

The Role of Career Professionals in Secondary Schools and Their Relationship with Other Professionals: An International Comparison of Japan, the United States, England, and France

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ABSTRACT

This paper compares career professional systems in secondary schools in four countries: the United States (Ohio), France, England, and Japan (Nagoya). Career professionals can be categorized into three types: career guidance teachers (GT), career counselors (CC), and school counselors (SC). The comparison reveals that GT-type professionals collaborate more easily with teachers and staff, while SC-types are more effective in integrating developmental support across multiple fields, although their role boundaries often become ambiguous. CC-types have the capacity to focus on career guidance; however, the "division" with other professionals often takes precedence over collaboration. Standardization contributes to equal access to career guidance services but may hinder flexibility tailored to regional or school contexts. Internal placement facilitates collaboration with other members of the school team, while external placement enables professionals to maintain appropriate independence from the school.

Keywords: Career Professionals, Career Development, Secondary Schools, International Comparisons

1. INTRODUCTION

As students' career development becomes more complex and diverse, the importance of individualized career guidance continues to grow. However, in Japan, where career professionals are not systematically integrated into schools, the practices of career guidance often rely on classroom teachers' experience-based approaches. Since 1950, voices in schools have called for the legislation of vocational guidance chief teachers and the assignment of full-time staff. However, the 1953 amendment of the Enforcement Regulations of the School Education Act resulted in the assignment of "vocational guidance director teachers" (renamed "career guidance chief teachers" in 1972), a secondary position without any qualification requirements (Fujita, 1997). Career guidance by teachers has been inadequate, both in terms of expertise and the time available to concentrate on guidance, and this problem remains unresolved.

In contrast, in many developed countries, teachers collaborate with career professionals. What is the optimum solution for professionals from different fields to support students' career development by leveraging each other's strengths while avoiding conflict among them? Building on Hooley (2022), Einarsdottir et al. (2023), and Robertson et al. (2024, 2025), career professionals can be categorized into three types: career guidance teachers (GT), career counselors (CC), and school counselors (SC), the latter providing both career guidance and general psychological support. In order to compare career professional systems internationally, it is therefore essential to investigate the roles of each type and clarify their relationships with other school staff, particularly teachers. "Career Navigators" (CNs) have recently been introduced in one region of Japan as a new initiative, and their further development is

anticipated.

This paper compares career professional systems in secondary schools with the aim of drawing implications for Japan and other Asian countries, focusing on four countries: the United States (Ohio), which employs an SC-type system; France, which historically followed a CC-type system but has shifted towards an SC-type system; England, which combines elements of GT and CC models; and Japan (Nagoya), which has recently introduced CNs.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a literature-based analytical approach. The international comparison framework is primarily drawn from Robertson et al. (2024), with additional criteria derived from other studies. The framework proposed by Robertson et al. (2024) consists of five areas: professional identity, standards, management of boundaries and tensions, advantages and disadvantages of the model, and future prospects. This study compares the first four areas, excluding future prospects, and draws implications for Japan.

3. RESULTS

3.1. United States (Ohio)

In the United States, the School Counselor (SC) is career professional in secondary schools. School counseling originated in the early 1900s as vocational guidance, later expanding to include personal adjustment and pupil services. Federal legislation enacted in 1946 and 1958 advanced training and the establishment of school counseling positions. School counseling began to be implemented in elementary schools in 1960s. From the 1970s, comprehensive program models developed, with many states adopting standards in 1980s–1990s. In 2003, the American School Counselor Association introduced the National Model, which is now widely used to standardize school counseling programs (Gysbers, 2010).

In Ohio, the state law regarding school counselors is defined in Ohio Administrative Code 3301-24-0. SCs provide support to K-12 students in both elementary and secondary education. They are full-time employees hired by school districts and play a vital role by guiding students toward success in their education and future careers across Ohio. SCs support all PreK-12 students in academic achievement, social and emotional development and career planning. The management of career education at each school is one of the SC's key responsibilities. SCs also develop relationships among schools and external organizations to support student's academic achievement, social and emotional development, and career development (Ohio Department of Education and Workforce (ODEW) 2025).

Ohio SCs must obtain the Professional Pupil License issued by the State Board of Education, which must be renewed, every five years. The pathway to obtaining an SC license varies depending on whether the applicant holds a teaching license and their teaching experience (University of Toledo). For example, applicants holding a current, valid Ohio Teaching License with two or more years of teaching experience must complete a state-approved master's level school counselor preparation program, including a 600-hour internship in a school setting. Upon completion of the master's degree, the approved school counselor preparation program and the Praxis II specialty area test for school counseling (0420), they become eligible to apply for the Professional Pupil Services License, valid for five years and authorizing service to students at all grade levels. They are not required to complete an Induction year. ODEW outlines 6 standards for SCs in the Ohio Standards for School Counselors (OSSC); 1) Comprehensive School Counseling Program Plan, 2) Direct Services for Academic, Career and Social/Emotional Development, 3) Indirect Services: Partnerships and Referrals, 4) Evaluation and Data, 5) Leadership and Advocacy, and 6) Professional Responsibility, Knowledge and Growth (Ohio Department of Education, 2015).

The content of initial SC training varies depending on the type of license held. Professional development is continuously provided by professional organizations such as the Ohio School Counselor

Association, the Ohio Association for Career and Technical Education - Student Services Division, ASCA, and the Association for Career and Technical Education - Guidance and Career Development Division. School District Committee evaluate the skills of SCs. The evaluation conducted by the school district board of education based on the OSSC.

Relationships between SCs and other professionals vary by the school type. In Career Centers and secondary vocational schools, SCs and lab instructors in charge of each course work collaborate with counselors. In Elementary and secondary schools, commitment from SCs and subject teachers (classroom teachers) is limited. In Ohio, SCs consider themselves as school counselors rather than "guidance counselors", as they recognize that they support all K-12 students not only in career planning but also in academic improvement and the development of social and emotional skills. However, when the expectations surrounding their role change, conflicts with other professionals may arise.

3.2. England

With the implementation of the Education Act 2011, responsibility for the delivery of career guidance—previously held by Local Authorities—was transferred to schools (Department for Education [DfE], 2011). In response to concerns about provision, the Gatsby Foundation commissioned research on international career guidance practices and, on the basis of its findings, proposed eight Benchmarks as a model of good practice (Gatsby Charitable Foundation, 2014). To ensure that schools adopted provision aligned with these standards, the Careers Strategy of 2017 required the appointment of a Careers Leader in every school (DfE, 2017). A defining feature of this relatively new role in England is that no formal professional qualification is mandated.

The statutory guidance (DfE, 2025) states that each school must appoint a Careers Leader who has received "appropriate training." Although the definition of appropriate training remains flexible, the minimum compulsory training may consist of as little as three days (Careers and Enterprise Company [CEC], 2025). This arrangement reduces barriers to implementation by allowing schools to designate staff according to their individual circumstances. However, the absence of a requirement for advanced professional qualifications can also be interpreted as a limitation, in that only schools with a strong institutional commitment to careers work may allocate substantial resources to enhancing provision.

In England, the Careers Adviser is the standard career professional, whose qualifications and standards are regulated by professional bodies. The national organization representing career practitioners, the Career Development Institute (CDI), requires that Careers Advisers hold at least a Level 6 qualification (equivalent to a bachelor's degree) in career guidance and development. This CDI standard is widely accepted as the benchmark definition of a career professional (Andrews & Hooley, 2017).

One of the eight Gatsby Benchmarks, "Personal Guidance," requires that every student receive at least one individual interview by the age of 16, delivered by a suitably trained adviser. By 2018, the DfE's revised statutory guidance recommended that schools and colleges ensure personal careers guidance (Gatsby Benchmark 8) is delivered by advisers trained to an appropriate level, identifying Level 6 and 7 qualifications. The guidance also advised schools to use the UK Register of Career Development Professionals, maintained by the CDI (Gough & Stewart, 2023).

With respect to managing boundaries and potential tensions among professionals, Careers Leaders generally occupy a position less prone to conflict. Their central responsibility is to ensure the delivery of the school's careers program while coordinating the contributions of teachers, support staff, and external specialists. Furthermore, the relatively modest level of professional qualification required for Careers Leaders may reduce friction with other career professionals, even as it raises questions about the depth of their expertise.

3.3. France

In France, Psychologist of National education specializing in education, development, and career guidance (PNE-EDCG) serve as career professionals in secondary schools. After World War II, career professionals began counseling students in secondary education to support transitions between different

educational pathways (Kyomen, 2015). In 1971, they were conferred the status of career guidance counselor as a national civil servant, in conjunction with the establishment of the national Information and Career Guidance Center (ICGC).

In 2017, career professionals were integrated with school psychologists in primary education, giving rise to the PNE in response to the government's policy that prioritized developmental support and dropout prevention over career guidance. While many core duties became shared, certain areas of specialization remained distinct.

According to Decree No. 2017-120 of February 1, 2017, PNEs contribute to the academic success of all students, work to reduce the effects of social inequality, and support young people in obtaining qualifications that facilitate their transition to employment, through their professional expertise. The specific roles of EDCG include providing information on educational courses and subsequent career paths, advising on the development of academic and career plans, preventing early school dropout, and preparing comprehensive plans for school career guidance (Notice of April 28, 2017). As of 2024, 4,561 PNE-EDCGs were assigned to 433 ICGCs nationwide, providing support to lower and upper secondary schools within their respective centers' jurisdictions through school visits (DEPP, 2025).

To obtain "Certificate of Aptitude for the Position of PNE-EDCG", candidates must pass one of three types of examinations and then complete one year of training as trainees. The training covers nine areas of knowledge, nine competencies common to both specialties of PNE and seven competencies specific to EDCGs (Ministerial Ordinance of April 26, 2017). Trainees alternate between "internship" (16 weeks) and "lectures" (420-450 hours) at the National Institute for Teacher training (NITT) and PNE training centers for one year (Ministerial Ordinance of August 23, 2017). Quality assurance is maintained through continuous training provided by educational authorities and professional associations, as well as performance evaluations based on target agreements (Kyomen, 2021).

Since the 1980s, their professional identity has oscillated between that of an "educational psychologist" and an "educator for career choice." Their association adopted the former, strengthening school educational psychology and pursuing multidisciplinary psychological support (Kyomen, 2022; Lehner, 2020). However, this shift risks diluting their identity as career professionals by broadening their scope of practice.

Career professionals have had to continually negotiate their status and roles with teachers-the majority group within the school community- to gain recognition of their professional legitimacy. The 2010s saw crises arising from reductions in personnel and emerging needs to enhance well-being within schools. To address these challenges, they adopted a strategy of shifting from a "career counselor" to a "school counselor" model. This shift improved collaboration with teachers but made it more difficult to focus solely on career guidance. Their non-affiliation with a specific school has the disadvantage of weakening their school identity. However, it also offers the advantage of ensuring independence from the school system.

3.4. Japan (Nagoya City)

In Japan, career education is not treated as a separate subject but is integrated throughout the school curriculum. According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), the goal of career education is to cultivate the abilities and attitudes necessary for students to achieve social and vocational independence. By enriching career-related learning through various educational activities, schools aim to connect students' studies with their future career pathways (MEXT, 2023).

Career education is implemented as a whole-school initiative. Special Activities, homeroom, moral education, the Period for Integrated Studies, and subject-based classes all contribute to career development. Whole-school efforts are guided by the principal, who sets the vision, and by in-school structures such as career education promotion committees. All teachers collaborate to design and implement a comprehensive career education plan.

A recent initiative attracting attention is Nagoya City's "Career Navigator (CN)" program, a locally developed model launched as a pilot in 2018 and fully implemented by 2025. The program assigns one full-time CN to every municipal junior high school, high school, and special needs school. Operated as

a contracted service, the program recruits and trains CNs through external providers. CNs are nationally certified Career Consultants who have completed a 150-hour training program and passed the national examination, ensuring standardized expertise, ethical awareness, and counseling competence (NPO ICDS, 2024).

CNs play diverse roles, including designing and delivering career education lessons, coordinating workplace visits, providing individual counseling for students and guardians, organizing professional development for teachers, and offering information and opportunities for out-of-school career-related activities. Although the CN position lacks a formal legal definition, national advisory bodies such as the Central Council for Education encourage greater utilization of career professionals in schools (Nagoya City Board of Education, 2024; Central Council for Education, 1999).

A key characteristic of CNs is their full-time presence in schools. By sharing desks in the staff room and working alongside teachers, they engage in frequent communication and build strong relationships. However, as the CN role is still relatively new, gaining trust and integration within school community can take time (Japan Career Development Association, 2024). Classroom teachers generally take primary responsibility for lessons and career guidance, although some of these areas overlap with the work of Career Navigators (CNs), collaboration continues to progress because CNs help reduce teachers' heavy workload (MEXT, 2023).

The strength of the CN system lies in its combination of specialist expertise and flexibility. Nevertheless, several challenges remain, including high personnel costs, the absence of a legal framework, the lack of a formal evaluation system, and ambiguous role definitions. Despite these limitations, the CN model demonstrates the potential of embedding career professionals in the daily life of schools to enhance student development.

4. DISCUSSION

The comparison reveals that GT-type professionals (e.g., England) collaborate more easily with other professionals due to their moderate level of specialized expertise. While Career Leaders are similar to Japan's career guidance officers, their limitations are often offset by qualified Careers Advisers. SC-type professionals (e.g., US and France since 2017) are more effective in integrating developmental support across multiple fields, although they tend to have fluid expectations of teachers and their role boundaries often become ambiguous. CC-type professionals (e.g., France before 2017 and Nagoya) have the capacity to focus their work on career guidance. However, the "division" rather than "collaboration" with other professionals tends to take precedence leaving responses to diverse developmental support needs beyond career guidance to individual judgment. Furthermore, as illustrated by the French case, transitions between these types can lead to a significant professional identity crisis. These are general patterns, however, and diversity is observed across all three types, reflecting differences in educational administration among countries.

The level of standardization was highest in France, followed by the US, Nagoya (Japan) and England. While standardization contributes to equitable access to career guidance services, it can limit flexibility in adapting the system to regional or school contexts. Another key difference lies in whether professionals are based inside (US, England, Nagoya) or outside schools (France). Internal placement facilitates collaboration with other members of the school team but limits autonomy as a career professional. External placement enables professionals to maintain appropriate independence from the school, while their status of full-times workers in school makes them less likely to be seen as part of the community, posing challenges for daily coordination.

5. CONCLUSION

This study draws implications for Japan from two perspectives: the position within schools and professional expertise. CNs are CC-type professionals, similar to those in France prior to 2017, yet they are permanently stationed within schools, a feature shared with the US. They are not directly employed by the schools but belong to external organizations contracted by the education administration. This

arrangement offers the advantage of maintaining a degree of autonomy while enabling collaboration across multiple professions. However, as a professional system, it is unstable. Unlike their counterparts in England or the US, CNs lack prior teaching experience, making adaptation to school culture a major factor influencing collaboration. Requiring teaching certification as a qualification could lead to candidate shortages; therefore, enhancing training programs is currently seen as the practical solution.

The professional expertise of CNs is ensured to some extent by the requirement for the national qualification of Career Consultant (150 hours of training and a qualifying examination). However, compared with the US or France, which require master's-level qualifications, the duration of the training is shorter. Furthermore, the content focuses primarily on career support for adults and does not sufficiently address career development during adolescence or the structure of school education. While organizations employing CNs provide their own training to address these gaps, nationwide implementation will likely require the development of competencies at the national certification level for school-based career professionals.

The discussions in this paper are based on findings from the literature review. Future interview studies will help to reveal the professional identity of career professionals, their management of boundaries and tensions in real-world context, and the future prospects of the various models excluded from this study.

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