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To cite this article: Tomomi Miyajima (2008) Gender inequality among Japanese high school teachers: women teachers' resistance to gender bias in occupational culture, Journal of Education for Teaching, 34:4, 319-332, DOI: [10.1080/02607470802401479](https://doi.org/10.1080/02607470802401479)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02607470802401479>



Published online: 21 Sep 2010.



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Gender inequality among Japanese high school teachers: women teachers' resistance to gender bias in occupational culture

Tomomi Miyajima*

Human Development Unit, The World Bank, Middle East and North Africa Region, Washington, DC, USA

This study explores gender inequality in the occupational culture of Japanese high school teachers with special focus on women teachers' resistance to gender-biased practices. It examines the effectiveness of official and informal teacher training programmes in raising awareness of gender issues. Through an ethnographic case study conducted in five high schools in Gifu and Aichi, Japan, this study explores (1) the characteristics of the teaching community, and (2) the role of formal and informal teacher education in the occupational socialisation of new teachers. Moreover, by applying critical feminist perspectives, the study highlights (3) gender inequality within the occupational culture and myriad forms of women teachers' resistance to gender-biased practice. In drawing policy implications, the study examines (4) the effectiveness of teacher training programmes in raising teachers' awareness of gender issues.

Keywords: gender inequality; teacher education; occupational socialization

Introduction

Research focusing on Japanese teachers' gender inequality is scarce. Many researchers have found that as an important agent in students' socialisation, teachers' gender perception significantly affects students (e.g. Bailey 1993; Barrie 1993; Acker 1994; Beyer 1999; Weiss 2001). Parents and teachers alike play an important role in nurturing children's perception of gender because they teach various gender norms both consciously and unconsciously (Acker 1994; Grossman and Grossman 1994; Duffy 2001; Smith 1992). Most previous studies in gender and education have examined students' experience and viewpoints. Similarly, most Japanese studies focus on teacher–student interaction rather than teacher–teacher interaction (Biklen and Pollard 1993; Kameda and Tate 2000; Ogawa and Mori 2001; Arnot 2002; Kimura 2002).

This study focuses on gender inequality among teachers. Feminist theory suggests seeing the world through 'gender-sensitive lens' so that we can illuminate the various forms of gendering practice (Peterson and Runyan 1999; Padavic and Reskin 2002). In observing teachers' daily interactions, critical feminist perspectives are useful in identifying the contexts in which gender-biased practices happen and how women teachers cope with them. By studying gender inequality among Japanese high school teachers, this study aims to provide significant insights into the achievement of gender equality in education and employment.

*Email: kurotomo@ucla.edu

Research questions and methodologies

Questions explored

1. Some scholars argue that Japanese teachers have unique forms of occupational culture – see the studies on Japanese teachers' occupational culture conducted by DeCoker (2002), Inagaki and Kudomi (1994), Fujii (1998), Shimahara (2002), and Le Tendre (1999). What are the characteristics of the occupational culture of Japanese high school teachers? What factors are involved in shaping this culture?
2. What is the process of teacher occupational socialisation? How does occupational socialisation (which includes daily on-the-job training by peer teachers, mentoring from senior teachers, and official teacher training provided by the local government) help new teachers naturalise and internalise certain norms and values?
3. Is teacher culture male-dominant and reinforcing of gender inequality?
4. What forms of resistance do women teachers develop to cope with gender-biased practices in the workplace?
5. Are the educational policies addressed in the current reform gender-sensitive? Is the formal and informal teacher training programme effective in raising awareness of gender issues?
6. In studying Japanese teachers' gender inequality, what is the implication for gender studies and education as a whole?

Ethnographic case study

This study exploits ethnographic case study methods and intends to prove its relevance and usefulness for obtaining in-depth information about sensitive issues such as gender, discrimination, and many other elements of a person's life story. The intention behind this method is to obtain a wide range of significant findings to account for the state of Japanese gender inequality in employment, with substantial consideration given to cultural factors commonly seen in the workplace. Data were collected at five schools in Gifu and Aichi, Japan, over the five-year period of 2000 to 2005. Fieldwork was conducted through on-site observation and in-depth interviews with 37 teachers, four school principals, and four superintendents in local government. Interviews were conducted in both formal and informal settings. Quantitative data released from government sources and research institutions, as well as journalistic articles, were used to clarify the social and economic status of teachers. Research sites were selected to cover different types of curriculum and locale to identify differences in workplace culture.

I observed teachers basically during normal school hours, but sometimes staying late, until 10 or even 11 pm, to see how teachers spent their extra work hours. I took notes during observation, but occasionally joined in conversation and activities without taking notes. Upon returning home, I would solicit my memory and record in detail what I had observed.

I noticed that some teachers, though not talkative, sent out clear messages in their communication. It was equally clear that they did not necessarily express their true feelings in exact words. Oftentimes, true intention was shown in very subtle or implicit ways, so I needed to guess because the language or verbal part of

Table 1. Profile of selected schools and interviewed teachers.

Schools	Public/ private	Number of students/ teachers	Curriculum feature	Regional characteristics	Number of interviewed teachers by gender
A	Public	450/38	Vocational, co-ed	Rural	6 female, 9 male
B	Public	720/47	Academic, co-ed	Rural	5 female, 3 male
C	Private	1160/46	Christian, girls only	Urban	2 female, 1 male
D	Private	1040/59	Academic, co-ed	Urban	4 female, 2 male
E	Public	820/59	Mix of academic and vocational	Rural	3 female, 2 male

communication itself was vague or ambiguous. Thus, I found it inadequate merely to record conversation and analyse solely from the transcript. In coding and analysing teachers' interactions, I sought an in-depth analysis, as opposed to a mechanical or superficial reproduction of a verbal exchange, without regard for non-verbal messages and context-embedded meanings.

Keeping these things in mind, I observed teachers in order to grasp their candid opinions and true feelings in their daily communication. I aimed to identify power relations and other dynamics working beneath the conversation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted based on the interview protocols, but I used these flexibly. When teachers began talking eagerly and passionately about other issues or anecdotes, I did not re-direct them to return immediately to the questions at hand. We typically spent one and a half hours for each interview. Essentially, all interviews were recorded and our conversations were transcribed after completing the data collection. The number of interviewed teachers was 37, of which nine were interviewed again, for a total of two to three times each. In addition to scheduled interviews, informal interviews, which mostly consisted of casual conversations at school and outside the school, were also conducted. These conversations were not recorded, but I took notes after each one. Observations and interviews were conducted primarily at school, but I also actively attended teachers' extracurricular socialising, where many teachers tended to open up and freely expressed themselves on many issues. All teachers cited have been anonymised.

Teachers' occupational culture

Being a teacher in Japan has many unique characteristics in its social, economic, and cultural status. Teaching is one of the most respected occupations in the society, and the expected level of accountability to the society is deemed to be almost equal to that of doctors, lawyers, or the police. Social expectations of teachers are both elevated and strict. Parents, community, and media maintain a strict view of teacher conduct (Moricguchi 1999; Kakinuma and Nagano 1998). Mass media heavily criticise teachers if they are ever involved in any unethical, immoral conduct. Parents too will accuse teachers for suspected inappropriate, disreputable behaviour. Teachers in Japanese schools are under ceaseless scrutiny and pressure.

Today, as respected educators and wise leaders, teachers face enormous societal pressure to behave in certain prescribed ways. They feel obliged to take part in the

endless pursuit of decent, respectable, and superior character. Other major works on Japanese teachers' workplace culture support this view (e.g. Inagaki and Kudomi 1994; Nagai and Koga 2000; Shimahara 2002). Teachers have often cited the pressure they continually feel to behave correctly.

Shiraishi: In staff meetings, usually after teacher misconduct has been in the national news, the principal reminds us how we should behave in and outside of school. No teacher actually thinks we'll ever be involved in such an incident, until it actually happens around us. I think most teachers are aware of their social status and don't do anything so stupid as to act indecently. We have been told so often not to engage in any misconduct.

Nomura: I was taught by a senior social studies teacher the other day how the community sees us, teachers. During official teacher training, we were also told that we should be proud to be teachers and to be responsible at the same time. The leader of the training said we couldn't be too responsible as teachers. In many sessions and workshops, new teachers learn about teachers' heavy responsibilities.

Higashino: I try to behave even in my private time, especially if I am around town. Lots of parents are watching teachers without your knowing. I go out of town for shopping or anything. I want to feel free. In this neighbourhood, I am a teacher seven days a week.

In addition to these tremendous external pressures, there are strong internal incentives to form a tight community at work. As Shimahara (2002) and Sato (1994) summarise, Japanese teachers are overwhelmingly responsible for all aspects of their students' lives. Teachers are in charge of the totality of their students' personal education, and their responsibilities are so broad that one cannot work alone to cover all aspects of students' development. This increases their incentive to establish 'strong teamwork' in order to work smoothly, and this is one of the major characteristics of the Japanese culture of teaching.

Compared to teachers in the west, Japanese teachers are expected to be more tightly knit, to work closely together, and to systematically collaborate to solve daily problems in the classroom (Kainan 1994; Roehrig, Pressley and Talotta 2002). This teamwork is based upon a strong bond, which sometimes requires the sacrifice of private time. 'Close and tight teamwork', 'mutual cooperation and harmonization', and 'strong bond among colleagues across ages' are considered important values in order to create a pleasant and efficient working environment. Good communication and cooperation is essential to settle daily classroom problems.

Yamaguchi: I have to do my part, you know? In any case, we cannot do everything all by ourselves. For example, if your homeroom students commit some misdeed, I will ask his or her closest teacher to act as a counsellor, to identify the background of the problem and to understand the student's emotional state. Then, I will ask a teacher in the student guidance section, to determine how to treat the student, and then ... So, each teacher has their own role in dealing with a problem. I cannot be objective when it comes to my student, so it is very helpful if other teachers work together and do their own part. This involves role-taking. Some teachers assume the role of gentle listener, another teacher that of a strict preacher; this is all done according to the student's individual circumstances. We need to develop a strategy depending on the case. In solving one problem, many teachers take different roles. I often take multiple roles but other teachers' help is a must.

The teaching community is a cultural circle; not only is this where senior teachers transmit teaching skills and knowledge, but it is also the milieu where values and

morals are taught to young teachers (see Nagai and Koga 2001; Nihon Kyoshi Kyoiku Gakkai 2002; Shimahara 2002). Teachers' occupational culture consists of a whole set of explicit and implicit rules and regulations. Not only dress code and language, there are codes and unwritten rules for certain attitudes and behaviour. First-year teachers learn how to speak and behave appropriately as a teacher. By fully acquiring norms and behavioural patterns codified in the pre-existent teachers' community, new teachers learn to become a 'whole' teacher. Daily interaction with fellow teachers and mentoring from senior teachers also contribute to occupational socialisation. In fact, this informal teacher training is crucial to new teachers' occupational socialisation. Through consistent mentoring and close daily teamwork with colleagues, novice teachers acquire and internalise the existing norms of the occupational culture, which gradually become 'habit', so that these new teachers stop questioning many workplace customs.

Murata: I stopped wearing earrings. I stopped wearing flashy-colour clothes. I remember I was told my first month not to wear these. I think a senior female teacher advised me on what I should wear. I don't remember exactly though. Anyhow, I got too busy and I didn't want to be bothered by these things. So I began to wear grey, black, or white. No pink, no blue, no orange. Now I don't care much about my outfits even in private life (laughs).

Hattori: I am a first-year teacher at an academic school. I graduated from college and became a teacher, so my behaviour looks 'very studentish' to senior teachers, they said. I was told not to use such casual language with teachers and parents. Needless to say, no overly friendly talk with students. For example, I was having a really girly talk – topics such as fashion, cosmetics, TV drama and film stars – and one girl showed me her beautifully manicured nails. I completely forgot that I was a teacher and commented: 'Wow! You've got a pretty colour! Where did you get your nails done?', with too much excitement showing on my face. Yes, I was alerted afterwards, by senior female teachers that my behaviour was totally inappropriate. I understood that, and since then, I have modified my language and behaviour.

Teachers understand that their attire, language, and attitudes all affect students. It seems a shared understanding that teachers should set a good example for students. Thus, decent, professional, and semi-formal looking wear is preferred and required. PE teachers are told not to go to class in overly casual sports wear. These dress and language codes are part of teachers' workplace culture. As model professionals, teachers have to behave and conduct themselves in a certain way, and they have an entire set of norms and standards which eventually become part of their comportment. Teachers live within this professional community and play by the rules particular to the occupation.

Gender-biased practices and women teachers' resistance

This section explores the kind of gender inequality which exists in teachers' occupational culture. Who defines knowledge, and who controls power in the teaching workplace? Is gender the most powerful determinant in creating inequality among teachers? Previous studies show that the ratio of males to females in the workplace affects the formation of a 'mainstream' workplace culture (Kimura 2002; Jones et al. 2000; Miya 2000). In Japanese schooling, the ratio of women teachers decreases in higher education, and this has not changed for several decades. While the opposite is true at the elementary school level, male teachers are the

overwhelming majority at high schools throughout the country (the percentage of female teachers is 93.9% at kindergarten, 62.7% at elementary school, 40.9% at junior high school, and 27.1% at high school level – School Basic Survey 2004). As for women's representation in managerial positions, the number of female school principals is also very small (17.7% at primary school, 4.7% at junior high school, and 4.3% at high school). Given that the national average age of high school teachers is 43.8 years (Statistics Survey on Teachers' Status 2003) the high school teachers' workplace culture could have many andocentric and patriarchal aspects. In some schools, it has been clearly seen that women teachers as a minority feel compelled to act in certain ways. Moreover, not only does the male-dominant occupational culture affect teacher behaviour, but so do students and school culture.

As shown in teachers' narratives, gender code does exist in their occupational culture. Gender code is part of the whole set of codes and rules of workplace norms. It guides and regulates teachers by prescribing the 'appropriate' outfit, language, attitudes, and behaviours for women/men teachers. Gender codes vary across schools where the roles expected of teachers differ. In a large part, school culture defines teachers' expected roles, and gender code is similarly shaped by the entire school culture. Some teachers' narratives reveal that gender code is heavily influenced by overall school culture, which consequently affects workplace culture. For example, at vocational school, where violence is not uncommon, even women teachers are expected to act very manly in an effort to maintain classroom discipline. Compared to that at vocational schools, the workplace gender code of academic school teachers is more closely connected to conventional gender roles widely recognised in the society. At both types of schools, it has been commonly seen that women teachers are basically expected to be soft, gentle, caring and accepting. They are encouraged to take a 'mother's role' while male teachers are expected to act as protector, taking a 'father's role'.

Nomura: In a vocational school where I work, the great majority are male teachers and conversation topics in the staff room are very guy-favoured ones. Sometimes I have difficulty in relating myself to this manly atmosphere. I also think all teachers have to act very manly, unshakably, or rigorously because some students here act tough and aggressive. If you are not firm, they take you too lightly, discipline collapses and homeroom becomes chaotic. As a young female, I could become a target. I have to behave really manly sometimes. I often envy male teachers since they seem more advantaged in pretending to be 'strong, threatening' figures who can take control in class.

Research has revealed that in these 'women as minority' environments, women teachers are vulnerable and tend to suffer sexual harassment (Kimura 2002 cites a previous study conducted by Nikkyoso [Japan Teachers Union 1993], which shows women teachers at high school reported more sexual harassment incidents than women teachers in elementary school). For example, a woman teacher working in a male predominant school had the experience of being harassed and humiliated. Verbal harassment by male colleagues deeply hurt this teacher, a woman in her late 20s. She confessed that her male colleagues had cruelly berated her:

You are now 29 years old and unmarried. You look very old, although you were so young when you first got here a few years ago. Look at those first-year teachers over there! They are so young and fresh!

This was not about her job performance or dedication to work, merely rude commentary on her age and appearance. She felt humiliated in that appreciation of

her work was totally absent, while she was being judged for youth and physical appearance only. Facing such abuse, she naturally felt offended and harassed. Many women teachers revealed episodes in which gender plays a crucial role in judging and discriminating among teachers. A woman teacher in her late 30s recalls that a male principal suggested that she quit her job and raise children at home when she informed him of her third pregnancy and requested arrangements for before and after her maternity leave. By her account, the male principal implied that she should prioritise raising her own children as a mother's responsibility. He may have considered raising three children and working as a full-time teacher to be too great a burden and was doubtless displeased with the fact that she had already taken two maternity leaves and was planning to take another. He must have thought she was accumulating too many absences to fulfil her commitment as a qualified teacher. However, given that family planning is a solely private matter, and that it was her legally assured personal right to take maternity leave, the pregnant teacher was infuriated by his comment. Similar stories are told by other senior women teachers who have experienced pregnancy and child rearing.

Against these gender-biased treatments, what kind of coping strategies or resistance do women teachers develop? By close observation of teacher interaction, I found certain patterns in women teachers' strategy building. It is not my intention to mould women teachers into rigid categories, and I am aware that each person is different. We cannot oversimplify and generalise people's behaviours and women cannot be labelled as one monolithic group with a few different categories. However, after careful observations and repeated interviews with women teachers, I found commonalities in their forms of resistance and divided these into at least four major categories. The purpose of this categorisation is not to stereotype women teachers. While it is true that coping strategies differ with the individual, I believe it is important to articulate characteristics, trends, and similarities to wholly understand the real life of women teachers.

Reluctant fighter, careful observer

This is seen in many young, beginning teachers in their mid 20s with one to three years of teaching experience. She is in the 'apprenticeship phase'; still trying to see what is acceptable in the workplace culture, carefully observing when and how to speak up. Though highly aware of gender-biased practices at work, she is reluctant to resist. She is afraid of creating a fuss. When frustrated by work-related issues, she utilises her network of friends, cohorts, family, and boyfriend in order to let out her emotions to release stress. She tries to maintain a good relationship with teachers of all age groups, but she is especially close to similarly aged colleagues in similar circumstances.

Burnout or avoiding burnout

This is mainly seen in teachers with 7–12 years of teaching experience and it is often seen among women in their early 30s. She enjoys acquired job responsibilities and has a high level of self-confidence and self-efficacy after passing the 'apprenticeship' phase. Due to the heavy workload, she continually feels distressed but never stops working. She is a near-workaholic and sometimes experiences an 'emotional rebound' and 'apathy' resulting from concentrated work. She is neither neglectful

nor careless about gender issues, but tends to avoid confronting any extra conflicts which would entail heavy emotional burden. She wants to focus on her work such as homeroom management, teaching difficult classes, gaining trust from colleagues, parents and students. Sometimes she displays 'burnout' symptoms or narrowly avoids falling into that status. She tends to spend excessive time at work and works harder to accomplish goals, which is one of her ways of easing stress.

Tough fighter

This would be an experienced teacher with more than 15 to 20 years of career. This is frequently seen among women in their 40s. She is very confident and determined, having very strong career aspirations. She possesses aggressive attitudes in general and is not afraid of speaking up or displaying overt forms of resistance. She fights against any unfair practices but this does not always mean for the benefit of women as a whole. She often fights for reasons of self-interest. Her awareness of gender issues is not necessarily high. In most cases, her strengths and determination to build a career are backed up by strong emotional support from her own mother. The mother is a full-time housewife and strongly encourages her daughter to pursue a career to be independent. The mother-daughter tie is very strong and they depend upon one another.

Silent but practical resistance

This is seen in female teachers across all age groups; teachers adopt this strategy depending on individual situation. She does not overlook unfair treatment, but does not immediately speak out forcefully. She carefully examines each case and quietly takes practical means to solve the problems. She does not wish to disturb workplace harmony, but neither does she embrace severe inequalities. She chooses where and how to express her complaints. She has a good network of colleagues from whom to ask for support.

Again, I do not mean to stereotype or categorise all women teachers, but I found it interesting that teachers in the same age group often show similar patterns of resistance. Mainly represented by young, beginning teachers, Type 1 individuals are still not fully confident or fully satisfied with their own work performance. On occasions such as student guidance or homeroom management, they tend to count on advice from senior, experienced teachers. This does not imply they are completely dependent on other teachers; rather, these young teachers are very enthusiastic about self-improvement and have been struggling to develop their own way of settling cases. However, they feel more comfortable reflecting advice and comments provided by experienced teachers in order to strengthen homeroom management skills. Basically they are eager to learn and are seriously working for the well-being of students. The more serious they are, the harder they struggle. Thus, a minor flaw or shortcoming in their own skill will hinder these young teachers and they become trapped by feelings of self-incompetence. Oftentimes they become insecure due to low self-efficacy as a professional; they tend to observe very carefully what other teachers do rather than try to initiate activities. In staff meetings, these teachers tend to be quiet and attentive to others' opinions.

It seems teachers with 7–10 years experience have moved on to another phase after graduating from this first stage. These teachers fall into Type 2: burnout, or avoiding burnout. She has gained confidence after several years of struggle for self-improvement. She has developed her way of teaching and dealing with homeroom problems, and has become aware of her own unique teaching style. Her sincere attitude and high professional standards inspire trust among colleagues, and consequently a lot of job assignments and related responsibilities inundate her every day. Unless controlled carefully, it is easy for her to fall into the ‘work-is-everything-life’ and to spend extremely long hours at work even over the weekend. Although she enjoys the heavier workload and added responsibilities, stress becomes enormous and sometimes difficult to handle. Some teachers become exhausted and go to ‘rebound’ of avoiding commitment and responsibilities. These ‘avoid-burnout’ teachers tend to carefully prioritise things in order to reduce stress and fatigue as much as possible. Some teachers avoid reflecting deeply on gender inequality because thinking about or struggling with such an issue would augment stress and conflict. Thus, they focus exclusively on certain ‘selected issues’ or ‘urgent cases’, mainly prioritising homeroom management and student problems. Since their self-efficacy, self-reliance and competence level is not low, gender issues will not hurt or impact them so much.

This attitude of ‘avoiding extra cost and sources of stress as much as possible’ paralyses incipient and real feelings on the part of the teacher and she gets used to the state of ‘not feeling’. Having once acquired and internalised this way of thinking and forgetting feelings, teachers become less preoccupied with gender issues and concentrate more on work. This pattern is commonly seen in women teachers with 7–12 years of experience.

I have also noticed that the women in Type 3 showed strong maternal ties. These teachers recalled that their mothers always supported their education and encouraged them to pursue a ‘lifelong, real career’ to become financially independent. I found that mothers significantly affect their daughter’s educational and occupational choice and success. According to the interviews, these mothers are essentially full-time housewives and are frustrated with their dependence on their husbands. These mothers instructed their daughters to have a ‘decent job, stable income, so you have more freedom and choice in your life’.

The effectiveness of formal teacher training in raising gender awareness

In addition to in-house training, Japanese teachers receive substantial amounts of rigorous and systematic teacher training organised by the local government. Yet, is this formal teacher education effective in raising gender awareness among teachers? Voices of both new and experienced teachers suggest that the programmes included in this training are inadequate in some prefectures. Here the feedback from teachers shows how young and experienced teachers perceive the official teacher training.

Each workshop and training session has specific goals and objectives, but teacher comments indicate they are not always effective. The common perception among young teachers was that teacher training is a good place for networking and socialisation. They make friends with cohort teachers in different schools and share information. Getting away from school and having a dedicated time for self-training also provides refreshment. Official teacher training offered by the Education Centre

at the local board of education is a good chance to reflect on oneself and one's teaching practices. Getting away from school, stepping back from the hectic work life can give teachers a chance to reflect on their daily schedule; however, some teacher training burdens teachers with extra tasks in addition to regular work. It often deprives them of free time, and the overwhelming amount of paperwork makes them even busier. However, teacher training provides additional communication and mentoring opportunities with senior teachers who have already undergone it. Thus, Education Centre-based teacher training programmes, as well as in-house teacher training, play an important role in socialising and acculturating teachers. Through this mentoring and training, teachers acquire occupational norms and standards.

Training for teachers of managerial positions is also effective in helping them gain knowledge and refine skills in personnel management. However, with regard to raising awareness of gender issues, sufficient training is currently unavailable, and interviewed school principals and superintendents stated that they don't remember taking such gender-oriented training programmes at all. For teachers in managerial positions, it is important to provide gender-sensitive training because its influence on regular teachers is enormous (Gender Equity Bureau, Cabinet Office of Japan, 2004).

Other factors shaping power relations among teachers

Senior teachers seemingly have greater self-confidence and self-efficacy compared to young, beginning teachers. In the course of a teaching career, they confront innumerable difficult problems with students, especially in their homeroom management. Teachers who have worked at several different schools will have experienced diverse educational issues in the community. Time spent working as a teacher is one of the most influential factors in determining one's level of confidence and self-reliance as an educator. I have also noticed that young teachers are full of hope and positive energy; however, they suffer from severe self-doubt and lack of confidence from time to time, especially when they encounter problems of a sort that they have not previously confronted and resolved.

Teachers of all ages often say 'experience is everything' in becoming an '*ichinin-mae*': a 'whole teacher, a real professional'. This does not mean senior teachers look down on young teachers; they do appreciate each colleague's unique talents and particular contributions to the workplace community regardless of years of service, but there is a fundamental respect for senior teachers. This was commonly seen across schools regardless of differences in school culture.

Teachers' behaviour is deeply affected by the seniority system, and the power dynamics among teachers are significantly based on the seniority-focused hierarchy examined in the previous section. When asked 'Who do you think shapes the mainstream workplace culture in your school?', many young teachers answered 'senior teachers with more than 10 years of experience'. Interestingly, they mentioned length of teaching career, but not gender itself. Regardless of gender, senior teachers' opinions are esteemed. The seniority system is at work in any school. Length of career matters when it comes to who is in power, who is influential among teachers. Some women teachers are actually very powerful – even more so than male teachers.

Togawa: I think the most powerful people in the teacher group are definitely the experienced female teachers. Everyone is afraid of them. Nobody can rival them. Even

in staff meetings, some powerful female teachers can make senior male teachers shut up. For example, in our school, there is a female teacher, I guess she is 48 years old, who is so powerful, that she explicitly decreed, 'Japanese women's hair must be black!', and she never seems to conform to other opinions. Nobody could oppose her.

Moreover, it was interesting to see that gender does not always matter in determining power relations, especially among the teaching cohort. Age, or teaching experiences, and the authoritative level of the person matters more than gender itself in determining power. It is interesting to see how teachers situate themselves in the whole teachers' group, and oftentimes gender is not the most powerful variable to determine power relations. As a prime example, for beginning teachers, especially among the cohort, gender plays a small role in distributing power, or they do not even care about the 'power game'. They see each other as 'friends' or 'comrades' who share the same concerns and experiences as beginning teachers. Young teachers often get together, go out for a drink, and discuss each other's problems frankly. During the probationary first year, teachers have ample opportunity to meet in workshops and training sessions periodically held in each region. These young teachers enjoy social gatherings and bond strongly with one another. Thus, 'power' is not an issue within the group; rather, they help one another regardless of gender. In addition, one's exact age does not matter either. Some teachers already have several years of experience working as full-time lecturers or in another occupation. The teacher selection exam is highly competitive and it is very difficult to pass it right after graduating from college. Many people work as full-time lecturers while attempting the exam a multiple number of times. Thus within the cohort, though differences in age and occupational background preclude homogeneity, actual age or previous experience does not prevent friendships. On the contrary, diversity enriches and energises the young teachers' community.

Besides the age and length of teaching experience, one's position also plays an important role in power relations. Part-time teachers and language assistants affirm that regular teachers treat them as second-class citizens. Thus, it is equally important to note that not only is there gender inequality in the workplace, but other inequalities exist as well.

Summary and policy implications

In summary, findings suggest these conclusions. Similar to many other case studies, this research is region specific and its focus is limited, thus this conclusion does not constitute a definitive analysis of the complex teaching culture of Japan. Further research will reveal more detailed aspects of gender inequality among teachers.

1. Teachers' workplace culture consists of various norms and standards which define official knowledge: i.e. what is acceptable/unacceptable as a respectable teacher. A whole set of these rules regulate teachers' behaviour.
2. Both external forces (pressure from mass media, societal expectations, etc.) and internal forces (power relations, hierarchy among teachers), and the backgrounds of teachers themselves (age, gender, length of career, teaching beliefs, etc.) all shape the occupational culture in each school.
3. Occupational culture greatly varies across schools and is affected significantly by the characteristics and demands of students, parents, and

- community. There is no one single ‘mainstream culture’ which can explain the whole complex teaching culture of Japan.
4. Through occupational socialisation, beginning teachers assimilate into the workplace culture. In order to work efficiently as a team, teachers closely cooperate and follow group values rather than promote individual beliefs.
 5. Not only official teacher training programmes but also informal on-the-job training such as daily mentoring from senior teachers plays a crucial role in beginning teachers’ assimilation into mainstream workplace culture.
 6. Some workplaces are male-dominant and marked by substantial gender inequality. Once acquired and naturalised by each member, the ‘gendered’ culture of teachers systematically reproduces itself through ‘self-regulated behaviour’ and ‘habits’ of each member.
 7. Teachers’ perception and attitudes towards gender issues significantly vary depending on each teacher’s standpoint, regardless of sex. However, in schools where overt and covert forms of gender-biased practices are often seen, women teachers create various coping strategies and develop implicit and explicit forms of resistance.
 8. Workplace culture within the teachers’ community is constructed of multilayered power politics. Most importantly, gender is not the only factor which determines power, nor the single absolute source of inequality. Age, or length of career, for example, is another powerful determinant in shaping hierarchy and power politics among teachers.

It is often said that the Japanese teacher training system is well designed and systematically implemented on a nationwide scale. The local government board of education is in charge of designing, developing and providing teacher training, in order to meet specific educational needs in each region. Thus, the contents vary significantly across prefectures. Especially for social issues such as gender equality, many teacher training curricula are not fully incorporated. For example, contents analysis of teacher training programmes shows that Gifu prefecture compares poorly with Edogawa Ward, Tokyo, where training includes detailed sessions about the importance of promoting gender equality in school. In my fieldwork, interviewed school principals, superintendents, and teachers in managerial positions recalled that they had never received gender-oriented training. Improving teacher training curricula to raise teachers’ awareness of gender issues is the first step to achieving greater gender equality in Japanese society.

Many elements of informal, casual forms of occupational socialisation are controversial and require immediate attention and change. Oftentimes gender stereotypes are perpetuated through subtle messages or signals within regular conversation. This is worse at social gatherings such as drinking parties, where some young women teachers have become targets of sexual harassment. Such cases are rarely reported in ‘serious’ fashion to higher authorities because victims are afraid of losing peer support by making a big fuss about things occurring during parties. Therefore, it would also be helpful to establish ‘counselling sessions’ to let teachers discuss problems. Although school counsellors are becoming more available, teachers often hesitate to reveal their problems to the on-site counsellor, who is part of the workplace human relations. Going to see a doctor is sometimes difficult because of the hectic schedule, and especially if mental issues are involved, teachers will see a therapist only reluctantly. Thus, incorporating these counselling sessions

into existing mandatory training for each career stage would be helpful, so that teachers need not take extra leave to obtain counselling. In providing such sessions, anonymity and privacy are essential to ensure that teachers feel free to speak.

It is essential first to ensure teacher well-being in order to provide high-quality education to students. Teachers are important agents in students' socialisation; students absorb values and norms from teachers' words and actions. Thus, teachers' unconscious behaviour affects students' holistic development. If teachers are satisfied with their lives and have fair and just views on gender, they can exercise a positive influence on students. Therefore, we should not merely pressure teachers to become superman-like figures, but rather provide sufficient support for them to enjoy a balanced professional life. To combat teacher burnout and alleviate the struggle to balance work and family, not only local boards of education but other policy institutions should formulate realistic plans to ensure care and support for teacher well-being.

This study suggests that society as a whole sees teachers and their workplace through different lenses, with deeper consideration for teachers' well-being and their quality of life. This would enable teachers to spare more time and energy for gender equality-oriented education, without suffering from burnout or apathy. Creating a gender-sensitive workplace environment is important and raising awareness should be part of any teacher training curriculum, both at formal and informal levels. Well designed teacher training is crucial to delivering high-quality education to students.

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