

## Article

# Teacher Training Policies in Japan in the Context of Ethical Values

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## Abstract

Teachers hold significant roles and responsibilities in providing ethics education and in teaching fundamental values to learners at schools. They also play a critical role in enabling learners to construct their own value systems in terms of performing modeling and guiding tasks. The purpose of this study is to investigate teacher training policies in Japan in the context of ethical values. In accordance with this purpose, the information obtained from the literature review has been collected under three headings that address: Confucian teaching in Japan, the importance of ethics education in teacher education programs, and the effects of Confucian teachings on teacher training. Ethical codes regarding Confucian teachings for teachers are emphasized in teacher-training policies. Based on the obtained data, Confucian teachings such as respect, responsibility, honesty, justice, loyalty and modesty have been indicated to be considerably valued in the Japanese teacher-training system.

## Keywords

Teacher training • Ethical values • Japan • Ethics education • Confucianism

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The values of a society are the phenomena that hold a society together and ensure its future while holding onto its past. Educational institutions thus enable the systematic transfer of values to future generations. In order to be adopted, the appreciation and application of ethical values by all sections of society is of considerable importance. In this context, the purpose of ethics education is considered to contribute to raising well-intentioned individuals as well as learners' awareness of their responsibility for the world they live in.

Ethics is relevant to anyone who asks "What should I do?" or "Is this right?" In other words, ethics investigates moral questions about practices such as "What should I do right here, right now?" in broader, systematic, and theoretical terms. Ethics carries a distinctive meaning in the field of education because teachers and principals are both surrounded with moral questions, and they are currently responsible for the education and moral goodness of learners (or future generations) more than ever (Haynes, 2002).

One of the benefits of ethical rules is that they influence the behaviors of an organization's members by leading to behavioral expectations. This benefit involves not only transferring or teaching ethical rules, but also affecting or controlling the decisions and actions of an organization's members within the framework of ethical rules (Dean, 1992). The bureaucratic and political features in terms of the school are shaped by the perspectives, attitudes, and practices related to the ethical decision-making process (Truong, Hallinger, & Sanga, 2017).

Ethical principles are primarily related to rules and processes. In other words, those principles are firstly constructed, then transferred, and lastly implemented (Dean, 1992). Stevens (1994) indicated that ethical principles require guiding individuals' behaviors in circumstances involving ethical practice. Discussing the content of ethical principles and raising organizational members' awareness of cases indicated by ethical principles and the kind of instructions they contain are considered important (Cassell, Johnson, & Smith, 1997). Ethical rules constructed this way are thought to contribute to an organizations' institutionalized ethical climate (Raiborn & Payne, 1990; Weber, 1981).

The value systems surrounding schools are a significant factor influencing teachers' work conditions and the way these conditions are evaluated. Values have a direct or indirect impact by determining certain criteria for teachers' actions. However, ethical values influence how broader strategies for school development and school construction are presented from three aspects (Louis, 1988):

- a) *Basic cultural values*: These represent the majority of citizens' beliefs in a country about how schools should work.

- b) *Professional values*: These are the value systems that manage views on how schools should be constructed and organize together the behaviors of individuals working in the same institution.
- c) *Social values*: These are society's special expectations and needs that belong to teachers.

The cultural, professional and social values explained above directly and indirectly influence teachers' practices at schools (Louis, 1988). Individuals who provide education, namely teachers, are first expected to have the ethical values in order to teach learners these values through education. In other words, teachers, rather than the content of the curriculum, hold the most significant responsibility for ethics education (Revell & Arthur, 2007).

### **Teaching Confucianism in Japan**

Japan is a collective society deeply dedicated to Confucian values (Arimoto, 2004). Cultural elements influence family functions and behaviors by raising collective awareness (Lu & Shih, 1997). Five different relationships appear to exist socially for people based on Confucianism: parent-child, ruler-citizen, wife-husband, youth-adult, and friend-friend. Of these, three address the family (Chang & Holt, 1991). Family members who are attached to traditional culture realize that they need to raise the welfare level and vitality of their own family (Lu & Shih, 1997; Miller & Yang, 1997).

Confucianism is considered to be a model that influences political, social, and cultural life, especially in terms of the history of Far East modernization (Kim, 2009). Throughout Far East history, the emperors, described as great superiors responsible for the education in their own countries, have honored Confucius as the first teacher (Cowen & Kazamias, 2009). Confucianism is a philosophical system based on the teachings of the Chinese philosopher Confucius. Confucian teachings involve the values of righteousness, honesty, wisdom, harmony, loyalty, and respect (Ackerman, Hu, & Wei, 2009; Chunxia, 2010; McDonald, 2012).

The fundamental principle of Confucianism is humanism. Confucianism emphasizes the world and the family rather than belief in God and the afterlife (Cheng, 2011; Fingarette, 1998; Ip, 2009; Kim & Strudler, 2012; Lin, 1994), focusing little on commitment to divine will (Juergensmeyer, 2005). This understanding attaches importance to self-development by admitting that an individual can learn and develop in a personal or social sense (Dore & Sako, 1998; Zhao & Roper, 2011). Professional development should be for cultivating oneself rather than achieving any worldly goal or collecting an external reward (Duperon, 2018). On the other hand, many philosophers who came after Confucius had supported their religious

and philosophical traditions with basic Confucian concepts, utilizing the authority of Confucius to base their arguments on solid ground (Wan, 1980).

The success of Japan, which displayed an example of successful development after World War II, is attributed to the common heritage of Confucianism (Kim, 2009). Because Confucianism is not unique to Japan as it had been imported from China, following a different course has been necessary for understanding Japanese Confucianism, which advocates teach social excellence through the characteristics of ethics/politics and leadership (Dollinger, 1988). This is due to Japan's having adapted certain aspects of Chinese Confucianism and aligning it with its own structure in the imperial period (Fukuyama, 1995).

The Japanese Empire's official education declaration made Confucian teachings mandatory and universal as part of the 1890 Meiji Constitution (Borton, 1970). Confucian doctrines have contributed to strengthening nationalist sentiment in Japan and have had a significant influence on society in promoting fundamental values such as education and determination (Dollinger, 1988). Even though Confucianism began to weaken as a philosophy as a result of patterns brought by individualization towards the end of the 20th century (Maruyama, 2013), it still maintains its effects as moral and ethical codes in several fields, primarily in education (Dollinger, 1988). The purpose of the present study is to address and investigate teacher training policies in Japan in the context of ethical values. Based on this purpose, information obtained from a literature review has been collected under two chapters: The importance of ethics education in teacher education programs and the influence of Confucian teachings on teacher training in Japan.

### **The Importance of Ethics Education in Japan's Teacher Education Programs**

Japan has obviously designed various educational programs at different periods, utilizing Confucian philosophy in these programs in order to adapt to the changing world and achieve modernity while keeping traditions. Ferguson (1985) addresses the history of Japanese teacher education programs under three headings:

#### **Meiji Period (1868-1912)**

In 1867, with the change of staff and management understanding, Japan began searching for information all over the world. Teachers were needed for training using the contemporary educational policies and innovative educational philosophies with the opening of new schools. In this sense, the first teacher training institute was established in 1872. In the 1880s, a conservative response arose against Western educational practices in these schools, and teachers began to be provided with training in the light of Confucian teachings. Thus, Western pedagogical techniques

were modified to match Japanese traditions (Ferguson, 1985). The Meiji central government established Japan as a modern nation in 1889 with its Constitutions and published the Imperial Declaration on education in 1890. The second article of the declaration states, “Specialization is required in ethics education for incorporating the primary objectives, knowledge, and skills in national education.” As a result, ethics education became the focal point of educational studies and activities for all individuals related to the empire (Maruyama, 2013).

### **Taisho Period (1912-1945)**

As a result of the changes in Japanese society, Western pedagogical ideas were re-examined. Meanwhile, with the rapid achievement of industrialization in this period, well-educated workers and teachers were needed. During the 1930s and 1940s, Japan experienced difficulty in teacher training due to the war. The only positive result of the war period is that in 1943, it paved the way for primary school teachers to teach at secondary schools (Ferguson, 1985).

### **Post-War Period (1945-Present)**

A new teacher education system was needed after World War II. In 1949, 47 universities were assigned for training primary- and secondary-school teachers. As a result of Japanese teacher training being based on American progressive education and the conflict of this understanding with Japanese traditions, harmony was attempted to be established between these two understandings in the 1950s. Modern Japanese teacher-training programs were developed using the harmonization of Confucian teachings and Western education philosophy (Ferguson, 1985). Hence, the Japanese teacher education system remained based on traditional Japanese culture and Confucianism, rather than being attached to the pedagogical ideas of the West (Arimoto, 2004).

In the Curriculum Council Report published in 1958, the decision to provide ethics education was given in Japan. The content and implementation of ethics education included in formal Japanese education involves four fundamental elements: (1) basic lifestyle and behaviors, (2) ethical mentality and judgments, (3) development of personality and creative lifestyle, and (4) ethical behaviors and practical motivation as a member of a nation and a society (Maruyama, 2013). These elements mean that teachers working in Japan are expected to pay attention to not only learners’ mental development but also their emotional and physical development (Organisation for Economic Cooperation & Development [OECD], 2012).

Prior to ethics education being introduced in teacher education in Japan, it had been included in programs in the fields of engineering and nursing. Teachers did not study at universities before World War II. Instead, they were trained at normal

schools and were not defined as professionals. However, society respected teachers because it considered them to be so ethical that they could be intellectual and teachers. Teachers' income was rather low. In 1946, the US educational delegation proposed to Japan that teachers should be educated at universities instead of normal schools. Teacher education programs, which would be completed in 4 years, should therefore incorporate three main areas: general education, courses related to the subject area to be taught, and pedagogical formation courses related to the practice of teaching. In addition to these courses, teachers are expected to possess the following qualifications: (1) sense of mission, responsibility, and passion for education; (2) social and interpersonal skills; and (3) the ability to understand children, students, and classroom management (Numano, 2010).

On the other hand, the content of ethics education courses was determined based on four basic principles, which Numano (2010) listed as: (1) individuals, being independent in terms of themselves should do what they can for themselves and live moderately; (2) they must know the importance of courtesy and communicating honestly with other individuals in terms of relationships with others; (3) individuals are guided by splendor and natural wonders, therefore they must feel the importance of nature and living things in terms of nature, the subconscious, and communication; and (4) individuals must keep their promises, follow rules, and be conscious of public service in terms of society and groups.

The enduring persistent change in society as a result of its social structure and power dynamics has influenced the content of curricula, and the content is considered required for being able to respond to the constantly changing values of society. In this context, teacher education policymakers have experienced various challenges, such as how to integrate educational reform in Japan in the middle of cultural conflict and how to regain public confidence in the teacher education system. However, the Japanese Ministry of National Education has prepared a series of teacher education reform plans in the direction of reform initiatives in response to internal pressure in order to reinforce the teacher training system (Tam & Cheng, 2007). At the beginning of the reform agenda are teacher certifications, regulations on the content of teacher-education programs, and a reduction of the number of teacher-training institutions (Arimoto, 2004). These reforms have been identified as: (1) increasing the quality standards in teacher education courses, 2) opening new graduate courses for teachers, and 3) introducing the certificate renewal system (Numano, 2010).

According to the Japan Teachers' Union and in consideration of the results of the Teaching and Learning International Survey in the context of teachers' professional development, Japanese teachers' needs for professional development are greater than the needs of teachers from other participating countries (Education International, 2014).

From this point of view, teachers need to always keep their knowledge and skills up to date (OECD, 2013). When taking into consideration the radical changes in society and the effects of these changes on teachers, the necessary qualifications and characteristics need to be updated in terms of current conditions. For this reason, the system established the implementation of teaching certificate renewals on April 1, 2009 (Numano, 2010).

### **The Influence of Confucian Teachings in Teacher Training**

The teachings of Confucius, who holds an important place in the history of the Far East in the context of ethics, have a universal validity (Kim, 2009). Confucius argued that the most important virtues of mankind are goodness, justice, knowledge, and belief and that these ethical values are at the core of human nature (Morishima, 2001). Confucius advocated that uncovering the goodness inherent in humans is possible through education. From this point of view, the teacher's job is to direct a person to their inherent goodness; as such, the teacher must first have the values of universal goodness to achieve this job (Levent & Pehlivan, 2017).

Japan has a structure that attaches importance to the quality of teachers' personalities through the influence of Confucian teachings. Therefore, attention is paid to the quality of a teacher's own personality before they improve the quality of students' personalities (Rao, 2013). Confucius believed an important link to exist between ethics and education (Gray, 1998). In addition, Confucius placed ethics education at the heart of education and advocated providing equal education for all people without discrimination. In this context, Confucius proposed that the goal of education is to help learners develop an ideal personality (Levent & Pehlivan, 2017). Similarly, Kim (2009) noted that ensuring teachers' personality development in line with societal norms relates not only to institutional education but also to the understanding of social education provided in the family. For this reason, Confucian philosophy considers teachers as the intellectuals of society and emphasizes that ethics education is teachers' primary need.

Japan considers the teaching profession to be important and attempts to have modern schools maintain Confucianism as well draw attention to the behaviors and attitudes towards teaching (Okano, 1987). In addition, the daily increase in the value of teaching profession is emphasized through Confucian teachings and the support of Japanese society. Considering the importance that Confucian philosophy attaches to the concepts of education and ethics, one can say that Confucianism addresses education in terms of ethical development.

Ohgiya (1954) suggested that teachers should develop a professional ethical understanding of teaching and should be ensured of gaining a professional identity in society (Maruyama & Ueno, 2010). In the East Asian educational tradition where the

Confucian culture is dominant, teachers should have adequate knowledge in the field before undertaking the role of motivating learning (Cowen & Kazamias, 2009). On the other hand, Confucius emphasized that a good teacher should be primarily passionate and devoted to one's work. That the teacher should have a lot of knowledge about one's own field and that one's students should always utilize this knowledge have been emphasized. Confucius advocated that the most important virtue of teaching is tireless dedication to the development of students and professional commitment (Huanyin, 1993).

Confucian philosophy evaluates education as a lifelong learning process and emphasizes that development should begin with the individual. It also proposes that social environments are significant in the learning process (Kim, 2009). Similarly, social environments in Confucian culture are considered to offer considerable opportunities for learning (Yang, 1981). In this context, the importance of teachers' self-development in sociocultural terms and adaptation to society is more understandable.

Confucius considered learning as the holistic knowledge of the human character, and the focal point of this knowledge is the individual's ability to assess the characteristics of others and identify one's self by analyzing key points (Beck, 2006). In support of this knowledge, the Japanese Education Act (Maruyama, 2013) stated education to require processing values and ethical concepts (Dotokushin woyashinai) and formal schooling to refer to the meaning of education. Whereas the second article of this law respects academic freedom for achieving pre-determined goals, it states the need to achieve the goals of encouraging attitudes towards attaining knowledge and culture in a broad sense, searching for truth, and promoting moral intuition and sensitivity while having a healthy body. Renewed in 2008, the purpose of ethics education is explicitly stated in the third article as developing learners' values by incorporating moral mentalities, judgments, processes, and behaviors (Maruyama, 2013).

Confucian teachings and culture maintain that individual cohesion needs to be ensured not only socially but also internally. Considering that ensuring the internal balance of individuals will influence the dynamism in the society, one can say that teachers need to benefit from the Confucian teachings and value system in order to achieve this balance. Confucian teachings absolutely exist to develop a philosophy of life and rules in order to get rid of turmoil (Waldmann, 2000).

The fact that teachers think critically about their own ethical beliefs and attitudes should also be underlined as a sign of professionalism. One of the keys for introducing ethics education into teacher education programs is to train prospective teachers and future teachers as discussion leaders who know not only how to manage class discussions but also how to encourage learners to participate in these discussions (Maruyama & Ueno, 2010).



## Conclusion

Through education, teachers have a critical job in integrating an individual with ethical values into society. Therefore, having teachers, who influence people even more than parents throughout student life, be individuals who are role-models dedicated to universal ethical principles is of the utmost importance (Levent & Kınık, 2017). In this context, awareness and character development become prominent in ensuring adaptation to the social roles the profession requires during teacher education.

When reviewing the literature on teacher education, Asian countries such as Japan, China, and Thailand appear to have adopted a much different approach to teacher training than other countries (Iwata, 2006). When individually evaluating East Asian countries, conceptual differences exist regarding education based on traditional differences. Whereas learners' diligence, patience, eagerness to work, and enthusiasm are emphasized in the Japanese educational model; self-esteem and individual needs are highlighted in the modern Western understanding of education (Arimoto, 2004). One of the most significant contributions of Confucian teachings is believed to achieve a systematic structure by clarifying different social concepts, rules, beliefs, ethical connections, responsibilities, and obligations (Gray, 1998). In this sense, Confucianism can be proposed to have constructed a bridge between two different understandings by transforming local concepts into universal values and to have a great share in enabling teachers to take a leading role in teaching ethical values to learners.

The Japanese teacher training system, restructured in accordance with the Confucian philosophy, draws attention to the importance of teachers' self-development in professional terms based on lifelong learning. Accordingly, it seems important to develop teachers' values and moral structures. In other words, one can suggest that the value system that constitutes the basis of Confucian philosophy and the ethical values inspire teachers in terms of their self-development for adapting to an ever-changing and developing world.

At the heart of teachers' curriculum knowledge, learning can in fact be considered an investment of moral values (Bullough, 2011). Society also has clear expectations from teachers to make decisions in the public interest (Starratt, 2007), and teachers' actions are expected to be based on dedication to moral perfectionism (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2013). Confucian philosophy regards communities as an organic whole (Waldmann, 2000). From this point of view, the holistic approach seems to be more appropriate for understanding individuals. The outer part of Confucianism philosophy is acknowledged to accept social roles and adaptation as its inner part constitutes consciousness and character development (Berling, 1982).

Many of today's teacher activities require teamwork and cooperation (Somech, 2008). Making the right decisions in ethical dilemmas during teamwork is a significant

factor within educational institutions (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2013). In other words, an effective teacher should not only have personal-verbal characteristics such as the ability to build positive interpersonal relationships while working as a team but also the ability to make the right ethical decisions in stressful, uncertain or changing situations (Nevin, Thousant, & Villa, 2009). However, teacher-training programs must incorporate systematic education that involves how to deal with ethical dilemmas while working in teams, particularly in stressful situations (Bullough, 2011).

The principles of Confucianism have been established on the values of humanism, righteousness, appropriateness, knowledge, harmony, and respect for others. Japan's educational experience is very important for analytical studies. The Japanese education system aims not only to improve learners' mental capacities but also to instill the ethical values of society, meritocratic developments, and social cohesion. Considering the response of Japanese society to recent disasters, one can see how much importance they attach to these values.

Students in Japan learn to respect elders and teachers and to be proper, orderly, and organized through different aspects. Insistence and hard work, praise for competition, service for schools, school friendships, responsibility for helping others, modesty, and appreciation for good deeds are considerably valued and appreciated at schools. How being so careful with behaviors will affect social life, business ethics, health, sustainable environment, and crime prevention is frequently emphasized.

When generally evaluating Japan's educational policies in teacher trainings, they seem to be based on an approach that fits cultural norms, that raise the status of teachers in society, and that attribute personal achievement to not only institutional education but also the education provided in the family. At the same time, an understanding of teacher training can be proposed to have also been taken into account in teacher training policies in accordance with the modern world, provided it adheres to tradition through the influence of Confucian culture.

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