

## **Global Citizenship Education in Japan: High School Teachers' Perspectives on MEXT vs. UNESCO Guidelines and the Challenges They Face**

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### **Abstract**

This study examined Japanese high school teachers' understanding and opinions of global citizenship education (GCE) and how it is carried out according to the guidelines established by Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Using semi-structured interviews, the study explored: (1) teachers' awareness of the differences in expectations, values, and goals between the two organizations; (2) the extent to which GCE is embraced; and (3) the successes and challenges in implementing GCE. The thematic analysis of interview data revealed three main themes: (1) varying awareness of MEXT and UNESCO guidelines; (2) specific challenges faced by different types of schools; and (3) successes and barriers in achieving GCE goals. The findings indicate that, regardless of school type, teachers tend to align more with UNESCO's globally oriented perspective on GCE. These insights underscore the need to improve the use of UNESCO's Associated Schools Project Network (ASPnet) and to address structural barriers to further develop GCE in Japan.

*Keywords:* global citizenship education (GCE), Japanese high schools, MEXT, *jinzai*, UNESCO

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## Introduction

Japan is at a crucial point in improving global education, with its government increasingly focusing on globalization and on developing future generations capable of contributing to the global community. High school education plays an essential role in preparing students for life in such a society. Currently, Japan faces social and economic challenges, including an aging population and declining birth rates. The government aims to create a generation that can compete worldwide, especially economically, with a focus on global citizenship education (GCE). To achieve this, Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) serves as the primary educational authority, seeking policy guidance from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

At this early stage of implementing GCE in Japan, how do high school teachers perceive the new guidelines set by MEXT and UNESCO? To explore this question, the study first reviews the general concepts of GCE, UNESCO's vision, Japan's history of globalization, and MEXT's initiatives and challenges.

## Literature Review

### Global Citizenship Education (GCE)

Global citizenship is not a new concept; it dates back more than 2,000 years to ancient Greece. At that time, citizenship focused on developing responsible and loyal citizens. But as globalization expanded, simply being loyal to your country became inadequate. Socrates and Diogenes called themselves "the citizens of the world" to challenge the limited view of the Polis, which only asks for loyalty to one's city and excludes others (Schattle, 2008). They believed that global citizens are those who are aware of their homeland and the wider world (Mutluer, 2013).

Today, the concept of global citizenship has many different meanings, with various opinions and interpretations. Mannion et al. (2011) argue that GCE often reveals how people are unconsciously influenced by Eurocentric views, and it's crucial to learn from local perspectives, including colonial history and imperialism. They also highlight that some viewpoints go beyond national borders, emphasizing the need for GCE to challenge Eurocentrism. Furthermore, they point out that globalization has already taken place and that this ongoing process provides an opportunity to move past the anti-globalization movement, especially in Europe.

According to Richardson (1979), a global citizen "knows how the world works, is outraged by injustice, and is both willing and enabled to take action to meet this global challenge" (p. 1). Davies (2006) suggests that GCE needs to include a sense of anger to sustain high motivation to change current situations, rather than simply becoming empathetic individuals. In this way, she believes that GCE could guide the future direction of education, a view that differs from education that focuses solely on students' academic skills.

Schattle (2008) argues that the modern definition of global citizenship is not about legal status but reflects behaviors that naturally occur in daily life. Educational institutions aim to develop ethical individuals who are not only members of society but also demonstrate actions typical of global citizens (Schattle, 2008). He believes that GCE emphasizes individuals serving as role models, not just within a limited community but for all of humanity.

Dill (2013) argues that GCE has two primary goals: (1) developing young citizens who can compete on a global scale, and (2) teaching students global awareness and empathy while inspiring them to adopt a humanistic outlook. Dill also emphasizes that these two goals depend on each teacher's willingness, meaning teachers shape the direction of GCE.

Bosio (2023a) views GCE as a value-based educational theory that encourages students to focus on similarities rather than differences. It promotes its use through reflective, dialogic methods where students share their values with peers. This ongoing dialogue helps them understand the mechanisms of problems and potential actions. Ultimately, learners engaged in this dialogic approach to GCE will evolve from simply being "human resources" into "global citizens" (Bosio, 2023a, p. 178).

Although scholars' definitions of GCE vary, there are common understandings. They agree that GCE aims to prepare younger generations to advocate for a better world by transcending national boundaries and fostering individuals who understand global challenges and can lead humanitarian change. In other words, GCE concentrates on developing citizens capable of promoting a better world peacefully by bridging differences.

### **UNESCO's Vision for GCE**

In November 1946, one year after World War II, UNESCO was founded to promote peace through dialogue and mutual understanding, acknowledging the remorse associated with WWII, antisemitism, and racism (MEXT, 2024a). Since then, UNESCO has made significant progress in GCE efforts. In 1953, it established the UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network (ASPnet) to implement its core educational policies. ASPnet schools foster global interactions among educators and students while developing innovative approaches to address worldwide challenges (MEXT, 2024a). Today, ASPnet includes over 12,000 schools across 182 countries (MEXT, 2024a). A key goal of ASPnet schools is supporting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially Goal 4: "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (MEXT, 2024a). To achieve this, UNESCO encourages ASPnet schools to prioritize GCE.

UNESCO states that "a global citizen understands how the world works, values differences in people, and works with others to find solutions to challenges too big for any one nation. Citizenship and global citizenship do not exclude each other. Instead, these two concepts are mutually reinforcing" (UNESCO, 2024, n.p.). Through GCE, individuals can belong not only to a country but also to the global community, addressing issues locally and globally (UNESCO, 2024). As the world changes rapidly, education must adapt. Therefore, UNESCO uses ASPnet to develop an innovative educational system for peace (UNESCO, 2024). With over 70 years of GCE experience, UNESCO demonstrates that those exposed to GCE early in life have the creativity to find peaceful solutions to conflict (UNESCO, 2024). Consequently, UNESCO plays a key role in promoting GCE worldwide.

### **Japan's History of Westernization, Internationalization, and Globalization**

Although developed, Japan lagged in globalization. Its late start can be linked to the *sakoku* [national isolation] period (1639–1853), when the country cut ties with the outside world due to fears that Catholicism would influence the shogunate (Garside, 2023). Additionally, a century of instability during the *Sengoku* [warring states] period caused the Tokugawa shogunate to limit foreign trade to maintain stability. The *sakoku* policy also aimed to counter

perceptions of Japan as inferior to China (Garside, 2023). By closing most borders except Nagasaki, Japan remained isolated from Western influence for over 200 years, while the West experienced major advancements, especially during the first industrial revolution (1760–1840). Japan focused on stability and recovery, while Western nations shifted from relying on human labor to machine technology, notably advancing the steam engine (Mohajan, 2019). As a result, the technological gap between Japan and the West widened during this period.

After the Meiji Revolution ended *sakoku* and ushered in the new era (1868–1912), Japan worked to catch up with Western countries that had advanced during its period of isolation. They focused on educating future leaders in economic and technological fields to compete with other nations and avoid colonization (Vosse, 2019). However, after the Meiji Restoration, Japan gradually shifted toward conservatism. While the Japanese embraced Western ideas, they limited these influences to preserve their traditions and unique culture (Vosse, 2019). Although the Meiji era marked Japan’s reopening, the country never fully internationalized due to its conservative stance.

Japan’s internationalization increased significantly after WWII, reaching its peak in the 1980s during the “bubble economy.” The boom began with the 1985 Plaza Agreement, which aimed to boost U.S. exports and reduce the trade deficit by weakening the dollar. Yen appreciation shifted investment to Japan, raising asset prices and unrealized profits and increasing collateral and loans, which fueled the bubble (Nomura Wealth Management, n.d.). Excess capital led Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone to promote internationalization and global trust through education (Aspinall, 2010). A key development was the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme, inviting native English speakers to teach in schools to modernize Japan’s insular attitude and strengthen global ties (Borg, 2018). The JET program marks the beginning of Japan’s efforts to internationalize its education system.

Another turning point occurred in 2012, when MEXT introduced new globalized educational policies (see the next section below), and in 2014, when MEXT launched a nationwide system called Super Global High School and University. The 2014 project aims to foster global leaders who can contribute to the world through education that helps students build communication and problem-solving skills (Super Global High School, n.d.). Schools designated as Super Global High Schools (SGHs) can expand global education with government-provided funding (Super Global High School, n.d.). The introduction of global education guidelines and SGH marked a clear shift from internationalization to globalization in Japan.

### **MEXT’s Global Jinzai Guidelines and Japan’s Challenges**

In Japan, MEXT plays a key role in shaping educational policies for all schools. In 2012, MEXT introduced new globalized educational policies aimed at fostering “global *jinzai*” [global human resources, global workers], outlining three guidelines for the qualities that global *jinzai* must possess.

Guideline 1: English ability and communication skills

Guideline 2: Initiative, proactivity, challenge spirits, cooperation, flexibility, sense of responsibility, and mission

Guideline 3: Cross-cultural understanding and Japanese identity

(MEXT, 2012a, p. 3)

One reason for emphasizing English proficiency is the reality of low English proficiency among the Japanese population, as evidenced by their low scores on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), with Japan ranking 33rd out of 35 Asian countries (TOEFL, 2023). The Japanese government believes that improving English proficiency is not only for educational purposes but also for developing *jinzai* who can contribute to and compete globally and help rebuild the Japanese economy (MEXT, 2012a).

MEXT's global *jinzai* education also emphasizes Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), UNESCO's response to urgent sustainable development challenges, including environmental destruction, economic issues, and social problems (UNESCO, n.d.). MEXT states that ESD aims to foster values and actions for problem-solving, supporting a sustainable society by addressing modern challenges as our own—reflecting the slogan “Think globally, act locally”—to ensure an abundant life for future generations (MEXT, n.d.). Therefore, ESD develops leaders who contribute to a sustainable society, and MEXT aligns with UNESCO's policies in launching global educational initiatives.

In 2016, MEXT concluded that GCE fosters a sense of global community by introducing a new concept that can influence schools pursuing ESD (MEXT, 2016). However, ASPnet Japan's guidelines do not include global citizenship or GCE, focusing solely on promoting ESD (MEXT, 2012c). Despite national efforts to encourage schools to join ASPnet, the Japanese government has never used the term “global citizenship” to develop global leaders, preferring instead “global *jinzai*.” This may be because UNESCO's goal is to nurture youth capable of addressing global issues beyond borders through GCE (UNESCO, 2024), while Japan aims to cultivate generations that support its prosperity. Consequently, UNESCO's GCE conflicts with Japan's objectives.

Japan has over 1,000 ASPnet schools (K–12), the highest number among 182 countries (MEXT, 2024b). MEXT considers ASPnet schools as hubs for promoting ESD (MEXT, 2021a) and supports curricula that foster research, action, and reporting, incorporating ESD into schools (MEXT, 2023a). Their perspective differs from that of other countries (MEXT, 2021a). While aiming to maximize the potential of ASPnet schools, MEXT questions further expansion because of a gap between schools that use assistance materials and those that do not (MEXT, 2021a). ASPnet schools only submit annual reports, leaving UNESCO and MEXT unclear about their current status (MEXT, 2021a).

According to Yoshida (2017), MEXT has aligned its educational policies with UNESCO for over 50 years. For example, MEXT promoted international education in 1988, following UNESCO's 1974 recognition of its importance (Yoshida, 2017). However, Japan lacks flexibility in implementing GCE within its curriculum, having integrated international education into existing subjects such as social studies and moral education (Yoshida, 2017).

Bosio (2021) argues that Japanese educational institutions are shifting from a traditional, rhetorical education model to incorporating GCE to produce globally aware graduates. However, their focus is on equipping students with skills to compete internationally rather than fostering respect or understanding of other cultures. Bosio criticizes Japan's emphasis on English and study abroad opportunities as means to secure careers in the Global North, noting that this focus on competitive global human resources has hindered the development of GCE skills like recognizing inequalities or societal issues. He insists that Japan's GCE mainly aims to help students succeed in the global market, lacking the broader global community awareness.

Although high school education is not compulsory in Japan, 99% of junior high school graduates attend high school today. MEXT expects high schools to recognize students' diversity and offer a unique and engaging education while supporting each student's independent approach to learning (MEXT, 2021b). MEXT also anticipates that the future will be difficult to predict due to rapid social changes, including economic globalization, declining birth rates, an aging society, advancements in information technology, and the mobility of the labor market and industrial and employment structures. From these perspectives, future high school education should equip all students with essential skills to navigate society and develop the qualities and abilities needed for their career paths. This should be based on a clear vision of the individual, considering the community's actual conditions as well as students' wishes and realities (MEXT, 2012b).

### **Present Study**

The present study investigated how Japanese high schools can improve their efforts to promote GCE by comparing (1) MEXT and UNESCO's definitions and goals for GCE, and (2) how public and private schools implement GCE curricula as outlined by MEXT and UNESCO. Specifically, the study addressed the following research questions:

1. To what extent are Japanese school teachers familiar with the difference between the MEXT and UNESCO guidelines for GCE, such as expectations, values, and goals?
2. How do Japanese high schools incorporate GCE?
3. How are they implementing the goals outlined by MEXT and UNESCO? What challenges do they face?

### **Methodology**

#### ***Participants***

This study involved seven MEXT-licensed high school teachers, all of whom taught English. Six private school teachers were recruited from two previously designated SGHs and the current ASPnet schools. One public school teacher from an ASPnet school also participated. This participant had experience teaching in multiple schools and offered insights into the realities of public schools from various perspectives. Table 1 shows the participants and their backgrounds.

**Table 1**  
*Participants*

|           | School<br>(School Type) | Years Taught | Educational Background                                    |
|-----------|-------------------------|--------------|---|
| Teacher A | School X<br>(Private)   | 3            | B.A. from the U.S.<br>Teacher Training Course in<br>Japan |
| Teacher B | School X<br>(Private)   | 18           | B.A. from the U.S.<br>M.A. from the U.S.                  |
| Teacher C | School X<br>(Private)   | 24           | B.A. from Japan<br>M.A. from the U.S.                     |
| Teacher D | School Y<br>(Private)   | 6            | B.A. from the U.S.<br>B.A. from Japan                     |
| Teacher E | School Y<br>(Private)   | 8            | B.A. from Japan   |
| Teacher F | School Y<br>(Private)   | 10           | B.A. from Japan   |
| Teacher G | School Z<br>(Public)    | 38           | B.A. from Japan   |

### ***Data Collection Procedure and Analysis***

Data were collected through one-on-one semi-structured interviews, conducted either in person or via Zoom, focusing on participants' experiences and thoughts regarding MEXT's global jinzei guidelines and UNESCO's GCE. Each interview lasted between 40 and 60 minutes. The data analysis examined similarities and differences in the experiences and perspectives of public and private school teachers, their opinions on the MEXT and UNESCO guidelines, their acceptance of GCE, and the challenges they face.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **Teachers' Awareness of MEXT and UNESCO Guidelines**

None of the private school teachers interviewed were familiar with MEXT's global jinzei guidelines, whereas the public school teacher was familiar with them and could explain them. Regarding UNESCO's GCE guidelines, although some teachers had heard of the concept, no one was thoroughly familiar with the actual guidelines. One possible reason is that private school teachers prioritize their schools' visions for GCE. Another reason could be the length of their teaching experience. MEXT released its global jinzei guidelines in 2012, which sparked a trend in Japan by introducing a new concept to the Japanese educational field. However, those who started teaching after 2012 did not have the chance to witness the transition before and after the definitions and guidelines were introduced.

### ***MEXT's Global Jinzai Guidelines***

After reviewing explanations about MEXT's global jinzai and UNESCO's GCE guidelines, the interviewees expressed interest in MEXT Guidelines 1 and 3, which emphasize improving English skills and communication, cross-cultural understanding, and Japanese identity. After learning about these guidelines, they examined the details and identified both positive and negative impressions. Regarding Guideline 1, all interviewees, who are English teachers, agreed on the importance of English education. However, they questioned whether English should be the most important aspect of global jinzai.

Sakamoto (2022) critiques the overemphasis on English education within the global jinzai guidelines. He argues that while acknowledging the importance of English education is necessary, achieving English proficiency should not be the primary goal of global education. Furthermore, he states that Guideline 1 (global jinzai) is crucial because MEXT emphasizes the significance of Guideline 3 (cross-cultural understanding), and merely improving English skills does not automatically improve global competence. Similarly, those interviewed for this study preferred students to develop as global citizens rather than just proficient English speakers.

The interviewees also discussed Guideline 3, especially regarding Japanese identity. Drawing from their personal experiences living abroad, all interviewees agreed that having an identity is important but questioned whether it should be specifically "Japanese." Kawano (2009) argues that students' understanding of "Japanese" is more flexible than many think, calling for a broader definition of "Japanese" in educational contexts. Since Japan began globalizing, Japanese identity has been seen as a key step in expanding GCE; however, creating a shared identity can sometimes exclude certain groups.

Kitayama (2018) raises concerns about xenophobia and racism in schools amid the rising far-right, comparing Japanese teachers with those from other backgrounds. Her research indicates that many Japanese teachers overlook this issue, while those from different backgrounds are more aware of it. She links this to justice in education. Although MEXT aims to promote a Japanese identity, some question whether people need to understand what it means. Without creative thinking about what being "Japanese" entails, as Kitayama emphasizes, xenophobia and extreme nationalism can arise. Understanding "who I am" is crucial in global interactions. Expanding perspectives on Japanese identity, especially in GCE, is important.

Overall, interviewees acknowledged that Japan's education has become more globalized due to the government-led global jinzai guidelines. They also recognized MEXT's goal of developing younger generations who can contribute to the world as representatives of Japan. However, they clearly stated that teachers, except those in management positions, do not discuss MEXT's guidelines at work. While MEXT's guidelines influence school policy decisions at the management level, they do not have enough impact on teachers.

### ***UNESCO vs. MEXT***

While most teachers were unfamiliar with either MEXT's or UNESCO's GCE, they formed their views on GCE by taking advantage of the opportunities provided by MEXT and/or UNESCO. Additionally, the teachers' needs leaned toward an outward-facing GCE, which

provides education for Japan and its schools and helps students broaden their perspectives on the world.

All interviewees responded positively to UNESCO's GCE definition. Teacher D noted its relevance beyond English education, and Teacher G said it relates to the SDGs and is crucial for raising youth. Private school teachers linked their GCE to UNESCO's, seeing understanding of the global standard as broadening perspectives and connecting their mission. They also distinguished MEXT's and UNESCO's GCEs: MEXT emphasizes Japan's benefits from global jinzai, while UNESCO emphasizes contributing to the world as global citizens.

All interviewees indicated that their views of GCE align more closely with UNESCO's GCE than with MEXT's. At the same time, they did not disagree with either definition. Teacher G, for instance, stated, "MEXT's definition focuses on what is lacking in Japanese people, whereas UNESCO's goes beyond that." Teacher F said, "MEXT's definition indicates the need to become global citizens, while UNESCO's clarifies the purpose of global citizens."

Burgess (2015) criticizes MEXT's inward-focused global jinzai guidelines. He claims that although the Japanese government seeks to globalize the country through these jinzai guidelines, its view remains limited to Japan's internal internationalization. For example, MEXT encourages students to study abroad, and universities promote English exams like the TOEFL. However, as Japan has recently become more open to globalization, this inward-focused tradition has become more noticeable than ever (Burgess, 2015).

### ***Public vs. Private***

Although there are no major differences between public and private schools in implementing GCE, the presence or absence of clear school policies and personnel changes impacts how they engage with GCE. Private schools generally find it easier to implement GCE consistently because of cohesive school policies and stable instructional staffing, although each school's decision ultimately depends on its specific policies. Meanwhile, public schools face challenges in adopting GCE due to frequent teacher transfers.

Although both private schools left SGH, they continued activities from the SGH period because personnel remained unchanged. Teachers with prior experience integrated GCE into the curriculum, while new teachers learned from veterans. Private schools, using their flexibility, adopted the GCE curriculum before MEXT updated its guidelines. Many teachers, recognizing GCE's impact, supported and incorporated it early, thanks to their staffing stability, curriculum independence, and shared mission.

Teacher G mentioned that at least one of her five colleagues in public schools embraced GCE. A major change she noticed in her career occurred in 2012 when MEXT promoted global jinzai guidelines, making education more open. The focus shifted from just learning the guidelines to integrating them into teaching and grading. However, the guidelines had limited impact on activities. Teachers need to actively incorporate them, or they won't influence classrooms. G said, "MEXT's guidelines do not restrict but allow maintaining curriculum while adding global jinzai elements."

MEXT affirms that any school, public or private, can apply for ASPnet (MEXT, 2023a), but challenges differ by school type. Applicants must align activities with UNESCO policies. After applying, schools undergo a one-year "challenge period" to improve their national review

efforts (MEXT, 2025). Completing this period allows for biannual domestic reviews, and successful schools can become ASPnet candidates (MEXT, 2023bc) within 14 months to two years. UNESCO reviews candidates before designating them as ASPnet schools, which must maintain activities for at least two years (MEXT, 2023b, 2023c). The entire process from application to ASPnet designation typically takes at least four years. Passing the domestic review hinges on demonstrating an organized, continuous participation system (MEXT, 2025). Long-term engagement is challenging for public school teachers, whose contracts often last three to six years due to personnel changes and transfers (Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education, n.d.).

Kimura and Mitarai (2021) highlight challenges in implementing global education in public schools. Introducing such education requires coordination with local governments and education boards to address issues like tax burdens, fairness, laws, hiring foreign teachers, training Japanese teachers, and informing parents. While there's hope that public high school teachers will influence others through personnel changes, this is often hindered by curriculum and class size constraints. However, public schools tend to be more aligned with government policies and must intentionally adopt GCE, as shown by three exemplary schools.

### **GCE Implementation and the Challenges**

Different schools implement GCE in their own ways, but share features such as overseas activities and exploring local and global issues to understand society and consider solutions. In Japan, GCE is often seen as a higher education matter due to its autonomy (Bosio, 2023b), but Chapple (2016) argues that most universities lack commitment and that substantial changes are unlikely without foundational reforms in compulsory education. Despite challenges, high school interviewees show that schools can do more, offering hope for broader GCE implementation.

#### ***Leveraging ASPnet Membership***

Although all interviewees had a positive impression of UNESCO's GCE, their schools still struggle to leverage their status as ASPnet schools to enhance their GCE activities. Teachers A, E, and G shared similar comments, such as "My school embraces GCE, but there are no activities that the school participates in as an ASPnet school." Teacher G also commented, "There are many in-school opportunities to develop students' abilities through GCE. But schools have never had the chance, for example, to participate in conferences using the school's affiliation with ASPnet."

Unlike government-funded SGH schools, ASPnet schools do not receive financial support; instead, ASPnet membership primarily serves as a branding name. Therefore, although these schools can continue their GCE activities, they find it challenging to fully appreciate the privilege of being part of the ASPnet community. Kobayashi (2016) notes the urgent need for an inter-school network to promote GCE. He argues that while it is evident that such a network is crucial for spreading GCE, the values guiding ASPnet schools and their structures still require clarification to be effectively embraced (Kobayashi, 2016). Given that teachers hold a favorable view of UNESCO's GCE, it is essential to strengthen ASPnet by providing more opportunities for schools and redefining its value.

There is a notable example of successfully leveraging ASPnet membership. To promote student interactions with peers from different countries, School X contacted an ASPnet school in the

U.S. Building trust with another school is often a major challenge. However, School X's ASPnet designation helped it establish this trust and form a partnership with the U.S. institution. This example showed that being an ASPnet school can expand educational opportunities. Still, since schools often don't see clear benefits just by being part of the ASPnet network, each school needs to put in ongoing effort and exploration to fully realize these advantages.

### ***New Curriculum and Human Resources***

School education takes different forms, and the implementation of GCE can vary. For example, it can happen during inquiry-based cross-disciplinary classes, club activities, after-school programs, selected-student activities, or long breaks. One interviewee mentioned that it is generally easier to conduct an activity if it is smaller in scope, such as a club or after-school activity. The downside of this approach is that not every student can access GCE through those activities, so integrating it into the curriculum ensures that all students can participate. However, adding GCE to the curriculum requires schools to navigate many processes, especially when starting a new curriculum. Teachers are already burdened with mandatory responsibilities, which makes it difficult to take on extra work. Therefore, human resources remain a major challenge.

Adopting a new curriculum is time-consuming and requires support and additional human resources. However, schools often lack the necessary human resources to implement a new curriculum. Teacher B mentioned, "If schools want specific teachers trained for the new curriculum, such as GCE, they must send them to a training course. While the teachers are away, someone must fill their position, meaning the school needs additional staff resources." Teacher A also noted, "We must learn about global issues to teach them effectively. However, our overwhelming responsibilities leave little time for study." Even if schools are willing to adopt the GCE curriculum, implementing it is challenging when human resources are unstable.

### ***Grading and College Entrance Exams***

High school students depend on their grades for university applications, making it crucial for teachers to set clear grading standards for the GCE curriculum. As Teacher C pointed out, "Unlike math or English, students find it hard to see their progress in GCE. So, those applying to college may overlook the importance of the GCE." Teacher G also commented: "Grading standards are essential. If students are passionate about GCE, should they automatically receive an A+? What about those who excel in GCE writing composition but don't take the course seriously? Grading significantly affects students." While they recognized the benefits of GCE, many expressed feeling overwhelmed by their duties. Curriculum, human resources, and grading are three vital pillars of schools, intricately connected. They emphasized that effectively addressing these components is key to implementing GCE successfully.

Most Japanese high school students attend university, so their education mainly prepares them for college entrance. According to MEXT (2025), college enrollment has risen yearly, increasing exam pressure. This competitive environment hinders GCE adoption. Teacher C said, "GCE's impact appears after college or work life because entrance exams drive students to focus on English or math over GCE." Teacher G mentioned, "Implementing GCE is tough as schools also aim for university admissions." Although college entrance exams are becoming more diverse, this environment still makes it difficult for high schools to adopt GCE.

## Conclusion

This study explored how Japanese high school teachers perceive and adopt GCE, examining their views and challenges. Results showed that most teachers create their own initiatives rather than strictly following MEXT's and UNESCO's GCE guidelines, while some schools foster values through long-term efforts. There are differences in the level of autonomy they have; however, both public and private schools have the potential to implement GCE. The study also suggests increasing the use of UNESCO's ASPnet and removing structural barriers to further develop GCE in Japan.

The study's limitations include a small sample size of six private school teachers and only one public school teacher. Additionally, the schools examined were unique because of their teachers' active involvement in GCE; however, not all Japanese high schools or teachers participate in GCE, and many Japanese educators remain unaware of or unconvinced about its importance. Future research should involve a larger sample of teachers from various schools, including those not represented in this study.

GCE is often seen as the responsibility of English teachers, and this study focused on their opinions. However, future research should also include teachers from different subjects to provide a comprehensive view of GCE in high schools. It is important to raise awareness among all teachers about the importance of GCE, as every subject plays a role in shaping students' future social contributions. Insights from teachers of various subjects could deepen the understanding of GCE approaches in Japanese high schools.

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### Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The authors acknowledge that Grammarly, an AI-assisted writing software, was used to proofread and refine the language of the manuscript. The usage was limited to correcting grammatical and spelling errors and rephrasing statements for accuracy and clarity. The authors further declare that, apart from Grammarly, no other AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate content in writing the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are original and derived from the appropriate and systematic conduct of the research.

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