

THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AND COMPETENCY-BASED APPROACH IN THE JAPANESE EDUCATION SYSTEM

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Annotation: This article analyzes the factors of sustainable development of the Japanese education system. The study examines the concept of quality education from the perspective of improving the professional skills of teachers (Lesson Study) and the coherence of state standards. Also, the practical effectiveness of the "Ikiru Chikara" concept aimed at developing 21st century skills and its integration with higher education and the labor market are covered based on scientific and statistical data.

Keywords: Japanese education, quality assurance, Lesson Study, Ikiru Chikara, competency-based approach, Society 5.0, human capital.

In the context of rapid globalization and the knowledge-based economy of the 21st century, education systems around the world are under increasing pressure to ensure high standards of quality and relevance. Among these systems, Japan's education model stands out as one of the most effective and consistently high-performing, largely due to its strong emphasis on quality assurance and competency-based approaches. These two pillars have played a crucial role in shaping a resilient, adaptive, and student-centered education system that aligns with both national development goals and global expectations.

Quality assurance in education refers to the systematic processes and mechanisms implemented to maintain and improve educational standards. In Japan, this concept is deeply embedded in institutional practices, curriculum design, teacher training, and continuous evaluation. The Japanese education system prioritizes not only academic excellence but also moral development, discipline, and social responsibility, ensuring a holistic approach to student growth. Through rigorous monitoring, feedback systems, and policy frameworks, Japan has been able to sustain a high level of educational consistency and accountability.

At the same time, the competency-based approach has gained significant importance in Japan's educational reforms. This approach focuses on developing students' practical skills, critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and lifelong learning competencies rather than merely emphasizing rote memorization. By integrating competencies into curricula and teaching methodologies, Japanese schools prepare learners to effectively navigate complex real-world challenges and contribute meaningfully to society.

The strategic integration of quality assurance and competency-based education has enabled Japan to build a system that is both efficient and forward-looking. It ensures that educational outcomes are aligned with labor market demands, technological advancements, and societal needs. Furthermore, this synergy supports innovation in teaching and learning processes, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and excellence.

This paper explores the strategic importance of quality assurance and competency-based



approaches within the Japanese education system, analyzing how these elements contribute to its global success and sustainability. It also examines the implications of Japan's experience for other countries seeking to reform and modernize their own education systems.

1. The professional community of teachers and "Lesson Study".

In Japan, the quality of education is formed not from the top down, but directly at the center of the educational process - in the classroom. The "Jugyo Kenkyu" (Lesson Study) system is the most powerful tool for ensuring the professional development of teachers.

Within the framework of this methodology, teachers are divided into groups and organize "research lessons". The main focus is not on the teacher's skills, but on how the student perceives information. Each lesson analysis (reflection) generates new pedagogical solutions, which constantly improves the quality of education at the micro level.

2. National educational standards (Course of Study).

In Japan, the standards set by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) are the legal and substantive foundation of the quality of education. The new standards introduced in 2020 are based on the principle of "applying rather than knowing".

3. Competency approach: the philosophy of "ikiru chikara".

The concept of "Ikiru Chikara" (Zest for Living), which is a central element of Japanese pedagogy, involves the formation of the following three global competencies in students:

Fundamental knowledge and skills (Chi): Independent information search, critical thinking and decision-making in problem situations.

Moral and ethical competencies (Tok): Teamwork, communication culture and social responsibility. Through "Tokubetsu Katsudo" (special events) in Japanese schools, students learn self-management.

Physical stability (Tai): Personal discipline and health care skills.

4. Quality of higher education and integration with the labor market.

The Japanese education system has long been recognized for its structured organization, high academic standards, and strong societal support. At the core of this success lies a well-established quality assurance framework that ensures consistency, accountability, and continuous improvement across all levels of education. Quality assurance in Japan is not limited to formal inspections but is deeply integrated into everyday educational practices, including curriculum development, teacher evaluation, and institutional self-assessment.

One of the key features of quality assurance in Japan is the centralized yet flexible governance system. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) sets national standards and guidelines, while schools and local authorities are given the autonomy to implement these standards in ways that best suit their contexts. This balance between regulation and flexibility allows for innovation while maintaining nationwide consistency in educational quality.

Teacher professionalism is another critical component of quality assurance. In Japan,



teachers are highly respected and are expected to engage in continuous professional development. Lesson study (*jugyokenkyu*), a collaborative practice where teachers observe, analyze, and improve their teaching methods, plays a significant role in enhancing instructional quality. This culture of collaboration and reflection contributes to the overall effectiveness of the education system.

In parallel with quality assurance, the competency-based approach has become increasingly central to Japan's educational strategy. Traditionally known for its focus on knowledge acquisition, Japan has gradually shifted toward fostering competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration. This shift is reflected in recent curriculum reforms, which emphasize active learning, problem-solving tasks, and interdisciplinary approaches.

The competency-based model in Japan also prioritizes the development of "zest for living" (*ikiru chikara*), a concept that encompasses intellectual, moral, and physical growth. Students are encouraged to apply their knowledge in real-life situations, work collaboratively, and develop a sense of responsibility and independence. This holistic approach ensures that learners are not only academically competent but also socially and emotionally prepared for future challenges.

Moreover, assessment practices in Japan are evolving to support competency development. Instead of relying solely on standardized testing, schools are increasingly using formative assessments, performance-based evaluations, and qualitative feedback to monitor student progress. These methods provide a more comprehensive understanding of students' abilities and support personalized learning pathways.

The integration of quality assurance and competency-based education creates a synergistic effect. Quality assurance mechanisms ensure that competency-based reforms are implemented effectively and consistently, while the competency-based approach enhances the relevance and impact of education. Together, they contribute to a dynamic and sustainable education system that meets the demands of a rapidly changing world.

The Japanese higher education system (HEI) has a high level of academic autonomy and close links with industry. The reason why educational institutions such as the University of Tokyo and Kyoto occupy high places in world rankings (QS World University Rankings) is the unity of fundamental science and practice.

The quality of higher education institutions is assessed by independent agencies such as NIAD-QE. The main indicators include the employment rate of students after graduation, the citation rate of scientific articles, and the scope of international cooperation.

Japan is placing special emphasis on digital competencies in education as part of its "Smart Society" strategy. The "GIGA School" project, along with providing each student with personal devices, provides basic skills in working with algorithms and the ethics of artificial intelligence.

In conclusion, the Japanese education system demonstrates the strategic importance of integrating quality assurance and competency-based approaches to achieve sustainable educational excellence. Quality assurance provides the structural foundation for maintaining high standards, ensuring accountability, and fostering continuous improvement. At the same time, the competency-based approach equips students with essential skills and abilities needed to succeed in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

The synergy between these two elements has enabled Japan to create a balanced and forward-thinking education system that prioritizes both academic achievement and holistic



development. By focusing on student-centered learning, teacher professionalism, and innovative assessment methods, Japan continues to adapt to global challenges while preserving its educational strengths.

The experience of Japan offers valuable insights for other countries seeking to reform their education systems. It highlights the importance of aligning educational quality with practical competencies, promoting lifelong learning, and fostering a culture of collaboration and innovation. Ultimately, the Japanese model illustrates that a well-coordinated approach to quality assurance and competency development is essential for building a resilient and future-ready education system.

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