

Issues in Career Education Policies and Measures from the Perspective of the Characteristics of the Japanese Employment System: A Quantitative Text Analysis of Official Documents Published since 1999

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ABSTRACT

This study quantitatively examines the treatment of the Japanese Employment System (JES) in fifty official documents on career education published between 1999 and March 2024. Using KH Coder, twenty-four analytic codes derived from JES characteristics were applied to the corpus to analyze frequency, distribution by document type and institutional role, and co-occurrence with instructional descriptions. Only eleven codes were detected, and references to contemporary labor issues, such as Involuntary Transfers and Long Working Hours, were almost entirely absent. JES-related descriptions were concentrated in policy guidelines, while practice guidelines contained very limited instructional integration. The findings reveal that despite the policy emphasis on preparing students for future work environments, official documents provide insufficient guidance for addressing JES-related labor realities in educational practice.

Keywords: Career Education, Japanese Employment System, Official Documents, Quantitative Text Analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

In Japan, career education has been promoted to help students prepare for the transition from school to work. However, unlike in European countries or the United States, where workers are hired for clearly defined jobs under contracts that specify duties, the transition to work in Japan operates under a different employment logic. Companies often hire large groups of new graduates simultaneously without specifying precise job roles at the time of recruitment. Under this practice, entering a company does not guarantee a fixed position. The actual job is assigned only after employment begins, and even after the assignment, the company may change an employee's duties or department without concluding a new contract.

This approach to recruitment and placement is one feature of what is commonly referred to as the Japanese Employment System (JES). Under such conditions, it is difficult for young employees to build a clear understanding of their future work role. In addition, long working hours tend to be treated not as a formal contractual condition but as something naturally expected upon joining the company. As a result, many young employees experience a gap between what they imagined before employment and the conditions they actually face, especially when their assigned job does not match their academic background or expected career path.

This gap is reflected in national survey data. According to a government survey conducted by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (2024), the most frequently cited reason for leaving the first job among individuals aged 15 to 34 was dissatisfaction with working hours, holidays, or leave (28.5%), followed by a perceived mismatch between the job and the individual (21.7%). Similarly, a company-based survey conducted by Aru Co. (2025) found that 44.6% of new employees in large firms reported a discrepancy between expected and actual working hours, while 18.5% experienced a gap in job content. These findings suggest that many students enter employment without sufficient understanding of how Japanese companies allocate work or manage personnel after hiring.

Given these conditions, schools are expected to provide career education that not only supports

students in exploring their interests but also helps them understand the employment environment they are likely to enter. However, implementation remains limited as a survey conducted by the National Institute for Educational Policy Research (2020) revealed that only 27.7% of high school teachers reported providing information on employment trends among young people, and only 20.7% addressed potential future risks such as resignation or unemployment. Meanwhile, a follow-up survey of high school graduates (National Institute for Educational Policy Research, 2021) indicated that guidance on coping with employment-related risks was among the topics they most wished they had been taught, revealing a gap between students' educational needs and actual school practice.

One reason for this situation is that public documents have not provided sufficiently clear guidance for shaping career education practices that address actual working conditions. Komikawa (2024) pointed out that although the 2011 Recommendations on the Future Direction of Career Education—a policy document issued by the Central Council for Education, the highest advisory body responsible for national education policy—marked a shift in policy discourse by recognizing the importance of knowledge and skills related to working life, this shift did not lead to concrete policy implementation. Likewise, Nagumo et al. (2019) argued that the Handbooks for Career Education compiled by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology did not provide explicit guidance on how to incorporate employment realities—such as working hours, job assignment, or reassignment—into school-based educational practice. However, their study focused on tracking changes in university students' knowledge of labor rules and did not directly analyze the content of public documents themselves.

These observations indicate that, although existing studies have highlighted the disconnection between policy discourse and educational practice, comprehensive analyses of how public documents describe employment conditions and whether they provide guidance for preparing students for such an environment remain insufficient. Accordingly, this study examines public documents related to the promotion of career education to clarify the extent to which they refer to elements of the JES and its transformations, and whether they present instructional orientations or practical examples that encourage students to prepare for the employment environment shaped by this system.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Corpus Construction

This study analyzes a corpus of fifty official documents on career education published between December 1999 and March 2024, collected from the website of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) (MEXT, n.d.) and the website of the National Institute for Educational Policy Research, Center for Student Guidance and Career Education (NIER) (NIER, n.d.). The corpus covers the period from the Central Council for Education report "Recommendations on Improving the Transition between Primary/Secondary Education and Higher Education" (December 1999)—the first official policy document in Japan to use the term "career education"—to "Reconsidering the Significance of Work-Related Experiential Activities (Part 1)" (March 2024), which was the most recent document available at the time of data collection (Table 1).

Table 1. Classification of Official Career Education Documents

Major Category	Subcategory	No. of Documents	Publication Period	Representative Example
Policy Guidelines	Central Council for Education reports	2	1999–2011	Central Council for Education (1999) <i>Recommendations on Improving the Transition between Primary/Secondary Education and Higher Education</i>
	Research Reports	17	2002–2016	MEXT (2002) <i>Report on the Promotion of Education to Foster Students' Views on Occupations and Attitudes toward Work</i>

Major Category	Subcategory	No. of Documents	Publication Period	Representative Example
Practical Guidelines	Handbooks	7	2005–2023	MEXT (2005) <i>Junior High School Workplace Experience Guide</i>
	Pamphlets	22	2009–2024	NIER (2024) <i>Reconsidering the Significance of Work-Related Experiential Activities (Part 1)</i>
	Case Collections	2	2008–2009	NIER (2008) <i>Case Collection of Career Education Experiential Activities (Vol. 1)</i>

Due to space limitations, Table 1 does not present all documents in the corpus but instead lists representative examples from each category. For analysis purposes, "official documents" were broadly classified into two types: (1) Policy Guidelines, which include documents related to policy direction and institutional design, and (2) Practical Guidelines, which consist of operational documents developed by governmental agencies to support educational implementation in schools. Within this classification, Policy Guidelines were further subdivided into "Central Council for Education reports" and "Research Reports," whereas Practical Guidelines were categorized into "Handbooks," "Pamphlets," and "Case Collections."

2.2 Quantitative Text Analysis

KH Coder was used to conduct quantitative text analysis. KH Coder, a software developed by Higuchi for quantitative text analysis and text mining, was used to process the corpus. The software is widely employed in academic research—having been cited in over 5,000 studies and conference presentations—and is recognized for its reliability in analyzing open-ended survey responses, interview transcripts, newspaper articles, and other forms of textual data. Quantitative text analysis is a methodological approach that systematically organizes large volumes of textual data to identify latent semantic patterns beneath the surface of the discourse (Higuchi, 2020). Given that this study analyzes a relatively large corpus of 50 public documents and aims to detect variation in descriptions across external variables such as document type and policy function, this method was considered appropriate.

2.3 Analytical Framework and Code Development

To operationalize the representation of JES within the corpus, a total of twenty-four analytic codes were defined. In addition to these JES-related codes, Instructional Guidance and Case Examples code were established to detect segments that present teaching directives, classroom practices, or pedagogical commentary. A full list of these code labels and their conceptual definitions—without the coding rules—is presented in Table 2. The JES-related codes were derived from Saigan (2024), which synthesized JES-related constructs across eight major academic studies published between 2019 and 2024. The codes were organized into two conceptual categories: (1) Structural components of JES, (2) Labor Issues Emerging from JES.

The first analytical category, Structural Components of JES, consists of codes that capture the foundational mechanisms through which employment relationships are institutionally organized in Japan. These include hiring systems such as "Simultaneous Recruitment of New Graduates", a practice in which companies recruit large cohorts of students at once without specifying precise job roles, and mobility arrangements such as "Company-Led Personnel Transfers", where employees may be reassigned across departments at the discretion of the firm rather than through contractual negotiation. In addition to these stable institutional features, this category also incorporates time-differentiated variants of structural codes—such as "Job-Grade Qualification System:1990s" and "Seniority-Based Wage System:1990s"—which allow the analysis to address how certain mechanisms have been partially modified over time without losing their structural continuity within the JES.

The second category, Labor Issues Emerging from JES, refers to codes that do not describe institutional mechanisms themselves but rather the consequences of those mechanisms as experienced by different groups of workers. For instance, "Difficulties Faced by Women" captures gender-specific

restrictions in career advancement under male-centered seniority structures, while "Restricted Inter-Firm Mobility" reflects the limited possibility of changing jobs due to company-specific employment practices and long-term retention norms. These codes make it possible to trace how the institutional logic of JES generates unequal outcomes, such as forced job rotation ("Involuntary Transfers"), prolonged overwork ("Long Working Hours"), or workplace coercion enacted through hierarchical authority ("Power Harassment").

Table 2. List of JES Analytic Codes and Definitions

Category	Code Name	Definition
Structural Components of JES	Personality-Based Evaluation System	Evaluation practices that assess workers based on personality traits or attitudinal qualities rather than clearly defined job performance criteria.
	Job-Grade Qualification System	A job classification framework in which roles and responsibilities are assigned according to job-grade categories.
	Job-Grade Qualification System:1990s	A reform phase in the 1990s, where performance-based pay elements were partially introduced into the job-grade system.
	Job-Grade Qualification System:2000s	A subsequent reform stage emphasizing role-based and responsibility-based pay structures within the job-grade framework.
	Slow Promotion Track	A gradual promotion process in which advancement to managerial or executive positions takes an extended period.
	Simultaneous Recruitment of New Graduates	A hiring practice in which companies recruit large cohorts of students directly from schools at the same time.
	Company-Led Personnel Transfers	A personnel system in which job assignments and transfers are determined unilaterally by the company.
	In-House Training and OJT	Company-led employee development practices conducted internally through on-the-job training programs.
	Seniority-Based Wage System	A wage structure in which salary increases and promotion are determined by age or length of service.
	Seniority-Based Wage System:1990s	A phase in which the seniority-based wage curve was gradually moderated after the 1990s.
	Mandatory Retirement System	An employment system in which termination of employment is uniformly determined by reaching a fixed retirement age.
	Mandatory Retirement System: Continuous Reform	Recent adjustments in retirement practices following increases in the pension eligibility age.
	Long-Term Employment Norms	An employment norm in which employees are expected to remain within the same company until retirement.
	Dismissal Regulation System	Institutional constraints that restrict dismissals, particularly economic layoffs justified by job elimination.
	Enterprise-Based Labor Union	Labor unions organized at the company level that engage in negotiation and labor–management consultation.
Labor Issues Emerging from JES	Unspecified Job Scope	An employment structure in which work content, location, and working hours are not predetermined at the time of hiring.
	Difficulties Faced by Women	Gender-specific barriers that make promotion and career advancement more difficult for female employees.
	Difficulties Faced by Mid-Career Employees	Structural disadvantages experienced by mid-career employees, including risk of dismissal or career stagnation.

Category	Code Name	Definition
	Difficulties Faced by Non-Regular Workers	Employment insecurity and unequal treatment faced by non-regular workers compared to regular employees.
	Mismatch Between Academic Degree and Job Assignment	A discrepancy between academic specialization and actual job roles assigned upon recruitment or transfer.
	Restricted Inter-Firm Mobility	Limited opportunities to change jobs due to company-specific employment practices and long tenure expectations.
	Involuntary Transfers	Personnel transfers imposed by the company that result in employees being reassigned against their preference.
	Long Working Hours	A tendency for prolonged working hours, including overtime and extended work commitments.
	Power Harassment	Situations in which hierarchical authority enables coercive or abusive behavior in the workplace.
Educational Orientation	Instructional Guidance and Case Examples	Descriptions of teaching guidance, lesson plans, or practice-based examples intended for use in educational settings.

2.4 Procedure

First, a simple frequency count was performed to identify whether each code appeared within the corpus. Next, cross-tabulation was used to compare how codes were distributed across different document types and institutional roles (policy guidelines vs. practice guidelines). Finally, to determine whether JES-related descriptions were presented alongside instructional guidance, Jaccard similarity coefficients were calculated to measure co-occurrence between JES codes and instructional codes within the same segment. To enhance reliability, keyword-in-context validation was conducted for codes detected through automated analysis. Segments that included matching lexical patterns but did not align with the conceptual definition of a code were excluded manually. This combined computational and interpretive approach ensured analytical rigor while accommodating semantic nuance.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Frequency of JES-Related Codes

The frequency analysis revealed that only 11 out of the 24 analytic codes appeared in any of the fifty official documents. The most frequently detected codes were "Simultaneous Recruitment of New Graduates" and "Difficulties Faced by Non-Regular Workers", followed by "In-House Training and OJT". Regarding labor issue codes, only two out of the eight codes—"Difficulties Faced by Non-Regular Workers" and "Difficulties Faced by Women"—were identified in the corpus.

3.2 Distribution by Document Type and Institutional Role

Cross-tabulation by document type demonstrated that Central Council for Education reports and research reports contained the highest number of JES-related segments, whereas handbooks, pamphlets, and case collections—which are more directly used by teachers for instructional purposes—showed very limited coverage of JES elements. When categorized by institutional role, 71.12% of JES-related content appeared in policy guidelines, while only 28.88% was found in practice guidelines.

3.3 Co-Occurrence with Instructional Content

The co-occurrence analysis based on Jaccard similarity coefficients showed that 10 out of the 11 JES-related codes identified in the frequency count appeared alongside instructional codes. However, the Jaccard coefficients remained below 0.1 across all combinations, indicating overall weak co-occurrence between institutional elements and instructional guidance. Among the codes, "Simultaneous

Recruitment of New Graduates", "In-House Training and OJT", and "Difficulties Faced by Non-Regular Workers" displayed relatively higher co-occurrence scores compared to the others. In terms of document type, Central Council for Education reports exhibited the highest degree of co-occurrence, followed by Research Reports. When categorized by institutional role, Policy Guidelines showed higher co-occurrence than Practical Guidelines.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Summary of Findings

Among the 24 codes related to the JES, only 11 were identified in the official documents, while the remaining 13 were not mentioned at all. The absence of these 13 codes indicates a lack of coverage in the current documentation. In particular, regarding labor issue codes, only two out of the eight—"Difficulties Faced by Non-Regular Workers" and "Difficulties Faced by Women"—were referenced, and descriptions of the other six issues were completely absent, revealing a notable insufficiency of information in this area.

Conversely, of the 11 JES-related codes detected, 10 appeared together with instructional descriptions or examples, suggesting that many structural elements were at least partially linked to practice-oriented guidance. However, all Jaccard coefficients were below 0.1, indicating that the co-occurrence between JES-related descriptions and instructional content remained generally low. Based on this tendency, it can be stated that references to instructional approaches designed to prepare students for labor environments shaped by the JES are limited.

4.2 Comparison by Document Type and Publication Period

Of the documents in which JES-related codes were identified, 71.12% of the references appeared in Policy Guidelines, while only 28.88% were found in Practical Guidelines. This indicates that descriptions related to the JES are relatively scarce in materials that teachers are likely to use directly in school settings. Furthermore, Practical Guidelines showed extremely low co-occurrence between JES-related codes and instructional descriptions. Since Practical Guidelines contain a higher proportion of charts and non-paragraph text compared to policy-oriented documents, such formatting characteristics may have reduced the likelihood of co-occurrence. However, given that the co-occurrence remained consistently low across all sources, it can still be stated that instructional guidance related to the JES is insufficient in practice-oriented texts.

4.3 On the Transformation of the Japanese Employment System

Among the codes representing transformations of the JES, neither "Job-Grade Qualification System:2000s" nor "Transformation of Retirement System" appeared in any of the official documents. In contrast, the code "Job-Grade Qualification System:1990s" was detected only in documents published after 2017. Since this code would normally be expected to appear in documents from the 1990s to the 2000s and considering that "Job-Grade Qualification System:2000s" was not detected at all, these findings raise doubts as to whether career education policies and measures have accurately reflected the transformations of the employment system.

5. CONCLUSION

In the official documents related to career education, descriptions of the characteristics of the JES and instructional guidance or practical examples linked to these structures cannot be considered sufficient. The fact that 11 out of the 24 JES-related codes were not referenced at all indicates a lack of information, suggesting that current policies and initiatives may not be fully designed and implemented based on the institutional features and transformations of the JES. Furthermore, regarding labor issue codes, only two out of eight were identified, and in the case of "Long Working Hours", none of the structural elements assumed to be causal factors were mentioned. These findings highlight a limitation in career education policy in preparing students for labor environments shaped by the JES. In addition,

Practical Guidelines—whose primary function is to directly support educational implementation—contained only limited references to JES-related information and instructional guidance. This indicates an insufficient linkage between policy rhetoric and classroom practice. The results suggest that the current state of career education practice may be affected by the lack of structured guidance and information concerning the JES in instructional materials.

The significance of this study lies in its examination of official documents through a quantitative text analysis approach, providing an objective basis for identifying policy-level issues. By empirically clarifying gaps at the level of policy and institutional design, this study contributes new evidence to ongoing discussions on the structural challenges of career education policy. However, this study did not include an analysis of how these documents are implemented at the school level. Future research should therefore adopt a more comprehensive analytical framework that encompasses both policy and practice to clarify the factors that currently shape the implementation of career education.

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