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| Title | Gender Consciousness at School: A qualitative study of Japanese women-teachers' narratives of work, career, and gender equality |
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| Citation | 大阪大学, 2024, 博士論文 |
| Version Type | |
| URL | https://hdl.handle.net/11094/96204 |
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Osaka University

Abstract of Thesis

Name (Sinai Harel)

Title

Gender Consciousness at School: A qualitative study of Japanese women-teachers' narratives of work, career, and gender equality

(学校におけるジェンダー意識の質的研究：日本人の女性教師の仕事、キャリア、ジェンダー平等に関する物語)

Abstract of Thesis

Recent scholarly attention has focused on persistent gender inequalities in Japanese education, particularly the underrepresentation of women in school leadership positions. However, existing research tends to narrowly examine managerial career trajectories and organizational structures, neglecting alternative career paths, employment-types, and teachers' subjectivities, among others. This study is predicated on the idea that achieving meaningful change requires understanding gender consciousness in addition to promoting equal representation.

This research aims to describe, interpret, and explain the gender consciousness of high school women-teachers in Japan. Utilizing the Kaleidoscope Career Model to analyze subjective careers, the study introduces an analytical model for gender consciousness encompassing the four dimensions of visibility, social identification, legitimacy, and emotion. Grounded in Symbolic Interactionism and feminist theorization, the qualitative interpretive design involves 13 in-depth interviews with mid-career women-teachers. Interviews include a life history component focused on teaching careers and a semi-structured section exploring gender perceptions. National survey data from the Japanese Ministry of Education is used to contextualize the qualitative findings.

Intended outcomes include advancing our knowledge of the gendered aspects of upper-secondary schoolteachers' work, expanding gender consciousness research, contributing to public debates on teachers' careers and work-style reforms, and informing teacher training initiatives.

The thesis comprises eleven chapters. Starting with an introductory chapter, followed by a review of Japanese gender and education literature, identifying underlying assumptions and gaps in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 introduces the theoretical framework, conceptualizing gender consciousness and subjective careers. Chapter 4 details the study's design and method, and introduces the study's participants.

Chapters 5 to 10 present the study's findings. Chapter 5 analyzes national survey data to illustrate and clarify the gendered aspects of teachers' work and careers. Chapter 6 introduces participants' stories, presenting an inclusive model of women-teachers' careers based on career-story analysis. Chapters 7 and 8 explore authenticity and balance narratives in early and mid-career stages, revealing shifts in gender consciousness and considering two diverging career paths – work-driven career and life-driven career. Chapter 9 examines gendered processes in teacher-student interactions, uncovering the gender dynamics in negotiating guidance styles. Chapter 10 delves into participants' perceptions of gender equality, exposing the varied and complex notions underlying the dominant perception of schools as gender equal environments.

Finally, Chapter 11 concludes this thesis by discussing women-teachers' gender consciousness, identifying four common patterns – unconscious, naturalizing differences, neutralizing differences, resignation but resistance – that offer insights into how women-teachers navigate the gendered reality of schools. The conclusion addresses limitations, theoretical implications, and practical recommendations.

論文審査の結果の要旨及び担当者

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| 論文審査担当者 | 主 査 教授 山本 ベバリー・アン 副 査 教授 木村 涼子 副 査 教授 北山 夕華 |
| 論文審査の結果の要旨 | |
| <p>Title: Gender Consciousness at School: A qualitative study of Japanese women-teachers' narratives of work, career, and gender equality [学校におけるジェンダー意識の質的研究：日本人の女性教師の仕事、キャリア、ジェンダー平等に関する物語]</p> <p>Against the background persistent of gender inequalities in the Japanese workplace despite copious policy to bring about change, this study set out to 'describe, interpret and explain the gender consciousness of mid-career women who work as high school teachers in Japan' p5. To date, much research in the field as focused on representation issues and particularly the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions, including in the teaching professional. This study focuses on women teachers in high schools in Japan who are regular teachers and not in leadership positions. The originality of this study is that it has focused not on representation issues, but on gender consciousness and the narratives of ordinary, mid-career teachers. It includes teachers in public and private schools, and those on regular and non-regular contracts.</p> <p>The research design is primarily qualitative, although it also draws on a wide variety of secondary data sources to contextualize the primary data. It addresses two interrelated research questions: 1) In what ways do women-teachers in Japanese high-schools exhibit gender consciousness, and 2) how does this consciousness manifest in their narratives of work and career?</p> <p>A series of sub-questions were created to address these two driving questions and to create data suitable for understanding structural issues and not just personal subjectivities (p8).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the gendered aspects of upper-secondary teachers' work and careers? 2. What are women-teachers' career stories and patterns? 3. What gendered aspects are in/visible to participants in their work and careers? 4. What notions of gender equality are reflected in participants' stories and experiences? 5. How do participants make sense of gendered aspects of their work and careers? <p>The thesis is structured around 11 chapters, six of which report on the results of the study. Chapter two is the literary review chapter, which really is a piece of research in its own right. The Committee members were impressed by the extensive and critical review of gender education research covering both the English and Japanese language literature. The summary table 2.2 on p24 identifies</p> | |

four areas of in the literature:

- 1) Teachers' careers
- 2) Inequalities in teachers' work
- 3) Teaching practice
- 4) Women teachers' history research

The final part of the chapter explores the relatively well researched theme of gendered leadership. The Committee felt that this chapter makes a significant, research contribution by introducing Japanese language literature in the field and in its analysis of the range of literature to date.

Chapter 3 covers the theoretical perspectives that inform empirical research. It is solid, informative, and well written. Harel states that she aimed to push forward theoretical knowledge by setting out to 'create a conceptual framework that better captures the complexity and diversity' of interviewed teachers' gender consciousness than a singular focus on career path or subjectivities. To achieve this, she employed Acker and Connell's idea of gendered organizations to understand how structural factors influence consciousness p8. At the same time, she drew on Symbolic Interactionism to understand how individuals construct and interpret meanings through their interactions with school structures and relationships throughout their careers and within schools they are working in p 36-38. While emphasizing the potential weakness of Symbolic Interactionism due to its emphasis on micro rather than macro sociological perspectives, Harel claims to have overcome this by applying a feminist epistemology that recognizes power operating even at the personal level and by linking her model with gendered organisations theory pp40-41. This model is expressed through Figure 3.1 '*Gender relations in organizations visualized*' on p47. We felt that this aim was partially but not fully realized.

Chapter 4 clearly outlines the design and implementation of the research project.

In terms of primary data collection, mid-career, female teachers were invited to take part in semi-structured interviews. A life-history approach was taken with questions loosely structured around personal life stories. Interviews explored the experiences of women teachers who are mid-career, highlighting the gendered aspects of their work and lives. It was felt that the developed survey instrument was of a very high quality. Except for part of one interview, the interviews were conducted in Japanese. Recruitment took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, and this hampered the recruiting process. As a result, only 13 teachers were recruited. These teachers were from both public and private schools, but mostly from the Kansai region. Table 4.2 p69). Their teaching experience ranged from 4 to 18 years, working in between 2 and 6 schools. Seven participants held Master's degrees. The subjects they taught were English (8 participants), Japanese (4 participants) and history (1 participants). This means that the humanities were over represented and there were no STEM teachers. As such, the Committee felt that the characteristics of the sample would not allow broader generalizations to be drawn.

Chapters 5 to10 reported on the results focusing on the following issues or themes:

Gender trends in teachers' work and career (Chapter 5)

Individual stories and shared careers (Chapter 6)

Early-career authenticity narratives (Chapter 7)

Mid-career balance narratives (Chapter 8)

Gender in women-teachers' in/formal work (chapter 9)

Narratives and Concepts of Gender Equality (chapter 10)

The data in there chapters was very well laid out with the original Japanese and English-language transcription from the interviews. The quality of the writing was high, making the chapters highly

readable.

Through Chapter 5, which drew on secondary data, we were able to see that despite the image of teaching as a gender equal profession, women suffer from a variety of inequalities. Chapter 6 offered data and analysis on the the life course narratives of 11 of the participants. Figure 6.1 on p118 offers an interesting summary of the various career paths of the women. Chapter 7 focused on the concept of 'authenticity' in relation to how the participants experience their work as gendered individuals. Chapter 8 looked at the issue of balancing demands at mid-career, including family and leisure interests. Harel distinguishes work-driven and 'life-driven' women and outlines how this affects the choices that are made along the way. There is a tension in the analysis here between whether women really get to chose their priorities (work or life), in the context of a teaching system that demands very long hours. Chapter 9 highlighted the issue of gender consciousness and subjectivities. This showed that while the participants were aware of gendered practices in school, including in teacher-student interactions, assigned duties and use of space, they tended to essentialize these differences based on loosely conservative notions of gender difference arising from the perceived characteristics of gendered bodies and the relative strengths of gendered beings. This raised the question of whether the gender consciousness of the women-teachers should be viewed as a 'false consciousness' or the way they create meaning in a highly gendered organization. Chapter 10 explored how the women-teachers narrate and understand gender inequality. Here it was found that there was a higher level of consciousness about inequalities between teachers compared to an understanding of how teacher-student interactions and curriculum content can create and reinforce inequalities.

Overall, we felt that the quality of these results chapters was very high and that they would be of interest to others in the field. At the same time, we felt that the particularities of the sample were likely to have strongly influenced the results (few had been trained in education in an education university, meaning they had little training in child development and general pedagogy, they mostly had advanced degrees in their subject areas, and they were mostly from the Kansai area) and that these needed to be factored in the analysis of personal and professional identities.

Chapter 11 was the concluding chapter. This offered a solid summary of the findings, but also attempted to locate the significance of the findings and their implications in a broader conversation about teacher training and school policy.

While commenting on the limitations of the small sample, there was unanimous agreement from the Committee that the thesis was of a very high standard. The breadth of the secondary data analysis and a critical engagement with the literature allowed Harel to analysis the data in depth from a variety of angles. We agreed that the research contributes to three areas: gender and education studies, Japanese studies, and sociology of education.

Based on the high quality of the research and the relevance of the topic, the committee were in strong agreement that Sinai Harel' s thesis had reached the level necessary to be awarded a PhD in Human Sciences.