Gakugei University. Head of the working group was a former Director of CCT.

The working group had 19 meetings between September 2001 and March 2004, and made a final report on March 2004. In the process of arguing about the materials of teaching methods of school subjects and their academic basis for teacher education curricula in universities, another working group of 14 members (who have majors in special subject) for nine school subjects (for primary school) has organized. The 2nd working group had 5 meetings between September 2003 and February 2004 and has checked about many things of real conditions of teacher education curricula in Japanese universities.

2) Considered Issues

The working group has considered the issues the Committee for the Future Status of the National Universities of Education in Japan has pointed, but there are some difficulties due to the unique conditions of teacher education in Japan.

(a) Difference between Type A and Type B:

As mentioned above, there are two types of universities which can provide license for school teacher in Japan. In the universities of Type A, it is not so difficult to make curriculum specialized for teacher education but in most of the universities of Type B, it is hard to make such kind of curriculum because teachers’ license is not necessary but only an option for the students of this type of universities. So, the final report of JAUE’s working group has pointed mainly for the universities of Type A but the report has not so much conviction for the universities of Type B.

(b) Difference between primary school teachers and secondary school teachers

In Japan, both primary school (G1-6) teachers and secondary school (G7-12) teachers are basically trained in undergraduate BA course (four years after upper secondary school) in various institutes. But license systems are quite different with these two. For primary school teachers, they teach all the subjects to pupils, so curriculum for these teachers should cover all 9 subjects they teach at schools. But for
secondary school teachers, the licenses depend on subjects they teach, so curriculum for these teachers should be specialized for one subject.

Most of the universities of Type A have both teacher education courses for primary and secondary school teachers in one faculty. And, as mentioned above, the teaching organization of this kind of faculty has a system called 'Peak-System'. In the 'Peak-System', students for primary school teacher have a major in one special subject. This system has some merit to grow academic skills for students, but there still remains a question whether the system is good for primary school teachers or not.

JAUE's working group has come to a conclusion that main issue of the curricula for teacher education in Japan is those for primary school teachers and how to collaborate many subjects together.

3) “Core Subjects for Teacher Education”

Because of the difficulties above, JAUE's working group could not make up any solid curriculum model for teacher education as a whole.

But, the working group has a responsibility to improve teacher education curricula in Japanese institutes (especially those of Type A), so the final report recommends to each university/colleges should make their curriculum based on “Core Subjects for Teacher Education”.

The aim of “Core Subjects for Teacher Education” is to make sure that every student to be a teacher can have a chance to practice at various educational fields and reflect them at university together. (see the image of last page), to make a clear structure in the curriculum for teacher education, and then to make the collaboration among teaching staffs in universities and between universities and various educational fields, especially primary and secondary schools attached or located nearby the universities.

The outline of “Core Subjects for Teacher Education” is as follows.

[Freshmen]
Educational Experience 1-2 (at fields) with Field Study 1-2 (at universities)
(1) to observe and reflect primary and secondary schools
(2) to observe and reflect various fields where children grow
   (nurseries, cram schools, family courts and remedy schools, etc.)

[Sophomore]
Development of Practical Study 1-2 (at schools) with Field Study 3-4 (at universities)
(1) for teaching some kind of school subjects
(2) for leading students in various activities
   (to lead students’ attitude, ethics, school activities, etc.)

[Senior]
Teaching Practice (at schools) with Field Study 5 (at universities)
Pre and post practice reflection
Teaching practice (at schools) 3-4 weeks

[Graduate]
Advanced Teaching Practice (Option)
For preparing BA thesis in the field study

The motto of “Core Subjects for Teacher Education” is “Practice at Fields and Reflection at University” and the final report of JAUE’s working group emphasized on the lap between various educational fields and universities/colleges.

4) Future Problems for Curriculum Reform

According to the proposal of “Core Subjects for Teacher Education” some universities of Type A have started curriculum reforms which take in the essence of “Practice at Fields and Reflection at University”. But there still remain a lot of difficulties to be gotten out.

(a) How to secure various educational fields for students and several weeks for their participation in the fields every academic year.
   (Especially for the institutes of Type B)
(b) How to make collaborations among various teaching staffs in institutes.
   (Between ‘Academicians’ and ‘Educationist’)
(c) The risk of second coming of ‘Teaching Practice Pollutions’
(d) The conflict between universities and provincial government to coordinate practical programs for teacher education in various fields.
   (ex. ‘Tokyo Cram School for Teacher Training’)
(e) Who can coordinate totally the teacher education curricula in Japanese universities?
(f) How to make a minimum standard for teachers’ quality

3. Higher Education Reform and the Future of Teacher Education in Japan

1) National Policies for Teacher Education

All national universities in Japan have turned into ‘National University Corporations’ from April 1, 2004. All ‘National University Corporations’, including 47 of Type A universities for teacher education, are operated mainly by government fund and the presidents have responsibility for budget and personnel. With ‘private-sector concepts’, ‘National University Corporations’ have to be evaluated every 6 years for re-budgeting according to ‘Mid-term Plan’ & ‘Mid-term Goal’ of each university.

In addition, KAWAMURA Takeo (河村建夫), former Minister of Education, Culture,
Sports, Science and Technology, has released a statement named ‘Reforming Compulsory Education’ on August 10, 2004. The statement has four major issues as follows.

(1) Towards a Flexible Compulsory Education System
(2) Reforms in Teacher Training
(3) Management of Schools and Boards of Education
(4) Responsibility of the Central Government in Ensuring Compulsory Education

Concerning (2), Reforming in Teacher Training, two policies for future are shown in the statement. One is ‘The establishment of professional teacher training graduate schools’ and the other is ‘The introduction of a teacher certificate renewal system’.

Policies in detail about the professional teacher training graduate schools are not decided at this point, but, estimating from other professional graduate schools such as ‘Law Schools’ for lawyers, the professional graduate schools for teacher training will contain more teaching staffs that have professional career in education than present graduate schools for teacher education. And they may provide some other premier license for teacher with different degree from present MA.

On the introduction of a teacher certificate renewal system, the statement says the aim is to create a new system which can evaluate individual’s suitability as a school teacher. The plan to set up an effective fixed-term period for teachers’ certificate is now under consideration.

As the background of KAWAMURA’s statement, there are severe social demands for teachers’ quality. The problems of ‘unsuitable teachers’ who can not treat suitably with various school affairs are now on a crucial stage. In addition, people’s opinions to criticize present graduate schools for teacher education are increasing. They do not think present advanced/premier license with MA Degree as a certificate for excellent teacher, and present graduate schools are not so efficient to develop teachers’ practical skills for teaching. In fact, the mission of present graduate school for teacher education is not so clear. Some think the major mission is to provide supports to be excellent educators, and others think the major mission is to breed ‘Academicians’.

Anyway, recent national policies for teacher education reform seem to aim for creating some competitive environment for teacher education, so as to make teacher education system more active.

2) Mid-term Goal, Mid-term Plan and Teacher Education

As mentioned above, all ‘Type A’ institutes are now challenging to improve their quality for teacher education according to the Mid-term Goals and Mid-term Plans. For example, the Mid-term Goal of Tokyo Gakugei University (2004-2010) says that 60% of graduates will pass through screening for teachers’ job. (On 2003, the real ratio of TGU teacher training course graduates who have passed through screening is about 50%.)

But there remains a big problem how to evaluate teacher education in
undergraduate course. Imagine a capable person who wants to be a teacher. She or he passes the entrance examination for university, learns with good curriculum at university for pre-service training, and pass through the screening to get a suitable position as a school teacher. But that is not her/his goal but only the beginning of her/his career as a school teacher. Then she/he will complete her/his career as a teacher, and pupils/students who learned with her/him become good citizen. At this point, final evaluation of teacher education she/he passed through may be possible. It is necessary to take long time for evaluating teacher education, so six years is too short.

3) Teacher Education in Competitive Environment

Teacher education in Japan faces a trial era in competitive environment. The competitive environment may create excellent teachers for primary/secondary schools and may decrease school affairs now people fear for.

And the recent national policies for teacher education in Japan finally may aim to restructure of ‘Open System’ by making the difference between the institutes of two groups.

In ‘Group 1’ institutes who emphasize on teacher education, there will be new type of professional graduate schools for teacher training and they may have some priority about certification of teachers’ license.

But in ‘Group 2’ institutes who do not emphasize on teacher education but have their teacher education course as appendix or students’ option under the principle of ‘Open System’, there will be no new type of professional graduate schools for teacher training. And, in the near future, they may not able to provide new type of premier license but only the license with limited period which have to be renewed. Thus all the institutes may no longer be treated as equal in the future.

In addition, for the compulsory education as an important national foundation itself, stability is essential and important factor. So nobody knows whether competitive environment is suitable to create good teachers for compulsory education or not.

References:
http://www.mext.go.jp/eng/topics/04091701.htm