Chapter 8

Digital Transformation in Primary and Secondary Education in Japan

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ABSTRACT

In Japan, schools were closed from March to May 2020 due to COVID-19. As most schools could not offer online classes, in April 2020, the government implemented the GIGA School Concept to accelerate the development of information and communication technology (ICT) in primary and secondary education. A case study of a secondary school was conducted. The results show that the principal exercised four types of leadership based on firm values: (1) sharing the vision and motivating teachers, (2) distributed leadership, (3) instructional leadership, and (4) responding appropriately to a pandemic. At the national levels, the main focus was on responding to the pandemic and implementing the GIGA School Initiative policy, while the schools were following more multifaceted leadership for improvement.

INTRODUCTION

In Japan, the COVID-19 pandemic began in January 2020, and consequently, digital transformation was initiated. On February 27, 2020, then Prime Minister Abe called

for the immediate closure of all schools. All schools were closed from March to May 2020, but most of them were unable to offer online classes. In response to this situation, in April 2020, the government decided to accelerate the implementation of a policy called the GIGA School Concept and allocate a national budget. As a result, the use of information and communication technology (ICT) has advanced in primary and secondary education in Japan. This chapter aims to elucidate the process and how the digital transformation of Japanese schools has progressed in the context of the pandemic. In what follows, first, national policy trends will be examined. Second, we will elucidate the leadership of a school principal in the case of A Secondary School using the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP) methodology.

BACKGROUND

Significance of the Study

The dramatic changes in Japan, where digital transformation has advanced rapidly in primary and secondary education, are distinctive from a global perspective. The documentation and analysis of such changes will be of interest to readers around the world. It will be of particular interest to government officials in countries that are going through a digital transformation. Discussions on the digital transformation of school education in Japan have been limited to the publication of articles in Japanese, and thus have not been shared with the world. This chapter has the significance of contributing to the international discussion by reporting the historical background and current status of Japan in English.

Basic Structure of Japanese Educational Administration

The administration of primary and secondary education in Japan is structured with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) at the top, followed by the Board of Education, which is responsible for local educational administration, and government schools, which are responsible for the curriculum and instruction of their students (Sato, Pang, & Chan, 2022). As a general rule, educational administration in Japan is supposed to be conducted under the sharing of roles and mutual cooperation between the national government and local governments (Article 16 of the Fundamental Law of Education). The national government is primarily responsible for formulating standards and providing financial support from the perspective of maintaining and improving equal educational opportunities and educational standards throughout the country. Local governments, under the

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