



DALARNA
UNIVERSITY

Degree Thesis

Bachelor's level

Aspirations and Realities

Understanding the “Unique Gender Distribution” in Japanese Educational Leadership

Author: Linda Humla
School: Dalarna University
Supervisor: Mariya Aida Niendorf
Examiner: Herbert Jonsson
Subject/main field of study: Japanese
Course code: GJP23Y
Credits: 15
Date of examination: 31 May 2024

At Dalarna University it is possible to publish the student thesis in full text in DiVA. The publishing is Open Access, which means the work will be freely accessible to read and download on the internet. This will significantly increase the dissemination and visibility of the student thesis.

Open Access is becoming the standard route for spreading scientific and academic information on the internet. Dalarna University recommends that both researchers as well as students publish their work Open Access.

I give my/we give our consent for full text publishing (freely accessible on the internet, Open Access):

Yes

No

Abstract:

This thesis investigates the gender disparity among female teachers and principals within the Japanese education system. The purpose of the study is to identify factors contributing to this imbalance and to explore the career aspirations of future female educators alongside the experiences of retired female principals. Using a mixed-methods approach, quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews were employed to gather data. The surveys aimed to understand the career aspirations of future female educators, while interviews provided insights into the experiences of retired female principals. The results reveal a complex interplay of societal expectations, institutional structures, and individual aspirations shaping women's professional trajectories in education. Despite the high representation of female teachers, the proportion of female principals remains significantly low. Implications of the study highlight the need for addressing systemic barriers and fostering an environment conducive to the professional development and advancement of women in educational leadership roles. By promoting gender equity and inclusivity, policymakers, educators, and researchers can work towards a more diverse and representative education sector in Japan.

Keywords: Japan, gender disparity, education, leadership, female principals, young women, career aspirations

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Background	2
2.1 Educators in Japan.....	2
2.2 Women in Education.....	3
3. Previous Studies	4
3.1 Gender (In)equality in Japan	4
3.2 Career Development of Female Principals in Japan	5
3.3 Career Aspirations Among Students.....	5
4. Materials and Methodology	7
4.1 Materials.....	8
4.2 Method of Data Collection.....	9
4.3 Method of Analysis	10
5. Results	12
5.1 Teacher Students	12
5.2 Principals.....	18
6. Analysis and Discussion	20
6.1 Theme 1: Marriage and Childcare.....	20
6.2 Theme 2: The Environment	24
6.3 Theme 3: No Hope, No Vision	27
6.4 Research Limitations.....	31
7. Conclusions	31
References	33

1. Introduction

In the complex world of Japanese education, a puzzling pattern can be found—a high number of female teachers, but very few female principals. This study dives into this mystery, investigating factors contributing to this unique gender distribution. Exploring not only what can be learnt from the experiences of retired female principals, but also from examining the aspirations and perspectives of future female teachers.

This situation must be understood in the context of society's expectations, how schools are set up, and the way gender plays out. In Japan, despite having a strong economy and a well-educated female population, there is a persistent problem—gender differences at work. Back in 1951, half of elementary school teachers, and a quarter of junior high school teachers were women (Fukasawa and Shigekawa 213). Fast forward to 2019, and more women are teaching—62.2% in elementary schools and 43.3% in junior high (Japan 6). But when you look at who is in charge, only 23% of elementary school principals are women, far lower than the OECD average of 53% (Fraser 1-2). These statistics highlight the scale of the gender distribution gap in Japan.

In general, Japan's gender inequality issues are well known. In the 2023 Global Gender Gap Report, out of 146 countries, Japan ranks 125th for gender equality and 138th for women in government, showing that representation of women in influential roles is significantly low (World Economic Forum 11-22). This disparity has been extensively researched, with many scholars arguing that gender inequality is a notable contemporary social problem ingrained not in individual behaviours but deeply embedded in societal structures. This imbalance affects various aspects, including the organisation of marriage and families, the workforce and economy, politics, language, and diverse cultural productions (Iida; Kim and Shirahase; Liao and Luo; Wulansari).

While ample research exists on the advancement of women in the Japanese workforce, there is a noticeable lack of studies in English specifically addressing the career development of female principals. This study seeks to address this gap by analysing the underlying factors contributing to the disparity between female teachers and principals. This is achieved by employing a methodological approach that combines quantitative questionnaires to explore the career aspirations of future educators with qualitative interviews to gain insights from experienced female principals. Through this combined method, this research delves into the intricate interplay between career aspirations, gender dynamics, and family responsibilities, seeking to uncover valuable insights into the myriad of factors shaping women's professional paths within the Japanese education landscape.

2. Background

2.1 Educators in Japan

In Japan, teaching holds a revered status as a prestigious and sought-after profession, accentuated by the government's recognition of educators as civil servants (Fujita 6). Educators, as defined by Kanga, include professionals in the field of education such as teachers, principals, administrators, and others involved in the theory and practice of teaching (123-135). Survey data gathered from middle school students revealed that "teacher" ranked as the third most desired career among boys, while "kindergarten teacher" and "nursery schoolteacher" emerged as the top choices among girls (Fujita 19).

Public primary and middle schools are established by local authorities, with school principals, vice principals, and regular teachers appointed by prefectural boards of education. This system mandates that educators change schools every seven years, with the aim to foster professional growth and expertise through diverse experiences. As of 2016, there are 44 schools across the country dedicated to teacher education, serving as the primary sources for training schoolteachers in each prefecture. Upon graduation, students submit their teaching certification applications to the prefectural board of education, concurrently receiving their teaching certification with their diplomas (Yamasaki 20-27).

In Japan, teaching emerges as the preferred career choice for a significant majority of teachers, driven by the opportunity to influence children's development and contribute to society. However, despite widespread job satisfaction among Japanese educators, concerns persist regarding specific aspects of their employment, such as contract terms and salaries. Additionally, challenges related to workload and work environment can impact overall job satisfaction and retention rates. Despite the profession's appeal, educators confront persistent challenges within the education system, including administrative burdens, parental concerns, and the weight of responsibility for student achievement (OECD 2-4).

While teaching in Japan offers salaries that surpass those of the average college-educated civil servant by approximately 4%, educators are required to engage in continuous professional development. Following ten years of teaching experience, these development programs are tailored to accommodate various career tracks, such as curriculum coordinators, directors, department supervisors, vice principals, and principals. Furthermore, teachers endorsed by a school principal have the opportunity to undergo training in management skills or educational guidance expertise (Yamasaki 27). Advancement to administrative positions, such as principal or vice principal, typically involves passing examinations and gaining experience through personnel transfers across multiple schools. Despite the appeal

of teaching as a career choice, the role of a principal comes with significant responsibilities. As outlined by the School Education Law, principals are entrusted with the management of school affairs and the supervision of all staff, including teachers (Fujita 26-36).

In summary, while teaching in Japan offers stability and opportunities for professional development, educators face ongoing challenges in navigating administrative demands and maintaining job satisfaction amidst societal expectations, raising questions about the sustainability of career choices in education.

2.2 Women in Education

The teaching profession has been available to women in Japan since the pre-war period, with the proportion of female teachers accounting for about 50% of elementary school teachers and about 25% of middle school teachers in 1951 (Fukasawa and Shigekawa 213). In 2019, the proportion of female teachers in elementary schools had increased to 62.2% and in middle school to 43.3% (Japan 6). According to Sasa et al., the teaching profession has traditionally been seen as an appropriate career for women, providing an avenue for them to integrate their motherhood into the realm of education, and the need for female teachers has been consistently advocated. Moreover, as the number of female teachers has risen, various support mechanisms, such as childcare leave, have been implemented to facilitate their continuous engagement in teaching even after starting a family, contributing to increased opportunities for women to sustain their careers in education (Sasa et al. 13).

However, when looking at the results from the 2018 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), an international, large-scale survey of teachers, school leaders and the learning environment in schools (OECD 19), we can see a phenomenon of “unique gender distribution” in elementary schools in Japan. Namely, the ratio of female teachers is relatively high compared to the ratio of female principals. According to the survey, 61% of elementary schoolteachers and only 23% of principals are women, compared to the OECD average of 78% and 53% respectively (Fraser 1-2). Despite women outnumbering men in elementary school teaching for over six decades, the representation of women in higher positions is remarkably low.

It is uncertain if the cause for this unique gender distribution phenomenon is a lack of aspiration for career development, gender stereotypes portraying males as more suitable for leadership roles, or the societal expectation that a woman should put family life, such as childcare work and household chores first. To find answers to what underlying factors are contributing to this disparity among schoolteachers and

principals in Japan, this study examines the career aspirations of females currently pursuing teaching professions and the experiences of former female principals.

3. Previous Studies

3.1 Gender (In)equality in Japan

For numerous years, Japan has been under growing scrutiny for its persistent gender disparities. Despite its status as a highly developed economy with well-educated women, the proportion of women participating in the workforce in Japan remains low, especially after marriage (Hasunuma 89).

In 2012, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe introduced his "Womenomics" policy, intending to boost the presence of women in the workforce, including in higher-level positions. The strategy involved expanding childcare provisions and setting targets for companies (Steel 8-9). The policy claimed that women were crucial for revitalizing Japan's slowing economy, emphasizing the need for them to contribute to the workforce and tackle the demographic challenges of a rapidly aging society by having more children. However, feminists responded to this policy with scepticism, as it appeared to push women to work even harder, both inside and outside the home. (Kano 1-2).

While it remains uncertain whether there has been a corresponding enhancement in the quality of female employment as a result of the Womenomics policy, there has been a rapid increase in the number of women entering the workforce from 2012 to 2019. The percentage of prime working-age women (i.e., between 15 and 64 years old) participating in the labour market reached 69.4% in 2017, a level comparable to that of eurozone countries, trailing Germany and Britain by only four to five percentage points (Emmott 26-28).

Japan, the third largest economy in 2023, boasts women who are among the most highly educated and literate among the 146 countries included in the Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum. Yet, Japan ranks 125th for gender equality and 138th for political empowerment, according to the same report (World Economic Forum). Despite its advanced economy and educated female population, the proportion of women in influential positions remains disproportionately low. This anomaly has been researched extensively and many scholars argue that gender inequality is a significant contemporary social issue rooted not in individual actions but deeply ingrained in societal structures. This inequity permeates the organization of marriage and families, work and the economy, politics, language, religions, the arts, and various other cultural productions (Iida; Kim and Shirahase; Liao and Luo; Wulansari 1-2).

3.2 Career Development of Female Principals in Japan

Although extensive research exists on the advancement of women in the Japanese workforce (Hasanuma; Iida; Nakakubo; Roberts), there is a noticeable lack of studies in English that specifically address the career development of female principals. However, this topic has garnered attention among Japanese researchers in recent years.

In a study conducted by Fukasawa and Shigekawa, female elementary and middle school principals were interviewed to explore their career journeys and the challenges they face in balancing childcare and work. The findings highlighted the significance of individual efforts, family cooperation, and supportive workplaces in overcoming these difficulties. This emphasis on personal and contextual factors resonates with the experiences reported by female educators across different roles and contexts (213-224).

In contrast, Akashi and Tsuji's research focused on the perceptions of Japanese female primary school PE teachers regarding gender dynamics in their careers. Their study emphasized the importance of challenging gender stereotypes within specific professional domains, such as the perception that leadership roles in physical education are exclusively suitable for males. By advocating for greater gender inclusivity in leadership positions, the study aimed to empower female educators to pursue diverse career paths within the education sector (1-20).

Similarly, Sugiyama et al.'s study delved into the underlying reasons for women's reluctance to advance in their careers. Their findings revealed systemic barriers, including the challenging transition from teaching to managerial roles and the lack of institutional support for childcare and nursing care responsibilities. These challenges reflect broader societal norms and structures that perpetuate gender disparities in the workplace, accentuating the need for systemic change to promote gender equity in educational leadership (281-299).

3.3 Career Aspirations Among Students

Mikami et. al found that students who chose not to pursue teaching felt a disconnect between their idealized image of a teacher and the reality of the profession. This gap led them to believe that their aspirations could not be realized within the context of teaching, prompting them to pursue alternative career paths. Conversely, students who remained committed to becoming teachers acknowledged this disparity and adapted by forming a new understanding of the teaching profession. Positive experiences with influential teachers, engaging interactions with students, and effective practical training during teaching practice played significant roles in strengthening students' desire to pursue teaching careers. Anxiety stemming from perceived deficiencies in knowledge and skills, compounded by the collectivist

approach to education within schools, also influenced students' perceptions of teaching negatively. The authors advocate for viewing career indecision as a natural part of the process of developing a professional identity rather than a simple reaction to dissatisfaction with teaching (177-188).

Sano et al.'s research on the gender-role orientations of contemporary adolescents and how they relate to the ideal life course, highlighted the significant impact of childbearing and child-rearing responsibilities on women's career decisions. Despite holding equality-oriented views, women often faced greater pressure to prioritize family responsibilities over career advancement. A greater number of women chose to enrol in re-employment courses, involving a temporary withdrawal from the workforce for childcare purposes, followed by their subsequent return to employment at a later stage. This suggests that women perceive the burden of childcare as weighing heavily on themselves, with some feeling that their partners are not sufficiently supportive in sharing household and childcare responsibilities. This disparity accentuates the ongoing challenges women encounter in balancing work and family life. The study also revealed that men's perceptions of women's roles in the workforce often differed from women's own perceptions, indicating a disconnect in understanding between genders. Furthermore, both men and women tended to categorise certain types of work as inherently masculine or feminine, indicating entrenched gender norms within society (45-52).

Similarly, Watanabe et al.'s study revealed a gender disparity in career motivation, even among university students who had yet to enter the workforce, with males displaying higher aspirations for promotion compared to females. This finding reflects broader societal trends regarding gendered expectations in the workplace. Additionally, the study found that females often cited concerns about work-life balance and family responsibilities as factors influencing their career decisions (289-298).

Etsuyo Nishigaki's study further elucidates the persistence of traditional gender norms in Japan. The majority of female students expressed a preference for becoming housewives after marriage and childbirth, indicating societal expectations regarding women's roles in family life and the persistence of traditional gender roles in family and work life. Additionally, the study found that even among those who desired to continue working, concerns about childcare and support from partners influenced their career aspirations (287).

Previous research has predominantly focused on singular perspectives within the Japanese educational landscape, offering valuable insights into the challenges and aspirations of various groups. However, there remains a notable gap in the literature concerning the intersectionality of career aspirations among future female educators and the experiences of retired female principals. By blending findings from studies

exploring gender dynamics in teaching careers and the broader societal context influencing career decisions, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the complex factors shaping women's career trajectories in education.

4. Materials and Methodology

This study examines career progression within the teaching profession with a particular focus on the career aspirations of prospective female teachers' and the insights gleaned from experienced female principals. Additionally, it explores their perceptions and experiences concerning the influence of gender on their careers. The research is divided into two parts, and by combining the findings from both quantitative and qualitative data with similar previous research, the aim is to discuss the topic from several perspectives.

Part one – Investigation of the career aspirations of future female teachers in Miyagi Prefecture and their perceptions of the impact of gender on their future careers.

Part two – Exploration of the specific experiences of former female principals in Miyagi Prefecture regarding teaching and family life, as well as their thoughts on the survey results.

Against this backdrop the research questions are formulated as follows:

1. How do the career aspirations of future female teachers intersect with the experiences and perspectives of retired female principals regarding the impact of gender in the teaching profession?

The sub-questions draw upon the collected data and are formulated as follows:

2. Considering the data acquired in the first part of the research that only 35% of future female teachers aspire to higher positions, what institutional and societal barriers, including both the general societal challenges and the specific barriers experienced within the education system, might hinder their promotional aspirations? How do former female principals perceive these barriers?
3. In examining the impact of family life on career trajectories, how do the perceptions of future female teachers align with the reflections of retired female principals, and what lessons can be learned to better support teachers in managing family and professional responsibilities?

4. Reflecting on the statistics provided by the Gender Equality Bureau showing that the proportion of female educators decreases as the educational institution moves up the ladder (Japan, 6), what insights can be gained from retired female principals regarding the challenges faced by women in reaching leadership roles?

4.1 Materials

As stated earlier, the study is structured into two parts. In the first part, a questionnaire featuring a mixture of closed-ended and open-ended questions was developed to investigate the future career aspirations of individuals currently studying to become teachers. This segment investigates the perceptions, thoughts, and goals of the students, focusing on gender inequality in career development within the education field. Questionnaires were chosen as the method to efficiently gather extensive data from students within a limited time frame. The data obtained from this questionnaire was then analysed and utilised in formulating questions for the semi-structured interviews conducted in the second part of the study. Semi-structured interviews were selected as the preferred method to explore the participants' perspectives and gain a deeper understanding of their experiences.

The questionnaire was administered online using Google Forms to students at Miyagi University of Education (MUE) from January 18th to February 17th, 2023, garnering 28 responses, with 23 of them coming from female students. With the criterion being that they are currently pursuing a teaching career, the participants for the questionnaire were chosen through snowball sampling, one of the most common forms of purposeful sampling and where existing study subjects recruit future subjects among their acquaintances (Merriam 97-98). For this study, only the results from the 23 female respondents are considered.

From Miyagi prefecture, three former female elementary school principals, all alumni of MUE, volunteered to partake in this research. Data was collected through semi-structured individual interviews, conducted in person at the MUE campus from February 20th to 21st, 2023. The participants were selected using purposeful sampling, which involves choosing individuals believed to contribute plentiful and meaningful content relevant to the study's purpose (Merriam 96). For this study, the criteria were being female and having achieved the status of principal. After booking the interviews through email, each interviewee was sent the interview questions with information about the aim of the study and how the response data will be used. Interviews consisted of open-ended questions, recorded with a digital voice recorder by the researcher, and later transcribed into text data. Conducted primarily in Japanese, the interviews' transcripts and translations were undertaken by the researcher. Subsequently, a native Japanese speaker proficient in English reviewed

both transcripts and translations for accuracy and clarity.

4.2 Method of Data Collection

Giannakaki suggests that employing both quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study can contribute to unveiling diverse aspects of the phenomenon under investigation, offering a more holistic comprehension of it (323). Therefore, with the aim of uncovering and gaining a more profound and comprehensive understanding of this unique gender distribution phenomenon, this study uses an explanatory sequential design, a type of mixed methods research. The fundamental idea behind an explanatory sequential research design is that a subsequent dataset explains, to a certain degree, findings from another dataset previously analysed within a study, merging the strengths of each of the two method types (Guest and Namey 590-591).

Self-completion Questionnaire

The questionnaire is a common device and valuable tool for collecting information needed for a study due to its time-saving nature and highly structured format. It proves to be a suitable method for collecting both quantitative and qualitative data (Taherdoost 14). The questionnaire used in this study employs both close-ended and open-ended questions.

According to Hyman and Sierra, close-ended questions offer a swift data analysis without extensive manual calculations. Additionally, close-ended questions require less time for participants to answer, simplifying the survey completion process and potentially boosting the overall response rate. However, their limitation lies in eliciting less in-depth responses, possibly failing to fully capture the respondent's attitude (155-157).

Conversely, although open-ended questions are weighted unintentionally by respondent articulateness, they grant survey participants the freedom to respond in their own words, providing additional context to their answers and making them ideal for elaborating on close-ended inquiries (Hyman and Sierra 154-155). By incorporating a mix of close-ended and open-ended questions in the survey design, the aim is to leverage the strengths of both approaches while addressing their respective limitations.

Semi-structured Interviews

In a semi-structured interview, the primary focus is on capturing the interviewee's perspective and unravelling the significance of their experiences. This approach strikes a balance by providing a certain structure to address specific topics related to the study phenomenon while allowing participants the flexibility to contribute new insights, fostering a rich array of possibilities (Galletta 23-24, 47).

Additionally, semi-structured interviews have gained prominence as a data-gathering method within the framework of feminist research, aligning well with the essence of this study, which revolves around gender studies. The strength of semi-structured interviews in feminist research lies in its capacity to amplify women's voices, letting them articulate their experiences in their own words. Feminist researchers advocate that semi-structured interviews facilitate a high level of rapport between the interviewer and interviewee, fostering reciprocity and creating a non-hierarchical relationship (Bryman 491-493).

Given the formulation of the research questions and the aim of the study, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the most suitable interview method. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of individual experiences, enabling the uncovering of participants' narratives and perspectives on the influence of gender on their careers, yielding a more comprehensive understanding in alignment with the research focus.

4.3 Method of Analysis

In the initial phase of this study, the data collected from the questionnaire was analysed and utilised in developing the questions for the semi-structured interviews, which formed the basis for the subsequent phase. Following the completion of interviews, a comprehensive mixed-methods analysis was conducted, integrating descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. This mixed-method analysis, initially focused on questionnaire responses, was expanded to incorporate interview data. Thematic analysis was applied to interview transcripts, followed by a comparative examination of findings from both questionnaires and interviews.

Mixed Methods Analysis

Mixed methods analysis is defined as a research approach wherein the investigator collects, analyses, integrates findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative methods within a single study. Throughout the research process, mixing takes place through merging, connecting, or embedding, occurring at different stages such as data collection, analysis, or interpretation (“The Sage Encyclopedia” 526-527).

In this study, a mixed methods analysis approach was employed by integrating both qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data, gathered from semi-structured interviews, provided rich insights into participants' perspectives and experiences. Meanwhile, the quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires offered numerical representations of participants' responses, allowing for statistical analysis.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics involve mathematically summarizing a large set of observed values into a few key numbers. In qualitative research, integrating these statistics

serves to augment researchers' understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, enriching the overall analysis. The inclusion of quantitative data not only enhances the validity, credibility, trustworthiness, and transferability of the findings but also offers a complementary perspective to qualitative inquiry, thereby providing a comprehensive framework for analysis (source: "The Sage Encyclopedia" 209).

Thematic Analysis

Braun and Clarke describe thematic analysis as a method aimed at identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within datasets. It involves organizing and depicting data with rich detail and sometimes delving into interpretations of various aspects of the research topic. Unlike more complex qualitative analysis methods like grounded theory, thematic analysis offers accessibility, making it suitable for researchers without extensive theoretical or technological expertise. It serves as a foundational approach, recommended by Braun and Clarke as the first qualitative analysis method for researchers to acquire. With its theoretical flexibility, thematic analysis provides a versatile and effective research tool capable of yielding detailed and nuanced insights into data. It can adopt an essentialist or realist approach, focusing on reporting the experiences, meanings, and realities of participants, or a constructionist approach, examining how various discourses shape events, realities, meanings, and experiences within society. Consequently, thematic analysis operates both to reflect reality and to uncover the underlying layers of 'reality' (78-87).

To analyse the data from the semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis approach was followed. The interviews were transcribed, and the data were thoroughly familiarized with. Initial codes were generated systematically across the dataset, and potential themes were identified and named by collating relevant data. These themes were then reviewed and refined in relation to the coded extracts and the entire dataset. In this study, three main themes were identified under the topic "gender issues in career development in the teaching profession": (1) marriage and childcare; (2) the environment; and (3) no hope, no vision. A deeper analysis of these topics is included in the analysis section.

Comparison on the Data from Questionnaires and Interviews

Comparison is fundamental in social sciences research, involving the examination of various entities or time periods to identify significant similarities and differences. This comparative analysis can occur between different entities, including individuals, interviews, statements, settings, themes, groups, or cases, as well as across different points in time. The goal is to isolate and analyse prominent similarities and differences within the data, providing insights into the phenomena under study ("The Sage Encyclopedia" 100).

Throughout and after conducting thematic analysis on both the interview and questionnaire data, a comparative approach was utilized to identify similarities and differences in the themes that surfaced. By comparing the results from the interviews and questionnaires, the points of intersection and divergence within the data were examined.

5. Results

5.1 Teacher Students

The questionnaires were conducted at Miyagi University of Education, a national institution dedicated to the training of educators for kindergarten, primary, middle, and high school, as well as special needs education. Additionally, the university offers an advanced program for Professional Teacher Education, aimed at preparing teachers for leadership roles within schools (“Miyagi University of Education”). In 2023, upon graduating, 72.5% of the 337 teacher graduates secured teaching positions, surpassing the national average of 67.8%. This figure reflects a notable increase of 6.2 percentage points compared to the previous year, marking the highest employment rate recorded by the university to date. Moreover, the teacher employment rate demonstrated a steady upward trend, with a 4.0 percentage point increase compared to the preceding year. Notably, among Japan's 44 national teacher training universities, the University is unique in its consecutive two-year increase in teacher employment rates by more than 4 percent (“Miyagi University of Education”).

Questionnaire Results

A questionnaire featuring a mixture of closed-ended and open-ended questions was developed to investigate the future career aspirations of individuals currently studying to become teachers. The presented data specifically pertains to responses from 23 female participants.

As illustrated in figure 1, when asked to respond to the question [I would like to have the opportunity for promotion one day (e.g. to become a principal)] only 35% of the respondents stated they agreed, whilst 31% did not feel strongly one way or the other, and the remaining 34% stated they disagreed. Upon further examination of the respondents with career aspirations responses to other survey inquiries (as detailed in table 1), it becomes evident that the perception among the majority is that both men and women have equal opportunities for career advancement within the teaching profession. Additionally, the consensus leans towards the belief that male and female teachers are treated equally in the workplace (see fig. 2). However, a minority who hold a contrary view mention concerns such as re-employment after childbirth and the perceived dominance of men in higher positions as factors influencing their perspective (see table 1).

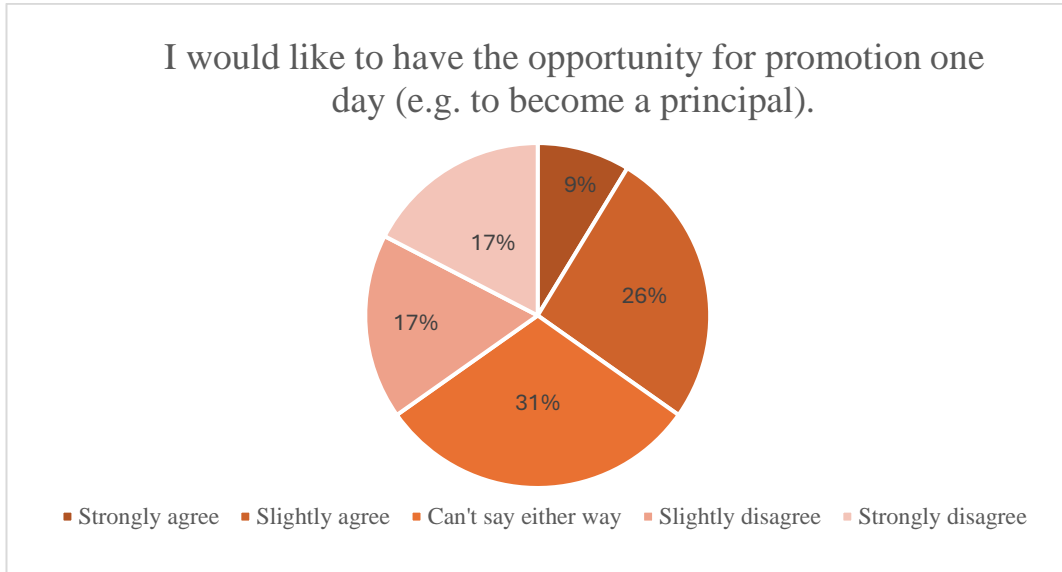


Fig. 1: Desire for Future Career Advancement

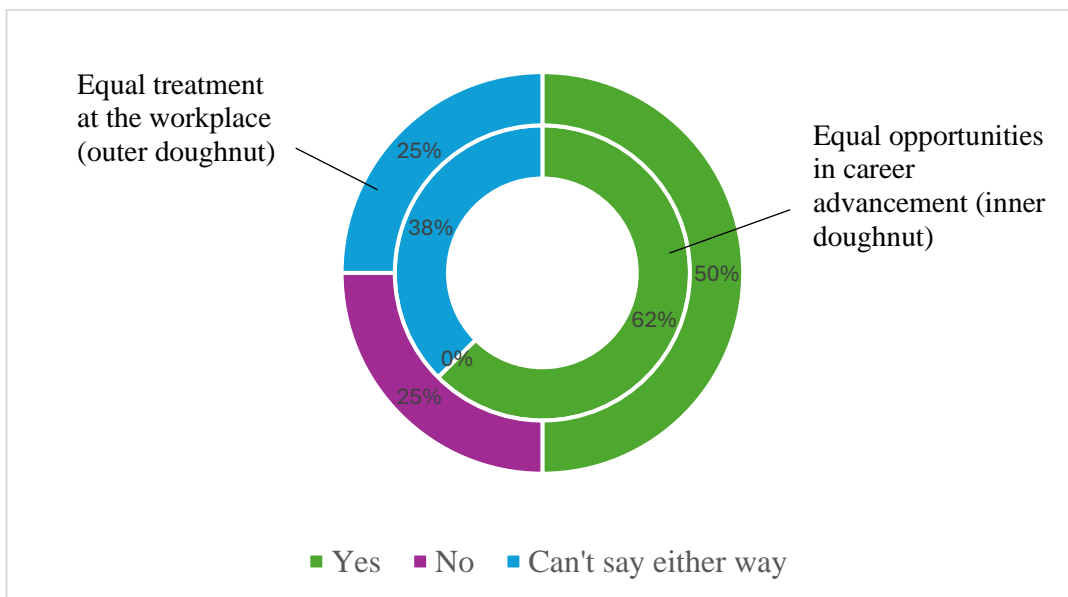


Fig. 2: Perception of Equality at the Workplace Among Respondents with Aspirations for Career Advancement

Table 1: Respondents with Aspirations for Career Advancement

Name	Major study	Age	<i>I would like to have the opportunity for promotion one day (e.g. to become a principal)</i>	<i>If you agree, do you see any potential problems or struggles you would have to overcome to achieve that?</i>	<i>In my occupation, I think that women and men have the same opportunities to advance in their careers</i>	<i>I think that on the whole male and female teachers are treated equally in the workplace</i>	<i>If I start a family in the future, I plan on quitting my job</i>	<i>What aspects and areas of the workplace or career development opportunities do you feel are unequal?</i>
Student_2	Primary Education	19	<i>I slightly agree.</i>	<i>I think strong desire is necessary. I also think it's difficult to maintain that desire for a long time.</i>	<i>I strongly agree.</i>	<i>I can't say either way.</i>	<i>I strongly disagree.</i>	<i>I don't know if it's unfair, but since physical differences don't diminish, I think it's difficult to be treated equally.</i>
Student_3	Primary Education	19	<i>I slightly agree.</i>		<i>I can't say either way.</i>	<i>I slightly disagree.</i>	<i>I strongly disagree.</i>	<i>Female return to society after childbirth.</i>
Student_4	Primary Education	19	<i>I strongly agree.</i>	<i>The ability to unite the surrounding teachers becomes necessary.</i>	<i>I strongly agree.</i>	<i>I slightly agree.</i>	<i>I slightly disagree.</i>	<i>Women need maternity and childcare leave.</i>
Student_12	Special Needs Education Teacher Training Course, Visual Impairment Education Course	22	<i>I slightly agree.</i>	<i>There is the struggle of improving skills related to school management, which are necessary for becoming an administrator.</i>	<i>I slightly agree.</i>	<i>I slightly disagree.</i>	<i>I strongly disagree.</i>	<i>There's a strong image that men are more likely to hold higher positions.</i>
Student_16	Special Needs Education	19	<i>I slightly agree.</i>		<i>I slightly agree.</i>	<i>I slightly agree.</i>	<i>I strongly disagree.</i>	<i>Losing one's position after maternity leave, etc.</i>
Student_21	Primary Education	19	<i>I slightly agree.</i>	<i>Mental training.</i>	<i>I slightly agree.</i>	<i>I slightly agree.</i>	<i>I strongly disagree.</i>	<i>I feel like there's a difference in the number of male and female teachers.</i>
Student_22	Primary Education	19	<i>I slightly agree.</i>	<i>Indeed. Because women are more affected by life stages compared to men.</i>	<i>I can't say either way.</i>	<i>I slightly agree.</i>	<i>I can't say either way.</i>	<i>Restrictions on how to take breaks due to differences in gender and family composition.</i>
Student_23	Music Education	20	<i>I strongly agree.</i>	<i>I feel that in Japan, men are more likely to have difficulty with promotions compared to women.</i>	<i>I can't say either way.</i>	<i>I can't say either way.</i>	<i>I strongly disagree.</i>	<i>Opportunities for promotion may be taken away due to gender differences.</i>

Upon closer examination of the respondents who do not express a desire for career advancement (as indicated in table 2), it becomes apparent that only one individual perceives equal treatment in career opportunities. In contrast, the overwhelming majority either perceive unequal treatment or refrain from giving a definitive opinion. Likewise, a significant proportion believe that male and female teachers are not treated equally in the workplace, while the remainder abstain from expressing a clear stance (see fig. 3).

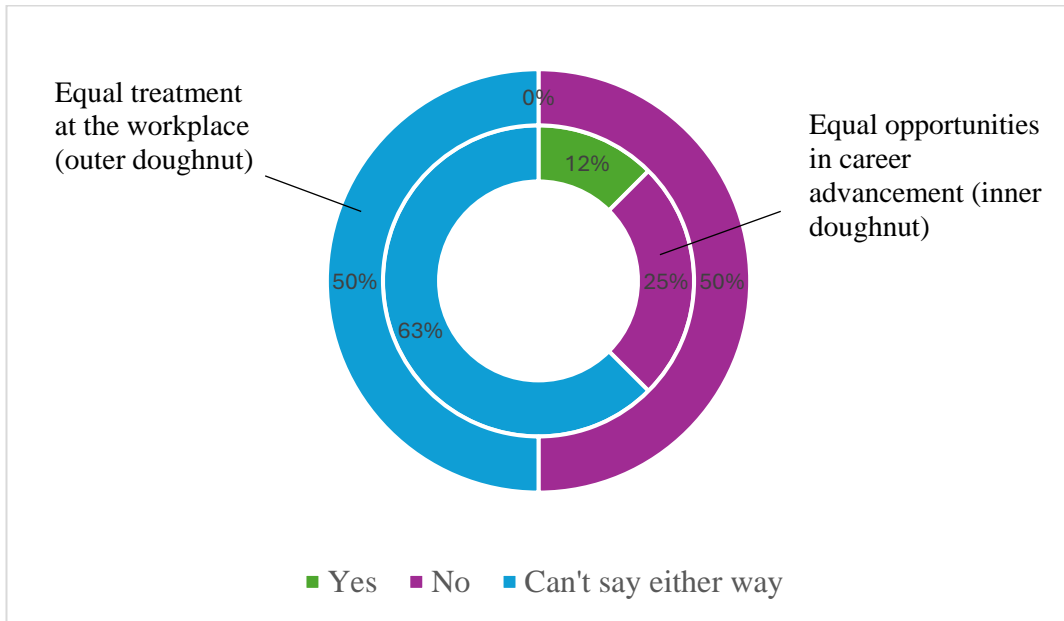


Fig. 3: Perception of Equality at the Workplace Among Respondents Without Aspirations for Career Advancement

Examining the responses to the question "if I start a family in the future, I plan on quitting my job" (see table 1 and 2), reveals an interesting trend. None of the students who express a desire for career advancement intend to leave their jobs if they start a family. Conversely, among the students who do not seek advancement opportunities, three out of eight plan to quit their jobs in the event of starting a family. Notably, all three of these students also perceive unequal treatment between women and men in the workplace.

Table 2: Respondents Without Aspirations for Career Advancement

Name	Major study	Age	<i>I would like to have the opportunity for promotion one day (e.g. to become a principal)</i>	<i>In my occupation, I think that women and men have the same opportunities to advance in their careers</i>	<i>I think that on the whole male and female teachers are treated equally in the workplace</i>	<i>If I start a family in the future, I plan on quitting my job</i>	<i>What aspects and areas of the workplace or career development opportunities do you feel are unequal?</i>
Student_5	Primary Education	19	<i>I slightly disagree.</i>	<i>I strongly agree.</i>	<i>I can't say either way.</i>	<i>I strongly disagree.</i>	<i>There's maternity and childcare leave for women, but I've never seen such a system set up for men.</i>
Student_6	Secondary Education, Japanese	19	<i>I strongly disagree.</i>	<i>I can't say either way.</i>	<i>I slightly disagree.</i>	<i>I slightly disagree.</i>	<i>Women may take maternity and childcare leave, so they may not be entrusted with major responsibilities.</i>
Student_10	Primary Education	19	<i>I slightly disagree.</i>	<i>I can't say either way.</i>	<i>I can't say either way.</i>	<i>I slightly disagree.</i>	<i>I don't see many female teachers advancing in their careers.</i>
Student_13	Primary Education	19	<i>I strongly disagree.</i>	<i>I slightly disagree.</i>	<i>I slightly disagree.</i>	<i>I slightly agree.</i>	<i>Currently, most women are responsible for childcare and housework, so they have to quit their jobs or take breaks, making it difficult for them to devote themselves compared to men.</i>
Student_14	Music Education	20	<i>I strongly disagree.</i>	<i>I can't say either way.</i>	<i>I slightly disagree.</i>	<i>I slightly agree.</i>	<i>I get the impression that male teachers are often hired for student guidance roles.</i>
Student_15	Special Needs Education	19	<i>I slightly disagree.</i>	<i>I slightly disagree.</i>	<i>I can't say either way.</i>	<i>I strongly disagree.</i>	<i>Unmarried women may feel restricted in their future marriage and pregnancy concerns, preventing them from doing the work they want to do, which feels unequal.</i>
Student_18	Primary Education	19	<i>I strongly disagree.</i>	<i>I can't say either way.</i>	<i>I slightly disagree.</i>	<i>I slightly agree.</i>	<i>While it's said that office casual attire is acceptable, there are more detailed rules for women. Makeup is considered a given, so there's also a financial burden of makeup products. The weight of the phrase "watch your appearance" is different for men and women.</i>
Student_19	Primary Education	19	<i>I slightly disagree.</i>	<i>I can't say either way.</i>	<i>I can't say either way.</i>	<i>I strongly disagree.</i>	<i>There are many men in management positions.</i>

When considering the motivations behind students' decisions to pursue teaching careers, they can be categorized into two primary groups: Personal Enjoyment Motivation (PEM) and Societal Impact Motivation (SIM). In the PEM category, students express reasons such as "I like children," "I enjoy teaching," and "I aspire to be like the teacher I admire," which are driven by personal satisfaction and fulfilment derived directly from the act of teaching. These motivations are rooted in the intrinsic joy individuals experience when engaging with teaching and interacting with children. In contrast, the SIM category comprises reasons such as "I seek to contribute to society or children's development" and "I want to make a change," emphasizing the broader societal impact or outcomes of teaching rather than the inherent joy of teaching itself. Such motivations indicate a desire to enact positive societal change or make meaningful contributions to the lives of children. However, it is noteworthy that one respondent diverges from these categories by not wanting to pursue a teaching career at all.

When categorizing the participants into these two distinct groups (see fig. 4), it becomes evident that the majority of students in the Societal Impact Motivation (SIM) category reported having female role models (58.3%), whereas the Personal Enjoyment Motivation (PEM) category had a lower percentage in this regard (37.5%). Notably, as seen in figure 5 and 6, the SIM group also exhibited a higher inclination towards seeking opportunities for career advancement (35,7% compared to 25% in the PEM group), along with a greater proportion of respondents expressing the belief that women and men do not have equal career opportunities (21.4% in the SIM group versus 0% in the PEM group). However, a larger proportion of respondents in the PEM category believed that there is unequal treatment between genders in the workplace (37.5% in PEM versus 28.6% in SIM).

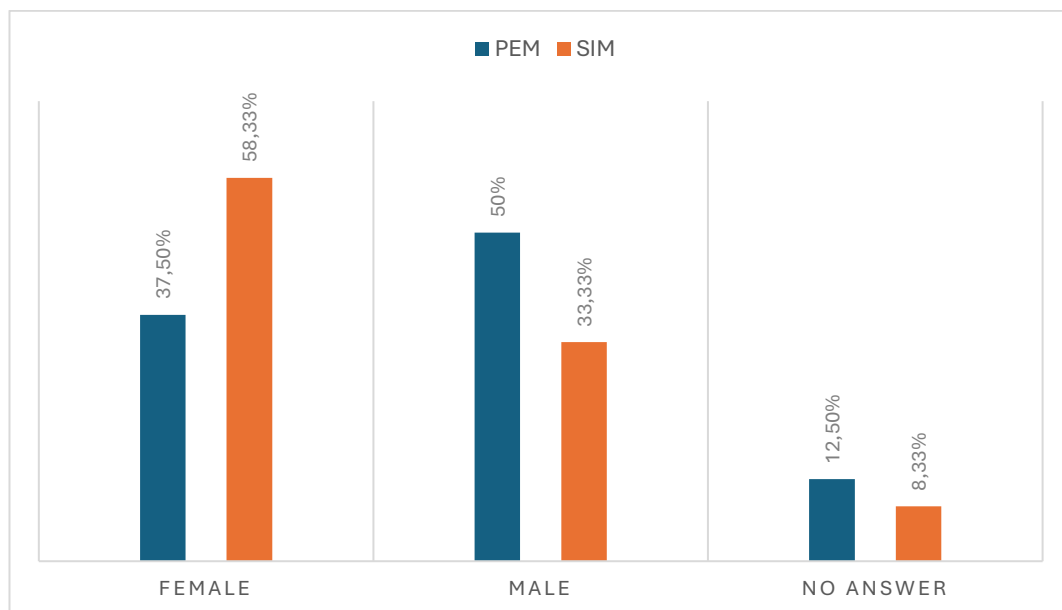


Fig. 4: Gender of Role Models

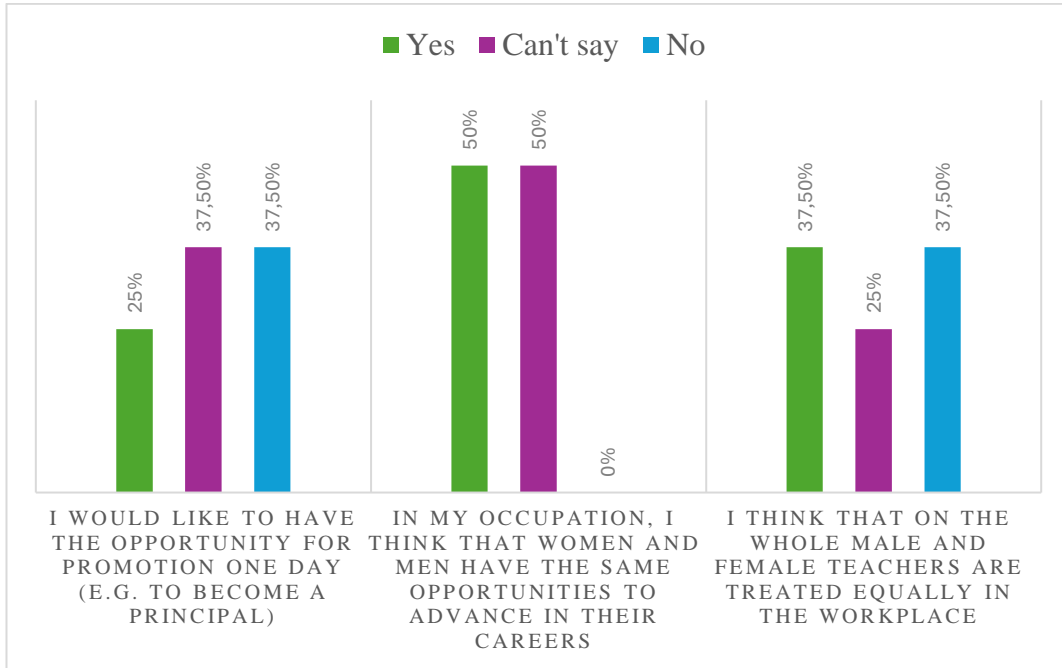


Fig. 5: Personal Enjoyment Motivation (PEM) Group

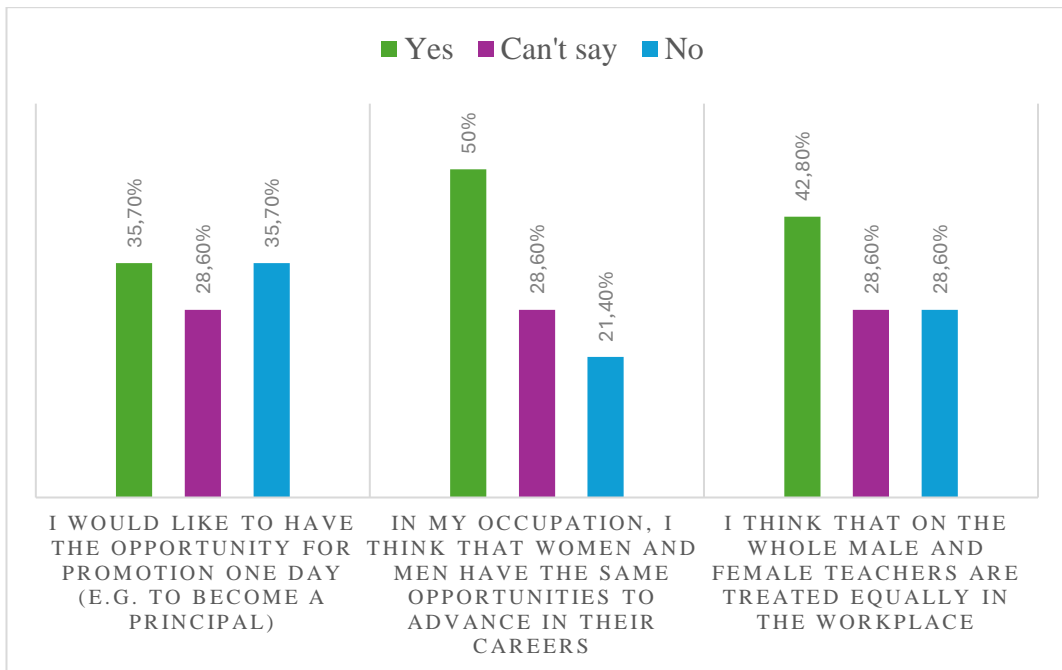


Fig. 6: Societal Impact Motivation (SIM) Group

5.2 Principals

To ascend to the positions of principal or vice-principal in Japan, educators typically undergo an examination for promotion to an administrative role after gaining experience across multiple schools through regular personnel transfers. The specific

procedures for selection and appointment to these leadership positions are determined by each prefectural board of education (Fujita 27). In Miyagi Prefecture, the appointment of principals is made by the Head of Department at the Municipal Board of Education. Eligibility criteria include being under 58 years old and having a minimum of 2 years of experience as a vice-principal (MEXT).

In May 2020, gender representation in Miyagi Prefecture's educational institutions varied: 92.0% of kindergarten staff, 60.0% of elementary school staff, 44.9% of middle school staff, and 28.7% of high school staff were female. However, female representation in managerial positions in elementary schools, such as principals and vice-principals, remains disproportionately low, constituting approximately one-fifth of the total female teaching staff. This trend is consistent with nationwide patterns (Miyagi Prefectural Government).

According to the FY2020 Survey on Public School Teacher Personnel Administration Status, the number of female managers, including principals and vice-principals, increased by 811 individuals from April 1st, 2022, reaching a total of 15,914. Notably, the percentage of women in managerial roles, encompassing principals, vice-principals, and vice-headmasters, has reached 23.7%, the highest recorded figure to date. This achievement aligns with the numerical targets outlined in the Fifth Basic Plan for Gender Equality, which set proportions of 20% and 25% for principals and vice-principals, respectively (MEXT).

In this study, three former female elementary school principals from Miyagi Prefecture, all alumni of MUE, were interviewed using semi-structured individual interviews. The interviews were conducted primarily in Japanese, with the researcher transcribing and translating the interviews. Subsequently, a native Japanese speaker proficient in English reviewed both transcripts and translations for accuracy and clarity. To maintain anonymity, the interviewees will be identified by numbers 1-3 (e.g., Interviewee_1). However, relevant demographic information such as age, marital status, and other pertinent details will be provided in Table 3.

Interview Results

Table 3: Interviewee information summary

Name	Interviewee_1	Interviewee_2	Interviewee_3
Age	64	64	62
Married	No	Yes	Yes
Kids	No	2 daughters	1 son
Maternity leave	No	Yes, 2 times	No, left work
School	Elementary school	Elementary school	Elementary school

None of the three interviewees, who were in their early 60s at the time of the interviews, initially aspired to become principals. The desire to pursue this career path emerged later in their professional journeys, shaped by diverse experiences they accumulated over time.

Among the interviewees, Interviewee_2 and Interviewee_3 entered marriages, whereas Interviewee_1 chose to remain single due to her dreams of pursuing overseas opportunities and concerns about maintaining work-life balance within a marriage. Both married interviewees faced challenges in balancing work and family responsibilities. Interviewee_2, who married a company employee, took maternity leave for both of her children. In contrast, Interviewee_3, who married another teacher, temporarily resigned from her teaching position to accompany her husband to Spain for his career. During their time abroad, they gave birth to their son and spent the early years of childcare in Spain before returning to Japan, where Interviewee_3 resumed her teaching career.

Despite the challenges associated with the role, all interviewees expressed a profound sense of pride and fulfilment in their work as principals. They acknowledged the existence of gender-based differential treatment, although Interviewee_1 did not have direct firsthand experience of it.

6. Analysis and Discussion

As described in the method of analysis section, thematic analysis was used to develop three main themes concerning “career development in the teaching profession” for women in different situations.

6.1 Theme 1: Marriage and Childcare

The theme of "marriage and childcare" emerges prominently in both the interview data and the questionnaire responses, reflecting a shared concern among educators regarding work-life balance within the teaching profession. All interviewees highlighted the challenges women face in managing their professional responsibilities alongside marriage and childcare commitments. For instance, Interviewee_1 chose to remain single due to these exact challenges. Interviewee_2 and Interviewee_3, who were married and had children, recounted the complexities of navigating maternity leave and childcare responsibilities while maintaining their teaching careers. Similarly, findings from the questionnaire revealed that many students expressed apprehensions about the potential impact of marriage and childcare on their career advancement prospects.

In terms of career progression, motherhood often presents a significant obstacle. Interviewees revealed that superiors tend to assign "easier" administrative tasks to

mothers, citing the perceived burden of childcare and household responsibilities. Meanwhile, more critical roles are frequently assigned to males under the assumption that they are more suitable. This disparity in task allocation was attributed to several factors by the interviewees, including consideration for the challenges of balancing childcare and household chores, gender stereotypes regarding skill sets, and the overarching influence of a male-dominated societal structure.

The rooted societal norm of women predominantly assuming caregiving responsibilities while men primarily serve as providers was evident in both the narratives of the principals and the sentiments expressed by the students. This traditional gendered division of labour is further emphasized by the limited initiatives aimed at encouraging greater male involvement in parental leave and childcare duties. The efforts undertaken thus far, such as the preparation and distribution of a leaflet in 2020, the distribution of information about special leave on service bulletin boards in 2021, and the provision of a Q&A session along with materials outlining revisions to childcare leave policies in 2022, remain inadequate in scope (Miyagi Prefectural Government).

This is particularly evident in Interviewee_2's accounts, as the demanding work schedule of her spouse compelled her to shoulder primary responsibility for childcare while simultaneously fulfilling her duties as a full-time homeroom teacher.

Interviewee_2: "My husband is a company employee, so he works long hours too. So, he can't really help with childcare. We have the intention to cooperate, but time is scarce. Yeah, and then if the child gets sick, there's a dilemma of who takes them to the hospital, right? But when he says he can't do it, I'm the mother, so I have to do it, right? Those moments, they were tough, you know? But if I let those feelings show to my daughters, they'll be sad, right? So, I had to bear it myself. I had to endure it. There were times like that for about 10 or 15 years, you know?"

According to the findings outlined in the White Paper on Gender Equality 2023, there appears to be a notable disjunction between the aspirations and actions of men regarding childcare leave. While approximately 54% of men in their 20s expressed a desire to take at least one month of childcare leave, 22.7% preferred a couple of days, and 20.8% had no preference, the empirical data on the actual length of childcare leave taken by men reveals a starkly different picture. Specifically, only 35.3% of men employed in the private sector take more than one month of childcare leave, with 13.2% taking two to three weeks, and 51.5% taking less than two weeks (Japan 20). This discrepancy between stated preferences and observed behaviours points out a significant gap between ideals and realities concerning men's engagement with childcare responsibilities. Addressing this disconnection requires

comprehensive strategies aimed at promoting a more supportive and inclusive environment for men to actively participate in childcare duties, thereby bridging the disparity between aspiration and practice in the realm of parental leave.

In the 2020 Sendai City Citizen Awareness Survey on Gender Equality Report, the primary obstacle cited by both men and women hindering women's participation in the workforce was the challenge of balancing work with household responsibilities such as housework, childcare, and caregiving, with 79.6% of men and 88.6% of women expressing this sentiment. Additionally, when asked about the essential factors needed to become community leaders, the second most common response among women was the lack of support from husbands and other family members in tasks related to child-rearing, caregiving, and housework, with 42.0% of respondents highlighting this issue (Sendai City).

In Miyagi Prefecture, the gender disparity in household responsibilities remains pronounced, as evidenced by the stark contrast in time spent on housework, nursing, and childcare between employed women and men. According to data from 2016, employed women dedicated an average of 2 hours and 31 minutes per day to these tasks, whereas their male counterparts allocated a mere 21 minutes. Remarkably, this pattern has persisted since the previous survey, which was conducted in 2011, with no discernible change observed (Miyagi Prefectural Government “2021”).

Against this backdrop, the experience of Interviewee_3, who is married to another teacher, offers a compelling insight into the potential for equitable sharing of caregiving responsibilities within the household. Interviewee_3 emphasizes the pivotal role played by her supportive husband in balancing both her professional pursuits and childcare duties. Notably, she attributes their successful navigation of parenthood to their initial experiences in Spain, where active involvement of both parents in childrearing is considered standard practice. This anecdote accentuates the transformative impact of cultural norms on shaping gender dynamics within familial contexts, highlighting the importance of fostering environments that encourage shared caregiving responsibilities irrespective of gender.

Interviewee_3: “When I gave birth in Spain, I had to go to the pediatrician with my husband without fail. Taking the child along, like twice a month, and then when we had some errands and returned to Japan, I wanted to take my child to the pediatrician here. When we were told, “Mrs. Interviewee_3, please come in,” my husband and I entered the examination room together. Then, there was only one chair in the room. The nurse said, “Oh! Is the father coming in too?” and brought in another chair. At that moment, I thought, “Huh?!”. In Spain, if you brought the child alone, you'd be scolded; you had to bring both parents, but in Japan, I found it odd to enter the examination room as a couple. I thought maybe I was raising the child alone, but in Japan,

raising children seems to equate to women. So, when it becomes like, "Men should work outside," I sometimes think, "What's going on here?" There are some peculiar aspects to Japan, aren't there?"

It is intriguing to note that insights from the White Paper on Gender Equality 2023 reveal shifting dynamics within households with children, particularly concerning preferences for the allocation of time between work and household responsibilities. Interestingly, women express a desire to decrease the time devoted to housework and childcare, while men exhibit an inclination towards reducing their work hours and increasing involvement in household and childcare duties. This trend is particularly pronounced among the younger generation, suggesting a notable departure from traditional gender roles, and signalling an evolving paradigm of ideal lifestyle in Japan (Japan, 2023).

When analysing the students' responses, it became evident that many expressed concerns regarding re-entering the workforce after maternity leave. However, the principals unanimously agreed that the re-entry process is more favourable in the field of education compared to other occupations, as individuals are guaranteed re-entry opportunities. This sentiment was echoed by Interviewee_2, who initially shared apprehensions about returning to work after her first maternity leave. However, she reported that her concerns gradually dissipated as she readjusted to her professional responsibilities. Moreover, Interviewee_2 noted a positive shift in the landscape of childcare support in Japan, suggesting that the current environment may offer even better support for individuals returning to work after maternity leave compared to her own experience.

In conclusion, the exploration of the theme of "Marriage and Childcare" highlights the significant challenges women in the teaching profession face in managing their careers alongside familial responsibilities. The narratives of interviewees and sentiments expressed by students reveal the pervasive influence of traditional gender norms, which perpetuate the unequal distribution of caregiving responsibilities. Despite the limited initiatives undertaken by the Miyagi Prefectural Government aimed at promoting greater male involvement in childcare duties, the burden disproportionately falls on women, as evidenced by Interviewee_2's accounts and the persistent gender disparity in household responsibilities. However, Interviewee_3's experience offers a glimpse of hope, illustrating the transformative potential of equitable sharing of caregiving duties within the household.

Furthermore, insights from the White Paper on Gender Equality 2023 shed light on shifting dynamics within households, indicating a departure from traditional gender roles among the younger generation. Considering these findings, it becomes imperative for educational institutions and policymakers to implement supportive policies and practices that foster gender equality and work-life balance within the

teaching profession. Only through concerted efforts can genuine progress be made towards creating inclusive environments that enable both men and women to thrive professionally and personally.

6.2 Theme 2: The Environment

The second theme, "the environment" encompasses various aspects such as societal norms, organizational dynamics, and cultural remnants that significantly impact female educators and their career trajectories. Beyond the confines of educational institutions, Japan grapples with well-documented gender issues, as highlighted in the low rankings in the 2023 Global Gender Gap Report (World Economic Forum). This data shows the stark underrepresentation of women in influential positions, indicative of pervasive gender inequality deeply entrenched within societal structures.

Although there appears to be a general perception among both students and principals that the educational sector offers relatively more equitable opportunities, a closer examination reveals underlying disparities. While the gender gap within education may seem narrower compared to other sectors, the majority of significant leadership positions are still occupied by men. A compensatory factor mentioned is that women often have the flexibility to return home to fulfil childcare responsibilities, while their younger male counterparts may step in to assist by assuming their tasks.

Interviewee_3: "In elementary schools, there are many female teachers, so it was easier for female teachers to leave work to pick up their children. I was often encouraged by senior teachers and colleagues who had finished raising their children, and there was a culture in elementary schools where it was okay for female teachers to leave work to pick up their children."

"Male teachers, on the other hand, weren't as understanding. However, I feel like my male colleagues who were also raising children understood. But perhaps they weren't understood by male administrators at the time. Yes, colleagues. Yes. Colleagues in the same position were very warm and supportive."

This quote sheds light on the gender dynamics within elementary school environments, where female teachers often receive more support and understanding regarding childcare responsibilities compared to their male counterparts. It accentuates a culture of mutual support among female educators, allowing them to leave work early to attend to their children with acceptance and reciprocity from senior teachers and colleagues.

However, the disparity in support becomes apparent when considering male teachers, who may not receive the same level of understanding, especially from male administrators. Despite some mutual understanding among male colleagues balancing childcare responsibilities, the lack of support from higher-ups highlights a significant disparity within the educational sector.

Furthermore, while women may have the flexibility to fulfil childcare responsibilities, their male counterparts may perceive themselves as working more rigorously for potentially less compensation. This paradox raises questions about the fairness of workload distribution and compensation within the educational sector.

When it comes to the question of whether men and women have the same opportunities for career advancement, the perspectives varied quite a bit both among the students and the principals. Interviewee_1 held the belief that gender does not inherently determine one's ability to become a principal; rather, success in this role depends on an individual's determination and drive. In contrast, Interviewee_3 expressed the view that women face greater obstacles due to deeply entrenched traditional gender roles, which historically favoured men. According to her, these ingrained societal norms make it difficult to advocate for gender equality, as men have traditionally been held in higher esteem. This sentiment resonated with many students, as several also mentioned the perception of men being favoured.

Interviewee_2 emphasized the significance of the surrounding environment in determining the possibility of a woman ascending to the position of principal. She highlighted the challenges of balancing childcare responsibilities alongside professional duties, noting that the ability to focus entirely on work is compromised in such circumstances. For Interviewee_2, achieving gender equality in leadership roles is dependent not only on individual aspirations but also on the level of support provided by the organizational environment and at home. She emphasised the systematic barriers that contribute to the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions within the educational context.

Interviewee_2: "There are more male managers, and men tend to appoint other men. 'Next, you.' It's usually men appointing men, not so much men appointing women. So, if there aren't more female managers, women's positions and careers won't advance either."

This comment points out the existence of a pervasive pattern where men, who predominantly occupy managerial roles, tend to appoint other men, perpetuating a cycle of male dominance in leadership.

During the interview with Interviewee_1, the term "*nomination*" (a blend of "drink" and "communication" in Japanese) was introduced, highlighting a prevalent practice in Japanese society where important information is informally shared and networking occurs during after-work drinking gatherings. However, motherhood presents a barrier to participation in these events, limiting opportunities for networking and access to crucial information. Aki Iida's research corroborates this observation, noting that women who are excluded from such homosocial environments face disadvantages in terms of career advancement. This leads to an information disparity between employees who engage in off-the-job communication and those who do not, with women often lacking essential information and communication opportunities necessary to cultivate relationships with their superiors and colleagues (Iida, 2023). Consistent with the findings of this study, Iida's research also indicates that in such environments, women are expected to exert greater effort and adopt a more traditionally masculine approach to work in order to secure promotions (Iida, 2023).

Interviewee_1 and Interviewee_3 both mentioned the persistent influence of cultural remnants, where the husband's career often takes precedence over that of the wife's. This dynamic is especially pronounced in occupations like teaching, where many couples work within the same profession. In such cases, women may voluntarily step back to allow their husbands to seize career opportunities first, in order to avoid negative societal perceptions. Additionally, both interviewees highlighted the inherent obstacles women face in advancing to managerial positions, exacerbated by the shrinking number of available roles due to declining birth rates and subsequent school closures. As opportunities diminish, the pervasive perception of male predominance in leadership roles further compounds the challenge for women aspiring to ascend the educational hierarchy.

Another significant concern within the educational context is the issue of unfavourable working conditions, particularly for mothers. The demanding nature of the principal's role, as emphasised by Interviewee_1 and Interviewee_2, often entails long working hours that are incompatible with childcare responsibilities. This prolonged workday, coupled with the immense responsibilities of overseeing an entire school, creates a substantial burden for individuals in leadership positions. Despite the demanding nature of their roles, the compensation, including salary, may not adequately reflect the level of responsibility and effort required.

Interviewee_1: "I think being a principal is the hardest work, after all. Especially in the case of schools, vice principals have to be at school by 7 in the morning. Finishing can really take a long time, like until 7 in the evening or even later, sometimes. That's one thing. And the second thing is that the responsibility becomes immense. In a classroom, it's just the children in that

class, but in a school, there are a tremendous number of responsibilities, and yet, the salary isn't particularly high."

"[...] in Japan, even during holidays, you often have to go to school. Especially when you're in a management position. For example, even during summer vacation, vice principals and principals have to take turns being at school. It's quite difficult to take consecutive days off."

Interviewee_2: "Yeah, I don't find it difficult, but there are times when the environment I'm living in doesn't allow for it, I think. Being in a managerial position at school involves long, long working hours. So, coming home and cooking, doing the dishes, folding laundry, doing laundry, taking care of the children—those things really restrict, so I think the environment plays a big role."

This accentuates the pivotal role that the work environment plays in shaping individuals' ability to balance professional and personal responsibilities, particularly for mothers navigating the complexities of childcare and household chores alongside their careers.

It remains challenging to alter deeply rooted cultural and traditional beliefs, despite the enactment of laws promoting gender equality. The school, as a microcosm of society, reflects these enduring norms, suggesting that achieving genuine gender equality will require concerted efforts to challenge and reshape prevailing attitudes and practices. Having both men and women in leadership positions could help address concerns of all staff and improve communication and understanding among colleagues, as leaders play a crucial role in setting the tone and atmosphere of the workplace.

All three interviewees expressed a desire to instigate change and establish schools aligned with their own visions. Both Interviewee_2 and Interviewee_3 aspired to cultivate educational environments that fostered greater encouragement and positivity, benefiting both students and educators alike. Despite encountering gender-based disparities throughout their careers, they transformed these challenges into catalysts for personal and professional advancement, striving to effect positive transformations within their respective institutions.

6.3 Theme 3: No Hope, No Vision

The last theme, "no hope, no vision", discusses the intricate interplay between social constructs and individual life choices among respondents, highlighting the pivotal role of representation in shaping aspirations. Through the lens of this theme, it becomes evident that dreams are inherently constrained by the boundaries of one's

imagination, shaped and moulded by societal constructs that dictate the realm of possibilities.

As seen in Figure 1, only 35% of respondents expressed a desire for career advancement. Interestingly, this aligns closely with the experiences shared by the principals, as none of them originally aspired to become principals. In fact, Interviewee_2 didn't even contemplate becoming a teacher initially. However, as their teaching careers progressed and they gained insights from working in various schools, their aspirations evolved, driven by a desire to enact change and shape a school according to their own beliefs and visions. This emphasises the notion that dreams are often constrained by one's ability to imagine possibilities within their current environment.

Currently, students have limited exposure to the realities of teaching and school leadership. Therefore, it may be premature to attribute low aspirations solely to individual motivations. Instead, it is crucial to focus on cultivating an environment that nurtures their ambitions and demonstrates the potential for upward mobility.

This is further clarified by examining the responses of students who did not express an interest in career advancement. A significant majority either perceive inequality within the teaching profession or refrain from expressing a definitive opinion. Could these perceptions of inequality and the perceived challenges for women in advancing their careers be influencing factors contributing to the lack of motivation or aspiration among these respondents?

Japan as a society still places much importance on men, and Interviewee_2's comment further accentuates the societal bias towards male children, indicating that the birth of a boy is often greeted with greater enthusiasm and celebration compared to the birth of a girl. This societal norm reinforces the idea of male superiority from an early age, perpetuating gender disparities and contributing to the broader cultural landscape where men are often favoured and seen as having higher status.

Interviewee_2: "For example, when a girl is born, it's like, "Oh, it's a girl," but when a boy is born, it's like, "Wow, it's a boy"."

Interviewee_2 highlighted the societal prioritization of men in Japan, a sentiment she experienced both in her youth and continues to observe. In a society where men are esteemed more highly, the constraints of limited time often force individuals, particularly women, to confront feelings of resignation or inadequacy when striving to pursue additional responsibilities or ambitions. Such societal dynamics can foster a sense of discouragement and resignation, amplifying the challenges faced by women striving to balance multiple roles.

Interviewee_2: “[...] in Japan, society tends to prioritize men, so especially when I was younger, and even now, I felt that quite strongly, you know. So, in such a society where men are respected more, when you want to do more work but your time is limited, you end up having to give up or feeling like you can't do it, you know? Those kinds of thoughts, they were there.”

This could potentially lead to a loss of motivation among women, especially those balancing motherhood and careers, causing them to feel disheartened by the perceived impossibility of achieving their goals, no matter how much they strive for them. This observation stresses the pervasive influence of societal norms and expectations on individuals' perceptions of their own capabilities and opportunities. It reflects the broader cultural landscape where male superiority is ingrained from an early age, perpetuating gender disparities and reinforcing the notion that men are inherently more deserving of recognition and opportunity.

These quotes from two of the students suggest a prevalent perception within Japanese society that schools with older children are seen as holding higher status. The students' observation reflects the remnants of a male-dominated societal structure, where men are traditionally viewed as more authoritative than women.

Student_7: “There's an impression that schools with older children hold higher status. In Japan, remnants of a male-dominated society persist, where men are considered more authoritative than women. It's possible that this lingering mindset contributes to the perception that schools with older students are more prestigious.”

Student_9: “As one progresses up the ladder in educational institutions, their social status tends to increase.”

Moreover, the persistence of gender stereotypes in the society is evident and is repeated both in the questionnaires and interviews. Common beliefs include the notion that men excel in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) subjects, while women are deemed more adept at nurturing younger children.

Student_4: “With younger students, there's a perceived need for maternal care, hence the prevalence of female teachers. Conversely, as the age of students increases, there's a perceived necessity for stricter discipline, leading to a higher proportion of male teachers.”

Student_3: “There is a preconception that men are intellectually and physically superior to women.”

Student_10: “There is a bias that suggests women are better at taking care of small children.”

Student_17: “The reason why there are more women among young children is because there is a fixed notion that taking care of young children is a job for women.”

Student_22: “As one advances in educational institutions, more specialized knowledge is required, especially in STEM subjects, which men tend to excel in. Conversely, handling small children is considered to be more suited to women than men.”

Interviewee_3: “I think when it comes to subjects like science and mathematics, men tend to be quite strong, surprisingly. Yeah, that's what I really think. Exactly. When it comes to detailed instruction, like how to wash hands properly or how to hold chopsticks, I think women are generally good at those kinds of things.”

In society, the persistent belief that women do not require higher education remains prevalent, as indicated by both the students and principals in this study. Men show a greater inclination toward pursuing research, particularly in STEM fields, which consequently enhances their prospects for attaining higher positions. Data from the Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office reveals a stark gender disparity, with only 16.6% of researchers in Japan being women, and a mere 15.4% of engineering students being female (Japan, 2019). This gender gap may also contribute to the low representation of women in middle and high school teaching positions, given the subject-based teacher system in these educational levels.

The 2019 White Paper highlights a concerning trend where science and mathematics, initially favoured subjects among girls in primary school, become the least popular subjects in middle school. However, a higher percentage of girls taught by female teachers in these subjects identify as "science types" compared to those taught by male teachers (Japan, 2019). This calls attention to the significant impact of environment and representation on students' attitudes toward specific subjects.

Nevertheless, there are indications of progress, albeit gradual, with emerging trends becoming discernible. According to the 2023 White Paper, younger women are increasingly expressing aspirations for long-term commitment to their work, belief in their potential for promotion, and desire for managerial positions. This contrasts with younger men, who exhibit less inclination toward long-term career commitment compared to older men (Japan, 2023). This shift suggests evolving attitudes toward gender roles and career aspirations among younger generations.

6.4 Research Limitations

Limitations of this study include the researcher's novice use of thematic analysis, which may have influenced the depth and interpretation of identified themes. While efforts were made to adhere to established methodologies, the inherent novelty of this analytical approach suggests room for refinement in subsequent studies. Secondly, the researcher being a non-native of both Japanese and English languages could have impacted the understanding of cultural nuances within the data.

Moreover, the study's participants span disparate generations, each shaped by distinct socio-economic backgrounds and life experiences. The principals, who embarked on their careers during a period of economic prosperity and societal stability, may harbour perspectives that diverge from those of students who grew up during economic stagnation, The Great East Japan Earthquake, and a global pandemic. These socio-economic differentials likely influence participants' attitudes toward work, career aspirations, and perceptions of gender roles within the teaching profession.

Additionally, the advent of the digital age has ushered in unprecedented technological advancements, reshaping the informational landscape and societal norms. While the principals may have had limited exposure to the internet during their formative years, students have come of age in an era characterized by global access to information and digital connectivity. This difference in technological exposure may engender divergent perspectives on work-life balance, career advancement, and gender roles.

Furthermore, the study's modest sample size and contextual specificity constrain the generalizability of findings to broader populations. While the insights gleaned from participants offer rich qualitative data, they may not fully encapsulate the diverse array of experiences and perspectives within the teaching profession.

In summary, while this study provides valuable insights into the intersection of gender, career aspirations, and socio-economic factors within the teaching profession, it is not without its limitations. Addressing these limitations through methodological refinement, cross-cultural collaboration, and expansive sample recruitment can enrich future research endeavours and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of workplace dynamics and gender equity in education.

7. Conclusions

The analysis conducted in this study discusses the intricate dynamics surrounding career aspirations, gender roles, and family responsibilities within the teaching profession. By examining the perspectives of both future female teachers and retired

female principals, valuable insights have been gained into the challenges and opportunities for women in education leadership.

The intersection of career aspirations between these two groups reveals a common recognition of the impact of gender norms and societal expectations on women's career trajectories. Both future teachers and retired principals acknowledge the barriers posed by traditional roles in marriage and childcare, highlighting the need for supportive workplace policies and cultural shifts to facilitate gender equity in education. Moreover, the barriers to promotional aspirations identified in the study accentuate systemic challenges such as gender biases in task allocation and career advancement, as well as limited support for work-life balance. Lessons learned from retired principals' experiences emphasize the importance of proactive measures to address these barriers, including promoting diversity in leadership positions and implementing mentorship programs for women educators.

The alignment of perceptions regarding the impact of family life on career trajectories stresses the significance of supportive workplace environments that accommodate the needs of employees with family responsibilities. Insights gained from retired principals' reflections offer valuable guidance for developing strategies to better support teachers in managing family and professional obligations, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and equitable educational landscape.

Finally, the challenges faced by women in reaching leadership roles call attention to the need for intensive efforts to address systemic barriers and promote gender equality within educational institutions. By leveraging the insights provided by this study, policymakers, administrators, and educators can work collaboratively to create environments that empower women to thrive in leadership positions, thereby advancing the cause of gender equity in education.

References

- Akashi, Ai, and Nobuhiro Tsuji. "Qualitative Research on the Development of Japanese Female Primary School Teachers' Perceptions of the Impact of Gender on their Careers." *Annual meeting of the AARE, Freemantle, Western Australia Nov 29-Dec 3*, AARE, 2015, eric.ed.gov/?id=ED593840. Accessed 6 October 2023.
- Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, vol 3, no. 2, 2006, pp. 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>. Accessed 15 April 2024.
- Bryman, Alan. *Social Research Methods*. 4th ed., Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Emmott, Bill. *Japan's Far More Female Future: Increasing Gender Equality and Reducing Workplace Insecurity Will Make Japan Stronger*. Oxford University Press, 2020.
- Etsuyo, Nishigaki. "gendai joshi daigakusei no byouku risou no raifukoosu [The Ideal Life-Course as Portrayed by Modern Women's University Students]." *44th Conference of Japanese Association of Educational Psychology*, 2002, pp. 287. https://doi.org/10.20587/pamjaep.44.0_287. Accessed 5 April 2024.
- Fujita, Kazumitsu. "Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers: Japanese Country Background Report." *OECD*. 2003. <https://www.oecd.org/education/school/29163349.pdf>. Accessed 19 February 2024.
- Fraser, Pablo. "Japan – Country Note: TALIS 2018 Results: Primary Education" *TALIS*. OECD Publishing, 2019, www.oecd.org/education/talis/talis-2018-country-notes.htm. Accessed 2 June 2024.
- Fukasawa, Manami, and Junko Shigekawa. "A Study on Career Development of Female Principals at Elementary and Junior High Schools." *Journal of Saitama University, Faculty of Education*, vol 64, no 2, 2015, pp. 213-224, sucra.repo.nii.ac.jp/records/17758. Accessed 7 January 2023.
- Galletta, Anne. *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview and Beyond: From Research Design to Analysis and Publication*. E-book, New York University Press, 2013.
- Giannakaki, Marina-Stefania. "Using Mixed-Methods to Examine Teachers' Attitude to Educational Change: The Case of the *Skills for Life* Strategy for Improving Adult Literacy and Numeracy Skills in England." *Educational Research and Evaluation*, vol. 11, no. 4, 2005, pp. 323-348, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13803610500110687>. Accessed 24 November 2023.
- Guest, Greg, and Emily E. Namey. *Public Health Research Methods*. SAGE Publications, 2015.
- Hasunuma, Linda C. "Gender Gaiatsu: An Institutional Perspective on Womenomics." *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal*, vol. 48, 2015, pp. 79-114. *Project MUSE*, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jwj.2015.0005>. Accessed 24 November 2023.

- Hyman, Michael R., and Jeremy J. Sierra. *Marketing Research Kit for Dummies*. Wiley Publishing, 2010.
- Iida, Aki. "Gender Inequality in Japan: The Status of Women, and their Promotion in the Workplace." *Corvinus Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2018, pp.43-52, <https://doi.org/10.14267/cojourn.2018v3n3a5>. Accessed 24 November 2023.
- , "How Do Women "Shine?" Exploring Professional Women's Perceptions of "Women's Advancement" in Japan." *East Asia*, vol. 41, 2024, pp. 1-24. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12140-023-09413-9>. Accessed 20 October 2023.
- Japan, Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office. *The White Paper on Gender Equality 2019*. Government of Japan, Cabinet Office, 2019, www.gender.go.jp/english_contents/about_danjo/whitepaper/pdf/ewp2019.pdf. Accessed 23 November 2023.
- , Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office. *The White Paper on Gender Equality 2023*. Government of Japan, Cabinet Office, 2023, https://www.gender.go.jp/english_contents/about_danjo/whitepaper/index.html. Accessed 21 September 2023.
- Kanga, Anne W. "A Teaching Philosophy: A Prerequisite for Effective Pedagogical Practices in Teacher Education." *Handbook of Research on Global Issues in Next-Generation Teacher Education*, edited by Keengwe, Jared et al., IGI Global, 2016, pp. 123-135.
- Kano, Ayaka. "Womonomics and Acrobatics: Why Japanese Feminists Remain Skeptical about Feminist State Policy." *Feminist Encounters: A Journal of Critical Studies in Culture and Politics*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2018, 06. <https://doi.org/10.20897/femenc.201806>. Accessed 23 November 2023.
- Kim, Young-Mi, and Sawako Shirahase. "Understanding Intra-Regional Variation in Gender Inequality in East Asia: Decomposition of Cross-National Differences in the Gender Earnings Gap." *International Sociology*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2014, pp. 229-248. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580913518084>. Accessed 24 November 2023.
- Liao, Wenjie, and Liying Luo. "Gender, Education, and Attitudes toward Women's Leadership in Three East Asian Countries: An Intersectional and Multilevel Approach." *Societies*, vol 11, no. 3, 2021, p. 103. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc11030103>. Accessed 23 November 2023.
- Merriam, Sharan B., and Elizabeth J. Tisdell. *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*. E-book, John Wiley & Sons, 2015.
- MEXT. "Ryou wa 4-nendo kouritsu gakkou kyoushokuin no jinji gyousei joukyou chousa kekka (gaiyou) [FY2020 Public School Teacher Personnel Administration Status Survey Results (Summary)]." *Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology – Japan*. https://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/jinji/1411820_00007.htm. Accessed 2 June 2024.

- “5-2. *Kenshibetsu no kouchou nado ninzuiu (reiwa 5 nen 4 gatsu 1 nichi genzai)* [Number of Headmasters etc. by Prefecture and City].” *Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology – Japan*.
https://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/jinji/1411820_00007.htm. Accessed 18 February 2024.
- , “5-7. *Kanrishoku senkou shaken no juken shikaku nenrei seigen keiken nensuu (reiwa 5 nen 4 gatsu 1 nichi genzai)* [5-7. Qualifications (age limit and years of experience) for management selection tests (as of 1 April 2023)].” *Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology – Japan*.
https://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/jinji/1411820_00007.htm. Accessed 18 February 2024.
- , “5-8. *Kanrishoku senkou shiken no juken shikaku (shokushu shikaku suisensha) (reiwa 5 nen 4 gatsu 1 nichi genzai)* [5-8. Qualifications for management selection examinations (occupational qualifications and nominees) (as of 1 April 2023)].” *Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology – Japan*.
https://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/jinji/1411820_00007.htm. Accessed 18 February 2024.
- Mikami, Aya, et al. “*Kyouin wo mezasu joshigakusei no shinro sentaku ni itaru katei* [Processes leading to career choices for female students who want to become teachers].” *Journal of Saitama University: Faculty of Education*, vol. 64, no. 2, 2015, pp. 177-188. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/199685813.pdf>. Accessed 27 October 2023.
- Miyagi Prefectural Government. “*reiwa 3 nendo miyagiken ni okeru danjo kyoudou sankaku no genjou oyobi shisaku ni kansuru nenji houkoku* [Annual Report on the Current Situation and Policies for Gender Equality in Miyagi Prefecture in FY2021].” 2021,
<https://www.pref.miyagi.jp/soshiki/kyosha/nenzihoukoku.html>. Accessed 6 April 2024.
- , “*Josei katsuyaku suishinhou dai 19 jou dai 6 kou ni motodoku torikumi no jisshi joukyou no kouhyou: reiwa 4 nen* [Publication of the status of implementation of initiatives based on Article 19 (6) of the Law for the Promotion of Women's Activities: year 2022].” 2022,
<https://www.pref.miyagi.jp/soshiki/zinzi/tokutei-jigyuu.html>. Accessed 6 April 2024.
- Miyagi University of Education. 2022. <https://www.miyakyo-u.ac.jp/index.html>. Accessed 20 April 2024.
- Nakakubo, Hiroya. “Glass Ceiling or Iron Weight?: Challenges for Female Employees on Their Path to Becoming Managers and Executives in Japan.” *Hastings International and Comparative Law Review*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2016, pp. 399-410.
https://repository.uclawsf.edu/hastings_international_comparative_law_review/vol39/iss2/4/. Accessed 6 January 2024.

- OECD. "TALIS 2018 Results (Volume I): Teachers and School Leaders as Lifelong Learners." *TALIS*, OECD Publishing, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1787/1d0bc92a-en>. Accessed 27 September 2023.
- , "TALIS 2018 Results (Volume 2): Teachers and School Leaders as Valued Professionals." *TALIS*. OECD Publishing, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1787/19cf08df-en>. Accessed 27 September 2023.
- , "Japan", *Education at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators*. OECD Publishing, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1787/1426642c-en>. Accessed 4 September 2023.
- Roberts, Glenda S. Leaning Out for the Long Span: What Holds Women Back From Promotion in Japan?." *Japan Forum*, vol. 32, no. 4, 2020, pp. 555-576. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09555803.2019.1664619>. Accessed 6 January 2024.
- Sano, Mayu et al. "Comparison with Attitudes toward Life Courses by Gender Roles and Among College Students." *Yamanashi Nursing Journal*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2007, pp. 45-52. <https://yamanashi.repo.nii.ac.jp/records/3644>. Accessed 27 October 2023.
- Sasa et al. "A Case Study of the Physical Education Teachers for the Occupation of Women (1)." *Journal of Osaka Education University*, vol. 59, no. 1, 2010, pp. 12-26, <https://doi.org/10.32287/TD00025244>. Accessed 24 November 2023.
- Sendai City. "Sendai shi danjo kyoudou sankaku shakai ni kansuru shimin ishiki chousa (reiwa 2 nen 3 gatsu) [Sendai City Citizen Awareness Survey on Gender Equality (March 2020)]." 2020, <https://www.city.sendai.jp/danjo-kikaku/kurashi/manabu/danjo/torikumi/chosa.html>. Accessed 6 April 2024.
- Steel, Gill, editor. *Beyond the Gender Gap in Japan*. Michigan Press, 2019.
- Sugiyama, Futaki, et al. "Career construction of women elementary and junior high school principals." *The Graduate School of Education, University of Tokyo*, vol. 44, 2005, pp. 281-299, <https://doi.org/10.15083/00031409>. Accessed 24 November 2023.
- Taherdoost, Hamed. "Data Collection Methods and Tools for Research; A Step-by-Step Guide to Choose Data Collection Technique for Academic and Business Research Projects." *International Journal of Academic Research in Management (IJARM)*, 2021, vol. 10 no. 1, pp.10-38, www.hal.science/hal-03741847. Accessed 23 November 2023.
- The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. Edited by Lisa M. Given. Sage, 2008.
- Watanabe, Yoko et al. "Study about Professional Ambitions of The Adolescence: Consideration of the Factor Which Influences Subjective Well Being." Annual reports of the Faculty of Education, Gunma University. Cultural science series, vol. 67, 2018, pp. 289-298. <https://ndlsearch.ndl.go.jp/books/R000000004-I028853347>. Accessed 12 February 2024.
- World Economic Forum. "Global Gender Gap Report 2023: Insight Report." *World Economic Forum*, June 2023, www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2023/. Accessed 25 November 2023.

- Wulansari, Sri Ayu. "Gender Inequality Perception: A Comparative Study of Women in Japan and Indonesia." *Research & Information Center of Asian Studies (RICAS)*, 2013. https://ricas.ioc.u-tokyo.ac.jp/aasplatform/achivements/pdf/2013_ab_16.pdf. Accessed 25 November 2023.
- Yamasaki, Hirotohi. "Teachers and Teacher Education in Japan." *Bull. Grad. School Educ. Hiroshima Univ.*, vol. 3, no. 65, 2016, pp. 19-28.