SNS as a Catalyst for the Interactive Education Policy Planning

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Abstract: Recently, adverse reports about teaching as a career in Japan appeared in the media, among which the Japan Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) (2022) report regarding a shortage of teachers at public schools was the most alarming. MEXT's attempt to spur young people's interest in becoming teachers elicited overwhelmingly negative reactions from teachers themselves. In addition, the social media platform used became a channel for teachers' appeals to the government for work-style reform. The purpose of this study is to examine how social media communication is used to bridge the gap between teachers' and the government's priorities, and why it may influence schools.

Introduction

This research examines the possibility of social media communication as a catalyst for change in educational planning in Japan. Specifically, it clarifies how such media can facilitate communication between education planners and practitioners, and why such enhanced communication may lead to positive changes in schools.

The Teachers' Baton Project is an X (formerly Twitter) platform launched in 2021. It is also a campaign to inform young people aspiring to become teachers by asking teachers already in the classroom to share positive stories about their passion for education. However, many teachers complained about the education system and the severe working environment at schools instead.

Until recently, government officials rarely heard teachers' voices directly in Japan. Whether intended or not, this platform offered an excellent opportunity for education planners to communicate directly with education practitioners, bypassing mediators such as local boards of education.

Theoretical Background

The government's initial intention and the actual outcome of the Teachers' Baton Project are analyzed using McGinn's (1994) framework for the politics of educational planning. McGinn (1994) states that education planning is a process by which disparate groups can come together to reach consensus on goals and effective means to achieve them. Formal plans often fail because they rarely sufficiently incorporate the objectives of planners, employees, or other actors. Therefore, planning should include political decision-making to bring about effective change.

Literature Review

Ackoff (2001) developed a concept of Interactive Planning (IP), which proposed more participative approaches to systems thinking. IP facilitates the active participation of stakeholders, makes them committed and engaged decision-makers, and enables their active engagement. As a result, the plans are grounded, which "facilitate exchange of knowledge between stakeholders, consensus building among them, and group-learning processes (Flacke, 2020)."

In educational planning, McGinn (1994) distinguishes two types of planning : Rational Planning and Interactive Planning. Rational Planning locates the planner outside reality, which is the object of planning, and applies the methods of objective science to overcome problems of subjectivity. This type of planning tends to cause confusion because all planning requires reason and information to choose among alternative goals. In other words, this separation of knowledge and action, or planning and implementation, is problematic.

Rational Planning fails for two primary reasons : a lack of political commitment and the plan's subjective content. The extent of government commitment to policies and plans is often overestimated by planners who rely principally on the rational or technical approach. The second reason for failure, wrong content, is a policy solution that was opposed to the one that should have been adopted for the educational system to serve the very purpose intended by the planner in the first place (Psacharopoulos, 1994). Expert consensus can gain credibility even in the absence of supporting evidence (Benveniste, 1989).

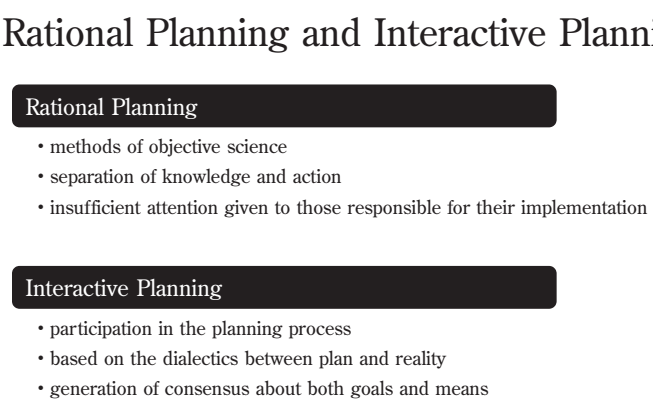
McGinn (1994) further states that there is a third reason for failure. Rational planners often ignore the process of making and carrying out the plan. From this viewpoint, plans fail because insufficient attention is given to those responsible for their implementation. Another factor to be considered is strategic problems. Educational planners often work for those in power and are adequate to the extent that they can help their powerful clients achieve their objectives. This relates to strategic issues regarding the validity of the actions taken. Strategic problems involve questions of power and relationships among groups of people with different, and often opposing, objectives.

The second type of planning is what Adams (1988) called Interactive Planning. Interactive Planning reduces the unit size for which planning is carried out and increases participation in the planning process. This type of planning is based on the dialectics between plan and reality, action and consequence, and among the people attempting to shape their collective future. From the standpoint of Interactive Planning, successful planning requires generating consensus on both goals and means. Figure 1 shows the different characteristics between Rational Planning and Interactive Planning.

The significant difference between Rational Planning and Interactive/Strategic Planning is their assumptions about the extent to which the necessary information exists before the planning process. McGinn (1994) points out that educational plans will be successful when they are believed to be necessary not only by experts in their technical aspects but also by those who will implement them and the "stakeholders" who will be affected by them.

As a shortage of teachers in public schools attracts widespread attention in Japanese soci-

Figure 1 : Rational planning and interactive planning



ety, it is essential to examine recent SNS communication between teachers and the government, the government's response, and education reform plans to improve educational practices and the image of the teaching profession.

Findings

Measures for solving the teacher shortage problem

The main reason the MEXT launched the Teachers' Baton Project in 2021 was the declining number of university students entering the teaching profession (Uchida et al., 2021). According to MEXT (2023), the ratio of job openings to job applicants of public-school teachers was 3.4, the worst in Japanese history. The government has been concerned with this trend recently, and the Central Council for Education has set goals to increase the number of high-quality teachers, increase the number of university students who intend to become teachers, and improve the motivation of current teachers.

The Teachers' Baton Project

MEXT responded to the Central Council for Education's goals and introduced "the plan to secure the number of teachers and improve their quality (Fujikawa, 2021)." The Teachers' Baton Project was implemented as part of the plan. The Teachers' Baton Project is an X (former Twitter) platform. It is also a campaign to inform young people aspiring to become teachers by asking teachers already in the classroom to share positive stories about their passion for education. However, many teachers complained about the education system and the severe working environment at schools instead.

Yomoda, Takinami, and Fujii (2022) analyzed 46,305 posts on the Teachers' Baton Project using KH Coder (a text mining software) and reported that between March 26 and April 30, 2021, the posts were mainly about the following:

- Improvement of the working environment
- Working hours
- Club activity coaching

- Dealing with family members
- Class Preparation
- MEXT's project

Although some posts discussed the joy of growing together with students, the creative nature of the work, and the stability of career status, the teachers who commented overwhelmingly indicated the need to select tasks, reduce long working hours, and utilize ICT to support their work.

OECD's TALIS survey

Among the six main topics posted, the comments regarding working hours and the MEXT's project are notable. The Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) is the world's largest international survey of teachers and principals. In terms of working hours, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2025) reported that Japanese elementary and middle school teachers' working hours are the longest among participating countries and regions, averaging 52.1 hours per week at elementary schools and 55.1 hours per week at middle schools, 11–14 hours above the international average.

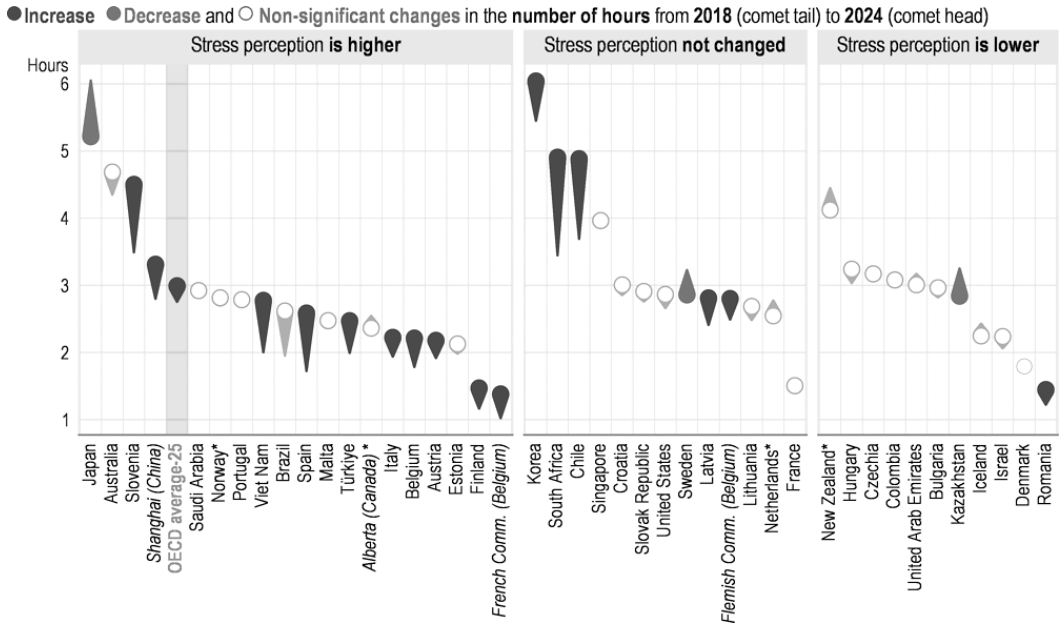
In the OECD's TALIS survey (2025), the focus is on teacher well-being. Although 89% of teachers said they were satisfied with their work, one in five said they planned to leave teaching within 5 years. The factors behind this unwillingness to remain in the teaching profession seem structural : administrative overload, constant curriculum changes, external evaluations, social pressure, and so forth. Since the OECD survey in 2013 showed that the average working hours for Japanese elementary and middle school teachers was 38.3, there has been a significant increase to 13.8–16.8 working hours per week. OECD (2025) argues the importance of teacher well-being as follows:

> "Teacher well-being cannot be understood solely as an individual issue. It is also an indicator of the school climate and the health of the education system. Where teachers feel supported, listened to, and part of a community, innovation flows and results improve. When the environment becomes hostile or indifferent, teaching deteriorates, even if the curriculum and resources remain the same."

The quality of teaching depends partly on autonomy, recognition, and collaboration. Teachers' working conditions are not a country-specific problem. However, some indicators in the OECD's TALIS 2024 survey (2025) clearly show Japan's problem. For instance, administrative workload remains a considerable demand for teachers. Across OECD education systems, about half of teachers report excessive administrative work as a source of work-related stress, particularly those with more than ten years of experience. With regard to Japan, the average time full-time lower secondary teachers report spending on administrative work (hours) is significantly higher than the OECD average. While the OECD average was 3 hours per week, Japan reported 5.2 hours per week, ranking second among the OECD member countries. It should be noted that, although slightly lower than the previous survey, many

Japanese lower secondary teachers reported that the weekly hours spent on administrative work were a source of stress. Figure 2 shows changes in reported administrative workload and related stress from 2018 to 2024.

Figure 2: Changes in reported administrative workload and related stress, from 2018 to 2024



Evidently, MEXT has increased the duties of public-school teachers in recent years. Thus, the fact that MEXT itself asked already tired teachers to post about how wonderful their careers are naturally received negative responses. The teachers felt their hope that the MEXT would consider improving their working conditions was not understood.

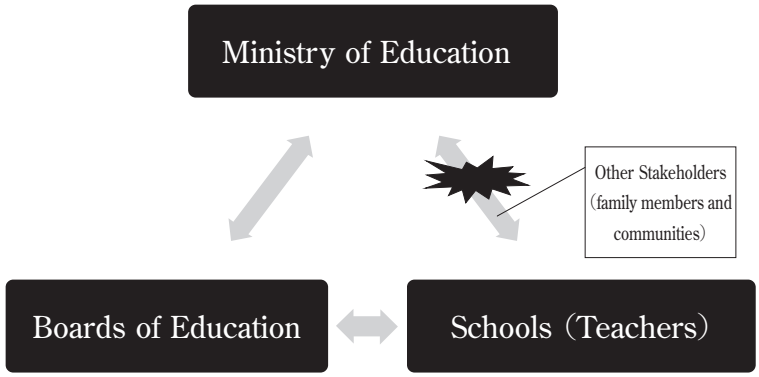
Overworked and exhausted teachers

A similar survey by Nippon Hoso Kyokai［Japan Broadcasting Corporation］(NHK) (2021), Japan's public media organization, indicated identical results. It also mentioned that some teachers became ill from overwork and had to leave the students with other teachers. Overworked and tired teachers try hard to teach their students wholeheartedly. However, the more they try their best, the more exhausted they become.

The teachers' responses highlight the problematic features of rational planning, including the separation of knowledge and action, or of planning and implementation. Figure 3 illustrates the lack of communication between the education planners and stakeholders.

Although the planners and stakeholders appear connected in the figure, the communicative relationship is essentially linear and not interactive. Additionally, compared to the OECD average, Japanese teachers have less instructional autonomy and more limited involvement in school-level decision-making on curriculum and other school policies. The traditional Japanese education system tends to be top-down. Communication between teachers and MEXT

Figure 3: Lack of communication between the planners and stakeholders

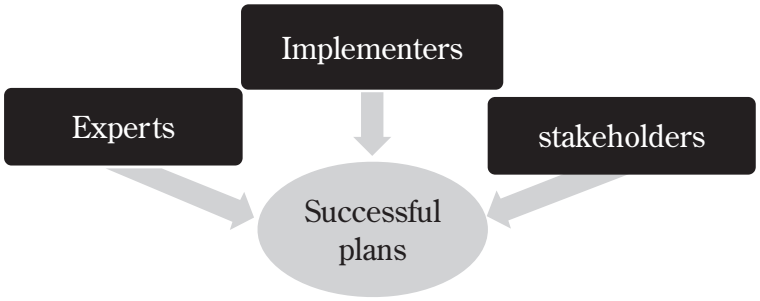


is usually through prefectural and local boards of education, if any. In Japan, one of the commonly reported sources of stress is keeping up with changing requirements from local, municipal, and national authorities. The lack of communication between education planners and practitioners is definitely a source of stress for both groups.

Interactive Planning

The findings indicate that the Teachers' Baton Project shows signs of influencing essential reform. In response to the teachers' posts, the MEXT recognized the seriousness of the problems with public-school teachers' working conditions and introduced a series of reform plans. The provisional reform includes shifting some school extracurricular activities to community activities and discussing a fundamental revision of the system to renew teaching licenses, requiring teachers to take a renewal course every 10 years to reduce teachers' burden. Figure 4 shows the theoretical path to implementing successful educational plans.

Figure 4: Successful educational planning



Although the reform is still ongoing and the outcomes are yet to be seen, it would be the first time teachers, the critical stakeholders in educational planning, have participated in interactive educational planning through SNS communication.

As mentioned earlier, the significant difference between Rational Planning and Interactive/Strategic Planning lies in their assumptions about the extent to which the necessary information is available before the planning process. The Teachers' Baton Project, though uninten-

tionally, provided the necessary information for the planners, the MEXT.

In addition, as McGinn (1994) pointed out, educational plans will be successful when they are believed to be necessary not only by experts in their technical aspects but also by those who will implement them and the "stakeholders" who will be affected by them. In this case, both education planners and stakeholders agreed that changes to public school teachers' working conditions are necessary.

Furthermore, due to the SNS platform that attracted public attention, other stakeholders, such as students' family members and community residents, learned about the current conditions of public school teachers and expressed their support for them by participating in SNS communication.

Teachers' Baton Project and Interactive Planning

The increased SNS communication on the Teachers' Baton Project platform enhanced knowledge exchange among stakeholders, consensus-building, and group learning, leading to participative approaches to systems thinking that involved committed, engaged decision-making. This is precisely the idea of Interactive Planning as defined by Ackoff (2001).

An SNS platform called the Teachers' Baton Project started with a different objective. However, it turned out to be the platform where the education planners (MEXT) could communicate directly with the practitioners (teachers). OECD (2025) found that, although only 14 % of teachers in Japan agreed that policymakers valued their views, the percentage increased by 4% since 2018.

There were also posts on the Teachers' Baton Project platform from the students' family members and other stakeholders, who recognized how busy the teachers were and understood the circumstances they faced. In Japan, the most commonly reported sources of stress include concerns about parents or guardians. The Teachers' Baton Project platform also provides a means to communicate general concerns, reducing individual teachers' workload.

If successful educational planning requires the inclusion of planners (government), practitioners (teachers), and other stakeholders (students, families, and communities), the outcome of this project seems promising.

Conclusions

Teachers' well-being and working conditions influence students' educational outcomes. In addition, these teachers' circumstances became widely recognized due to the openness of SNS. The original goal of MEXT, namely to share positive stories with young people aspiring to become teachers, was not met. On the contrary, whether intended or not, the Teachers' Baton Project brought a new goal: improving communication between education planners and practitioners.

There is no doubt that high levels of teacher turnover can negatively affect student achievement. Considerations such as remuneration, contract stability, and working conditions can be important factors in whether younger generations aspire to teaching or not, and in whether teachers stay or leave the profession.

This study focused on a case study in Japan. However, multiple case studies might produce

more general results. In addition, other groups of people might find this kind of communication platform a place to express their concerns, communicate directly, and pursue opportunities for change. Although there are some people who claim that the project is not successful, the Teachers' Baton Project platform did provide opportunities for change.

Implementing Interactive Planning is effective not only in the governmental education reform process but also in any organizational education planning process. Including planners, practitioners, and other stakeholders in education planning may take time and effort. However, as McGinn (1994) emphasizes, educational plans will be successful when they are believed to be necessary not only by experts in their technical aspects but also by those who will implement them and the "stakeholders" who will be affected by them.

Successful planning requires building consensus on both goals and means among those seeking to shape their collective future. It is crucial for education planners to keep in mind that, though onerous, inclusive and meticulous planning leads to a successful outcome.

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