AN ANALYSIS OF JAPAN'S EDUCATIONAL REFORMATIONS AND SIGNIFICANT BARRIERS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Sheikh AJAHAR[1]

Abstract
Japan is regarded as the most favourable country globally for its robotics and high-tech technology. The country's economy impacts Japan's global market for sustainable higher education. Because the current international market relies on highly trained and knowledgeable labour, Japan's higher education system regularly produces skilled and knowledgeable personnel in various working areas. However, specific significant challenges have turned into roadblocks in how countries progress, both in the global economy and Japan's higher education system. Such obstacles are the nation's ageing population, which has become the leading cause of concern since the 1990s. The administration and the students talk a lot about the university entrance exam. The administration periodically implements reasonable reforms and policies to enhance the nation's higher education system. What is the duration required to get past them? What counter-strategies are needed to maintain the entire education system, and how can a developed country like Japan advance towards providing a sustainable education system for all? This study will attempt to focus on important educational reforms and policies taken after the Edo Era to the end of the 20th Century, the main obstacles that Japanese students encountered in reaching higher education, and the concern about improving the quality of higher education.

Keywords: Higher Education; Global Economy; Obstacles; Internationalization; Reformation.

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1. Introduction

Japan is well-known for its world-class advanced technology, robotic systems, and electronic items. Technological breakthroughs in the country have been a primary driving force behind the country's economic prosperity and global influence. Japan's reputation for invention extends beyond electronics, with notable contributions to automotive engineering, medical technology, and space research. The Japanese attitude to technology is profoundly based on their culture, which values precision, accuracy, and efficiency. This has resulted in the development of some of the world's most advanced and dependable goods. Aside from technology, Japan is famous for its rich history, culture and traditions, which include tea ceremonies, kabuki theatre, and sumo wrestling. These customs have been perpetuated. Japan's educational system was developed due to numerous reformations that began in the 19th century,

[1] Sheikh Ajahar, Visva-Bharati University, India, skajahar000@gmail.com.

drawing inspiration from various Western nations. Although Japan was comparatively late in modernising, the entire education system's development happened rapidly. During that short time, Japan's socioeconomic environment was compatible with the advancement of education.

2. Educational reformation

As an advanced country in the world from ancient times, Japan has witnessed many reforms in its culture, tradition, literature, society, and education.

2.1 School Education Reformation during the Edo Period (1603-1868)

Higher education in Japan was reformed and built with the help and examples of several Western countries. Japan followed the route of modern education after total modernisation, and it is also believed that Japan established its education system in a relatively short period. Japan observed the closed country policy during the Edo period when the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1868) ruled Japan for more than 250 years. At the time, Japan had cut itself off entirely from the rest of the world. With this possibility, traditional Japanese culture was greatly enriched throughout the years. Not only that, but Japan worked to improve its educational system. Throughout Japan during the Edo period, we found unique academic institutions. Children from the samurai or warrior class used to attend the public education institute known as *Hankō* in the Japanese language, where they essentially learned classic Chinese literature (Confucian studies).

On the other hand, regardless of social class, a private institution equivalent to secondary schools was formed for the rest of Japan. This private institute or school is called *Shijuku* in Japanese. Many students also went to the *Terakoya*[2], where standard students practised reading and writing skills. A system of apprenticeships was also established for the children of workers and technicians. Buddhism and Shintoism were the most common traditional religious faiths in Japan. There was no specific educational establishment for Buddhist and Shintoist believers at the time; hence, a significant crisis was generated for all to develop a standard, strong, and equitable education system for all, regardless of class, and it became influential in the mid-nineteenth century. A conventional class structure was introduced to meet the needs of the people, and it appeared that society was being chosen based on its academic standing.

2.2 Meiji Restoration and School Education Reform

[2] 'Terakoya'（寺子屋）aslo known as Temple School or private elementary school which was builtduring Edo period (1603-1868) in Japan, the children of the commoner went there for reading, writing and practicing the mathematics.

Following the demise of Tokugawa's political rule in 1868, Japan experienced a substantial political transformation, the Meiji Restoration. The Meiji Restoration brought numerous reforms and improvements in countless political and social spheres throughout Japan. This Meiji restoration term is derived from Emperor Meiji's name. During the Edo period, Japan had locked itself off, but overwhelming pressure and threats from the rest of the world forced it open. The new Meiji administration eliminated the feudal system and transformed Japan into a cohesive, modern nation, enacting appropriate policies. This new administration prioritised military reinforcement and establishing a new, long-term education system. The term for these policies is "civilisation and enlightenment". The new government established the Ministry of Education in 1871 to ensure a proper and egalitarian education system. The school system followed the American educational model, while the administrative process and structure were modelled after the French educational system, with other cooperative entities regulating it. The school education principle at the time was that all children in the country went to elementary school regardless of their socioeconomic class, parental occupation, or gender (Yasuo, 2009).

Mori Arinori, Japan's first Minister of Education, was appointed by the government. He built a new foundation for general educational progress in Japan. This structure became the foundation of Japanese education. Minister Mori established four divisional groupings in this framework: elementary school, middle school, regular school, and imperial university. The declaration of the Imperial Rescript (教育勅語) was adopted in Japan in1890 to highlight patriotism and allegiance to the emperor. This Imperial Rescript has had a significant impact on Japanese education.

2.3 Imperial Rescript on Education

According to Education Minister Mori, the two primary goals of the country's development at the time were modernising Japan and fostering national morality to promote spiritual unity among the citizens. Out of these two goals, the Imperial Rescripts declaration in 1890 greatly encouraged the second one. This imperial record significantly impacted Japanese education until the end of World War II.

2.4 GHQ's Oversight and Educational Laws Implementation

After World War II, the supreme power of Allied forces occupied Japan and the General Headquarters (GHQ) of the Allied forces maintained control until 1951. The GHQ established numerous reforms in Japan under this direction, including democratisation and demilitarisation. The GHQ sent a U.S. education mission to Japan to observe the country's entire educational system. As a result, the mission was sent in 1946, and after its observation, it issued several recommendations. Based on

the report, significant changes were made to Japan's educational system. According to the report, a robust educational framework known as "6-3-3-4" was formed at the time, along with some of the essential education laws, such as the school education law (1947), board education law (1948), social education law (1949), and private school law (1949). Primary and lower secondary schools are included in the mandatory schooling for all children up to nine years old. Japan likewise studied the issue of promoting industrial education. As a result, two independent laws – the "Industrial Education Law" and the "Science Education Law" were enacted (Yasuo, 2009).

The Industrial Education Promotion Law of 1951 and the Science Education Promotion Law of 1953 were two more laws passed to advance particular fields of study. The laboratories, infrastructure, and supplies required for industrial and scientific education are outlined in these regulations as national standards. Public or private schools may apply for a nationwide subsidy covering all or part of the expenditures that wish to upgrade their scientific facilities to meet these requirements (Yasuo, 2009).

2.5 Consequences of Compulsory Education

Beginning in the 1950s, the educational system experienced a sharp increase in capacity. The increase of mandatory education to nine years was almost completed by 1950. Individuals desiring to pursue higher education became more prominent in number. This initially had an impact on upper secondary education, which then extended over into higher education. In 1950, the percentage of students who advanced to higher secondary schools was 42.5 per cent; it increased to 57.7 per cent in 1960; it reached 82.1 per cent in 1970, and it increased once more to 94.1 per cent in 1980.

Additionally, more students were pursuing education at junior colleges and universities. Just 10.3 per cent of the class that graduated in 1960 went on to further their education (15.3 per cent of boys and 4.6 per cent of girls). There was still an indication of elitism in higher education. However, by 1970, the percentage had climbed to 23.6 per cent; by 1980, it had increased even more to 37.4 per cent (33.7 per cent of girls and 41.3 per cent of boys). It was evident that the massification of higher education was becoming a reality, much as in the United States (Yasuo, 2009), (M.E.X.T).

2.6 Third Educational Reform

As Japan entered the 1970s, more and more people expressed the need for a comprehensive education system reform. In 1971, the Central Council for Education (CCE), an advisory body to the Minister of Education, submitted a report that

included “a fundamental policy for the comprehensive expansion of the education system” and discussed a comprehensive reform that would restructure all educational levels, from kindergarten to university. This report was dubbed “the third major educational reform”. The report prompted a heated discussion. The Japan Teachers Union, in particular, took a distinctly opposing position, stating that the CCE made reform recommendations without critically analyzing postwar reforms. Wide-ranging education reforms were met with resistance, financial constraints, and financial crises after the 1973 oil shock (Yasuo, 2009).

2.7 National Council on Education Reform (NCER)

Once Prime Minister Nakasone entered the administration at the end of 1982, he immediately demonstrated his desire to implement reforms in education. The National Council for Education Reform (NCER, *Rinkyôshin*), an advisory council directly under the Prime Minister's authority, was established in 1984. The debut of NCER sparked much curiosity in the media. Throughout its three-year existence, it published four reports. The final report was published in August 1987. Three fundamental perspectives on educational reform were put forward: (1) stressing the importance of each student's uniqueness, (2) implementing a lifelong learning system, and (3) adapting to shifts like globalisation and information technology breakthroughs (Yasuo, 2009).

3. The Major Obstacles in Higher Education in Japan

Japan is a highly developed country in every way, including education, and it implements new reforms and policies as it goes about daily life. Despite this, Japan's higher education system continues to face significant challenges, even though the government and policymakers unreservedly give their time and best efforts to keep it up. Here are some significant obstacles that Japan is facing on the path to Higher Education:

I. In Japan, students from various backgrounds and occupations frequently faced criticism for their rote memorisation skills during school. This criticism forced students to relinquish their thinking efficiency and creative power. This criticism is not limited to school.
II. The fierce competition among students for admission to prestigious or top-tier schools and universities makes life for students more stressful and difficult. It leads them to psychological patience with students and their parents. The Japanese citizens are very familiar with this competition, called „examination hell” (Education in Japan: Past and Present).
III. In Japan, the phrase *ochikobore*, which translates as “To Leave Something Behind,” describes students who cannot keep up with their schoolwork or the assignments given by the school or institute. To address this issue, many students used to enroll in cram schools or institutes, known as *juku* in Japanese.

IV. Another significant barrier facing students in Japan is called *ijime*, which translates as "bullying" or "violence". Bullying or violence is a common occurrence in schools and universities, sometimes taking the form of verbal abuse or physical intimidation. As a result, students become isolated from their families and friends, "hikikomori", hate their schools or universities, and refuse to attend school *futoko*.

V. Another significant issue is the "average quality" of the students. It makes reference to the notion that university students never face academic pressure or hardship from the institution after passing the entrance exam. Therefore, they are considered conventional students because they do not invest the time or energy required to grade their scores.

VI. Another significant problem facing Japanese society is the sharp drop in the birth rate. The Japanese population was 128 million in 2008, and it has been steadily declining ever since. According to the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research (2012), it is predicted that, with foreigners included, the population will reach 124 million in 2025 and 107 million in 2040. The major problem of the declining birth rate caused the majority of higher education institutions to become vacant, and the process of entrance applications became non-competitive.

VII. Because higher education institutions can offer students the chance of a bright career, the lack of graduates becomes a concern for everyone as a result of the student shortage or declining population, which may result in a lack of job seekers. The number of students enrolling may still be active even when an institute is established for them.

VIII. Increasing the number of international students is also a concern for the government and higher education institutes because the number of international students directly threatens the number of Japanese students in terms of global and domestic job opportunities. Japan's manufacturing sectors are hiring graduates from other countries rather than their graduates in terms of human resources policies, according to the Global Human Resource Development Committee of the Industry-Academia Partnership for Human Development 2010 (Akiyoshi, 2019).

IX. The "De Facto Open Enrollment" of college students is another crucial barrier in Japan's higher education system. In the past, the Japanese higher education system had an effective screening process to find outstanding people resources that could react to in-house training, which is a component of the conventional model of lifetime employment in a large company. However, as a result of the decline in the number of young people enrolled in higher education, colleges have effectively opened enrollment to all applicants. Except for those who have completed higher education, even the majority of young people will never experience any challenges (Akiyoshi, 2019).

4. Conclusion

This present study, "An Analysis of Japan's Educational Reformations and Significant Barriers to Higher Education", aims to give a glimpse over some Japanese educational reformations that took place for the development of entire education since the Edo era and discusses some of the significant obstacles that Japanese university students face reaching to higher education. We are all very concerned that "Higher Education" is the only key to the development of a nation, and this key not only develops a nation but also helps nurture our human mind and gives us excellent human resources for our society. Government representatives and policymakers oversee and provide their essential input to reforms and policies aimed at constructing high-quality education across the nation, giving full attention to overcoming issues or challenges. In an endeavor to raise educational standards and guarantee equitable chances for all students, the government and other university administrators regularly make improvements. One such endeavor to support students from low-income homes is the provision of scholarships and financial aid programmes. In addition, the government implemented several measures to encourage the rise in the birth rate, including funding for children's education, salary increases for young Japanese workers, and senior health and welfare services, all of which contributed to improving society and the educational system etc. Despite these continuous efforts, all parties must continue working together to overcome the problems that higher education in Japan is currently experiencing and ensure a better future for our nation.

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The author

Ajahar Sheikh is a research scholar at the Department of Japanese, Visva-Bharati, India. I am working as a Japanese language instructor for extracurricular activities at Techno India Group Public School and have served as a guest faculty member at M.G.A.H.V. University, Maharashtra, India. My major publications are “Higher Education in India and Japan: A Comparative Study”, “An Overview of the Role of Distance Education in India's Educational System Before and After COVID-19”, and “Responding to COVID-19: Japan’s Government-Driven Evolution in Education”. I participated as a fellow in “The JENESYS Programme”, organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, and AFS, India, attended the international workshop on “The 4th Collaborative Research Workshop for Aspiring Scholars in Japanese Studies”, December 6, 2022–February 20, 2023, Tokyo, Japan, and “The 8th Biennial International Conference of the Japanese Studies Association of Southeast Asia (JSA-ASEAN 2023)”, December 20, 2023, Chiang Mai, Thailand.