

The Work Environment of Teachers in Japan

Introduction

In the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) conducted by the OECD in 2013, the work hours per week of teachers in Japanese lower secondary schools were reported to be the longest out of all of the 34 countries participating in the survey.¹ The length of the lessons did not differ all that much when compared to the surveyed countries' average, but the time spent on guidance for extracurricular activities (sports and cultural activities) was seen to be particularly long (7.7 hours for Japan, 2.1 hours on average for the surveyed countries), while the time spent on office work (5.5 hours for Japan, 2.9 hours on average for the surveyed countries) was also longer than that of the other countries.

There have also been reports that the longer the work hours at school, the greater the mental toll on the teachers. According to analysis conducted by the University of Tsukuba Research Team of data obtained through a Survey on the Work Situation of Teachers, the teachers at elementary and junior high schools (career as a regular classroom teacher) suffered higher levels of stress affecting their physical and mental state than those in a managerial post (principal, vice-principal, assistant principal), also showing that the longer the hours worked by the teacher, the worse the mental health².

This paper will give an overview of the conditions affecting the work situation of elementary school teachers based on data obtained from various surveys such as the factors leading to long work hours, the worries of the teachers due to these long work hours, and the policies set out by the government to deal with this problem.

Basic information on elementary school teachers in Japan

In the first place, what exactly does a teacher in Japan do? Here, I will be giving some basic information on elementary school teachers in Japan.

According to the statistics of the School Teacher Statistics Survey conducted in 2016, 380,011 teachers were employed in elementary schools in Japan, of which number, 61.6%

¹ Japan: 53.9 hours, surveyed countries average: 38.3 hours.

² From the results of the "Analysis of stress of teachers - Survey on working situation of teachers (FY2008) - (Presentation material on work style reforms of school special group), [Mental Health] Research Team: Teacher working status research consignment project, November 6, 2017".

were female, and 38.5% were male, showing the percentage of women to be higher.³ Compared to the 2013 data, the number of teachers had increased by 1.3% in three years. Moreover, the average age of elementary school teachers was 43.4 years (44.4 years for males, and 42.8 years for females), a decline of 0.6 points as seen from the previous survey in 2013. The composition of age groups was 18.1%⁴ for teachers between 55 and 59 years, followed by 14.8% for teachers between 50 and 54 years.⁵ Looking at the educational background of the teachers, the percentage of those who graduated from university (undergraduates) accounted for 86.9%, and the percentage of those with a graduate degree was 8.8%. In addition, there are an increasing number of teachers with a higher level of education, and the percentage of teachers with a graduate degree had increased by 0.6 points compared to 2013. In addition, the average years of experience of elementary school teachers teaching in elementary schools in 2016 was 18.1 years, while the average monthly salary of a 43.4 year-old teacher was 336,000 yen.⁶

Hours of work

The question arises how many hours do these busy teachers in Japan spend on work at school? Here, we attempt to understand the work situation of the teachers by mainly selecting data from the School Teacher Statistics Survey and the Survey on the Work Situation of Teachers.

First, how much time is spent on the teacher's primary responsibility which is lesson teaching? According to the results of the interim report of the FY 2016 School Teacher Statistics Survey, the number of hours of classroom lessons for the subject taught by the teacher was reported to be 18.6 hours per week.⁷ By dividing the number of hours by five, the number of weekdays in a week, on average, teachers are teaching 3-4 hours of lessons a day.

Moreover, according to the data of the same survey, we can see that the teachers who

³ Based on the results of the FY 2016 Survey on School Teacher Statistics (Interim Report) (press release of September 14, 2017).

⁴ By gender, men at 8.0% and women at 10.0%.

⁵ Outline of the results of the FY 2016 Survey on School Teacher Statistics (interim report) (2017), see p. 3, Table 4, Fig. 3.

⁶ Based on the results of the FY 2016 Survey on School Teacher Statistics (interim report) (press release of September 14, 2017).

⁷ Based on the results of the FY 2016 Survey on School Teacher Statistics (interim report) (press release of September 14, 2017).

participated in the survey, on average, arrived at work at 7:27, and left work at 19:21. In other words, the average time that teachers spent in school was 11 hours and 54 minutes. This shows that the time spent at school had increased by 42 minutes compared to 9 years earlier, and by 25 minutes compared with 6 years earlier. The average sleep time for teachers was reported to be 5 hours and 53 minutes in 2007, but it was reported to be 5 hours and 51 minutes in 2010, and 5 hours and 47 minutes in 2016, and therefore, along with the increase in the hours spent at school, the sleep time is seen to be gradually getting shorter.

While the hours of work at school have been increasing, the time spent on school work at home has been declining. In terms of weekday home time, on average, 84.1 minutes was spent on school work at home in 2002, but in 2016 it had decreased to 57.7 minutes. On the other hand, the time spent on researching teaching materials and preparing for classes saw little change, reaching 93.9 minutes in 2007, 89.4 minutes in 2010 and 91.8 minutes in 2016. The time spent reading newspapers or books at home decreased from 31.5 hours to 24.7 hours between 2007 and 2016.

Looking at the situation of work on Saturdays and Sundays, including attendance of school events and club activities, 16.7% of the respondents answered, “I come to school almost every week” while 23.2% of the respondents answered, “About once every 2 weeks”, totaling 39.9%, and therefore, it can be said that roughly 40% of teachers go to work on a holiday one time or more every two weeks.

In a report of the Survey on the Work Situation of Teachers (2016) (additional aggregate figures) surveying 8,951 teachers from 397 schools, data is given on the rate of teacher movement for every (weekday) hour of teachers in elementary schools. According to the data, from 8:00 to 17:00, more than 90 percent of the teachers are doing some form of work in school. It is possible to see that of these teachers, the teachers seem to be taking a break between 12:30 and 13:00, but more than 90% of these teachers do not actually take a break but are doing some kind of work.

During the time before the start of class and in the lunch break, many teachers do their morning work, or give guidance to students, communicate with local residents, engage in grade or class management, or perform office work (see Table 1), and at around 16:00 after the classes have finished, many teachers spend a lot of time on school administration work such as work related to educational guidance or school management. Another characteristic is teachers participating in training in the evening.

When comparing these hours with the hours worked by people who have died from overwork, 33.5% of elementary school teachers, and moreover, 57.7% of junior high school teachers work 60 hours a week or more, that is, we can see that the teachers are

engaging in overtime work in excess of the 80 hours a month, which is regarded as the criteria beyond which a worker's death can be linked to overwork⁸. This percentage is clearly a very high rate even when compared to other industries. For example, when compared with a report that compiled the data of people who work 35 hours a week or more in the 2016 Labor Force Survey, even the percentage of workers working 60 hours or more in restaurants that typically have long work hours was 28.4%, while the average hours of work of elementary school teachers were seen to be longer.⁹

Table 1 Types of work and examples of work content

Types of work	Examples of work content
Morning work	Communication of events etc. of the day by teachers and staff as well as detailed meetings by grade (about classes, about children
Student guidance	Greetings at the school gate, safety guidance, learning support, building human relationships, issuing warnings to students who have engaged in inappropriate acts etc.
Communicating with local residents	Responding to queries from local residents in the vicinity of the school, home visits, social gatherings, collaboration for use of local residents and local resources
Grade and class management	Planning and advice on school events (excursions, end-of-year school trips, work experience, etc.), management of notices in the classroom, posting of students' work, etc.
Office work	Attendance management, checking of submissions, grading of tests, division of duties (management of study groups, preparation of reports, cooperation with surveys, supplies management, accounting management of overhead expenses, etc.)

The worries of the teachers

Judging from the data related to the aforementioned hours of work, teachers in Japan

⁸ From the "Certification of workers 'accidents of the brain / heart disease -" Death from overwork "and workers' accident insurance - (p 6)" (October 2015) by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, the prefectural labor bureau and the Labor Standards Inspection Office

⁹ Masatoshi Senoo, from the materials of the School Management Forum @ Tokyo (December 1, 2017) [viewed on February 5, 2018] (http://www.mext.go.jp/component/a_menu/education/detail/__icsFiles/afieldfile/2017/12/18/1399197-011.pdf)

spend a great deal of time on work, but how do teachers feel about this situation exactly?

The Sixth Basic Survey on Educational Guidance DATA BOOK (Elementary / Lower Secondary School Version) [2016] includes questions on the problems the teachers are facing, and the response with the highest rate was, “I don’t have enough time to prepare teaching materials”. This was followed by responses such as, “There are too many office documents to fill in” and “The educational administration does not understand what working in the school is actually like”, which were the top-ranking answers, and these top three answers were all worried about the workload and hours. After these answers came concerns about guidance, and it was possible to discern that teachers also faced such difficulties as, “It is difficult for me to respond to students who need special support”, and “It is difficult to teach the classes because of the large disparities in academic ability among the students”.¹⁰

In addition, when comparing the answers over the years to the question of how satisfying the teachers found their work to be, 58.2% of the teachers were “Very satisfied” or “Quite satisfied” with regard to educational guidance, and this was an increase of 7.1 points compared to 2010. On the other hand, concerning the question of a “work-life balance for teachers”, only 45.2% replied they were satisfied indicating a decline of 10.4 points from 2010. Concerning the question on how “rewarding or fulfilling” the work was, 85.2% answered they were satisfied while the level of satisfaction was 77.7% for “looking at life overall”, and when compared with the answers to the question of the abovementioned “educational guidance”, these numbers were higher showing that there are many teachers who perform their work with a strong sense of fulfillment in their work as a teacher.

Reform of the teacher work environment

Based on statistical outcomes and requests from the schools, the government has been promoting legislation towards reforming the work environment.

In April 2016, a “Task Force to Consider Suitable Teaching Staff for the Next Generation School Teaching System and Improvement of the Work Environment” chaired by the Parliamentary Vice-Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology was established, which conducted a study on suitable teaching staff and

¹⁰ From the number of teachers who answered, “I agree very much” and “I think so”. The Sixth Basic Survey on Educational Guidance DATA BOOK (Elementary / Lower Secondary School Version) [2016]

measures for work improvement, and released a report on the results. Background factors were a clear need to improve the long work hours of the teachers and the goal of ensuring sufficient time for teachers to interact with the children face-to-face, and securing an environment where teachers could feel proud of their work, and find their work rewarding.¹¹

Furthermore, these problems were seen not only as problems for teachers, but actions could be seen to be taken by the country as a whole. On March 28, 2017, the 10th Council for the Realization of Work Style Reform was convened at the Prime Minister's Office, which saw the approval of the Action Plan for the Realization of Work Style Reform. In the plan, "long work hours" was explicitly stated along with "gaps in treatment between regular and non-regular workers" and "the Japanese single-track career path" as problems in the Japanese labor system and work styles, and the promotion of government-wide efforts toward improving the work environment was confirmed.¹²

Later, on December 22, 2017, a report was compiled by the Central Council for Education entitled, "Comprehensive measures relating to work style reform in schools to build a sustainable school guidance and management system for education in a new era (interim summary)." Specific measures to be taken were outlined in the report such as "sharing of roles and optimization of work through clarification of the tasks to be carried out by the schools and teachers", "review of plans, etc. created by the schools", "an ideal school organization management system", "reform of consciousness and institutional measures relating to work hours", and "preparation of an environment for the realization of reform of work styles in school".¹³ As one example, with respect to the "sharing of roles and optimization of work through clarification of the tasks to be carried out by the schools and teachers", the work to be carried out by the schools was grouped roughly into the three categories of (i) educational guidance based on the curriculum designed on the basis of the Courses of Study, (ii) essential student guidance and careers guidance to help student character-building, and (iii) While promoting collaboration with parents and local communities, classroom management and school management operations necessary for

¹¹ "Towards Optimization of the Work in Schools", website of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology [viewed on February 5, 2018] (http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/uneishien/detail/1372315.htm)

¹² "Council for the Realization of Work Style Reform", website of the Prime Minister's Office [viewed on February 5, 2018] (<http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/hatarakikata/>)

¹³ "Emergency Countermeasures for Reform of Work Styles in Schools", website of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology [viewed on February 5, 2018]. (http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/houdou/29/12/1399949.htm)

implementing these curriculums and implementing guidance for students, enabling clearer recognition of the work involved. Among them, as an even more tangible example, “work that a teacher does not have to do” was also identified as part of reform of the school guidance system such as patrolling at night after school, collecting school-related fees, and management, etc., and an environment is being promoted that allows teachers to concentrate on their real work.

As policy is being developed, the impact of the reforms is gradually beginning to be felt in the schools. For example, since specific measures to manage the work hours of the teachers such as visual confirmation or records by personnel in managerial posts, or the use of time cards or IC cards were listed,¹⁴ the Fukuoka Prefectural Board of Education and Takamatsu City Board of Education decided to introduce a system to manage the work hours of the teachers at all of the prefectural high schools etc. and all the elementary and junior high schools in the city from FY 2018, and it was reported that tangible actions such as the use of IC cards were being taken aiming to ascertain the starting time and finishing time of the teachers, and to ensure health management and greater efficiency in work.¹⁵

Even if we look at the data on the estimates request of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in 2018, changes can be seen in the various budgets aimed at improving the work environment of the teachers in terms of funding of 4.6 billion yen to add 1,000 reinforcement teachers for bolster the number of teachers needed to teach elementary school subjects, to add 40 office staff to strengthen the school management system by reducing school administrative and financial affairs, and to assign school counselors to the public elementary and lower secondary schools¹⁶.

As the above information shows, various actions are being taken to improve the work environment of teachers. However, the results will not be immediately visible. It is necessary to continue looking at various reports on results that will become apparent in the future.

¹⁴ “(Sixth) Working Group on Reviewing the Direction of Schools and Teachers, and Adjustment of Teacher Work Hours, handout document 3”, website of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology [viewed on February 9, 2018] ([Http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/shingi/chukyo/chukyo3/042/siryo/attach/1247465.htm](http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/shingi/chukyo/chukyo3/042/siryo/attach/1247465.htm))

¹⁵ News report dated December 9, 2017, 06: 00, Nishinippon Shimbun [viewed on February 9, 2018] (https://www.nishinippon.co.jp/nnp/f_sougou/article/379033/), and news report of January 24, 2018, 10:58, Mainichi Shimbun [viewed on February 5, 2018] (<https://mainichi.jp/articles/20180124/k00/00e/040/240000c>)

¹⁶ “Points of the Budget related to MEXT (draft)” website of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology [viewed on Jun 11, 2018] (http://www.mext.go.jp/component/b_menu/other/_icsFiles/afieldfile/2017/12/22/1399821_1.pdf)

Note: Data from various surveys was used in this paper, but it should be noted that even if a survey asking very similar questions was conducted in the same year, some variances may appear in the figures.

Reference materials

“International Comparison of the Teacher Environment – Report on the Results of the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2013” edited by the National Institute for Education Policy Research, Akashi Shoten, 2014.

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“Survey on Work Situation of Teachers (2016) (Additional Aggregated Statistics)” (Document 1-2: “Comprehensive measures relating to work style reform in schools to build a sustainable school guidance and management system for education in a new era (interim summary) [draft], Deliberations-Related Reference Material 3)”, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2017

“The Sixth Basic Survey on Education Guidance DATA BOOK (Elementary / Lower Secondary School Version) [2016]”, Benesse Educational Research and Development Institute, 2016”

日本の教師の勤務環境（多忙な日本の教師）【要約】

世界の中で最も労働時間が長いとされている日本の教師の勤務環境を、複数の資料やデータを基にして概説する。本稿で取り扱った情報には、下記のものが含まれている。

日本の小学校教師の基礎情報

- ・ 性別，年齢構成，学歴，勤務年数，給料月額

勤務時間

- ・ 教科等担任授業の時数
- ・ 出勤，退勤時間，睡眠時間
- ・ 家で学校の仕事に費やす時間，
- ・ 教材研究や授業準備に費やす時間
- ・ 家で新聞を読んだり，読書したりする時間
- ・ 土日の出勤状況
- ・ 小学校教諭（平日）の各時間帯の行為者率
- ・ 過労死ラインとの比較

（表 1 教員の業務とその内容の例）

教師の抱える悩み

- ・ 教師が抱えている悩み
- ・ 仕事に対する満足度
- ・ 教員生活と私生活とのバランスに対する満足度
- ・ やりがいに対する満足度

教師の勤務環境改革

- ・ 「次世代の学校指導体制にふさわしい教職員の在り方と業務改善のためのタスクフォース」
- ・ 「働き方改革実行計画」
- ・ 「新しい時代の教育に向けた持続可能な学校指導・運営体制の構築のための学校における働き方改革に関する総合的な方策について（中間まとめ）」
- ・ 教育現場への改革の影響
- ・ 2018年度の文科省の概算要求