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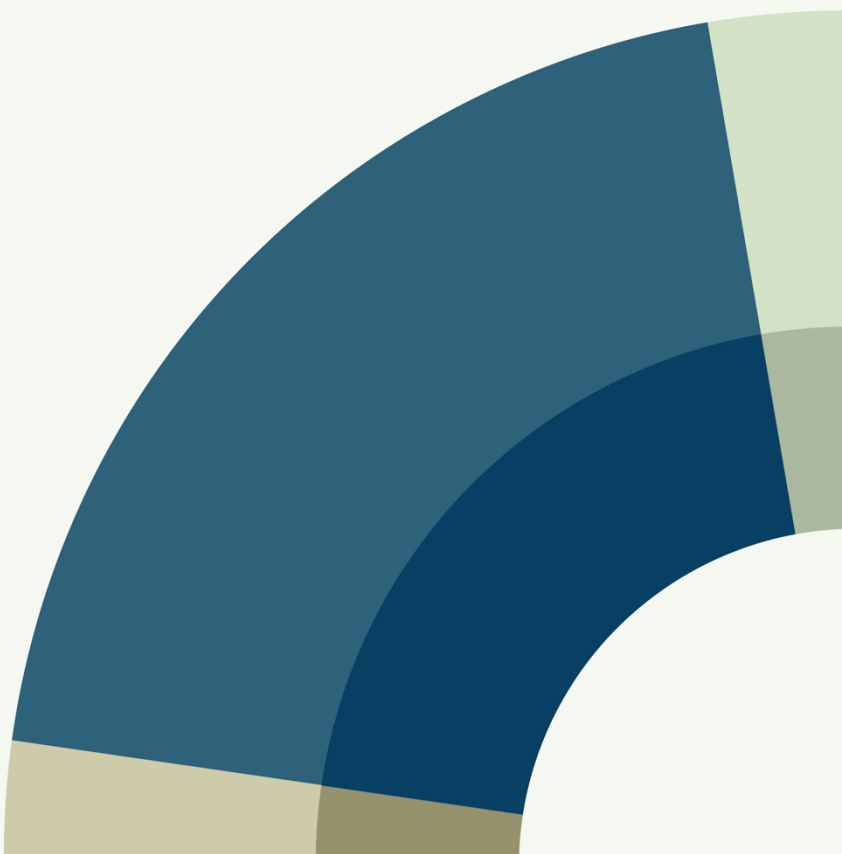
INTERNATIONAL COMPARATIVE REVIEW

ACCOUNTABILITY POLICY

Summary of country report (3 pages)

Authors: AI generated with human checking
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Japan



Authorship. This AI generated summary has been created and checked by the CES team (see ces.partners/resources/methodologies). It is based on the original Country Reports created by EPPI. The author of the full report has not made final checks for accuracy.



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The Centre for Education Systems improves education for all, by helping governments, advisors and campaigners learn from education systems around the world. We describe different policy approaches, their contexts, and their outcomes.

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The EPPI Centre

This report is based on a comparative review undertaken by the EPPI Centre - the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information Centre, based at University College London (UCL), within the Social Research Institute. EPPI conducts and develops systematic reviews to inform public policy in areas like health and education. Its mission is to promote rigorous evidence for a fairer world through methods for evidence synthesis, user participation in research, and a focus on research impact. To find out more about the work of the EPPI Centre, please visit our website eppi.ioe.ac.uk.



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Japan – AI generated Accountability Policy summary

RQ1: Purposes, Values and Aims

The aims of Japan's accountability system are explicitly tied to the Basic Act on Education, focusing on equity and social justice. Four key values underpin the system: Transparency and Trust, achieved through public disclosure of school information and evaluations; Improvement of Educational Quality, using tools like the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle; Community Engagement, fostered by initiatives like the School Management Council System which gives parents and local citizens a role in school administration; and Inclusive Education, which holds schools accountable for meeting the diverse needs of all children, including those with disabilities or international students.

RQ 2 – Levels, measures, and mechanisms of accountability

Accountability in Japan is structured around centralized directives from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), which sets national standards and oversees reforms. Key actors include MEXT, the advisory Central Council for Education, local school boards responsible for implementation and personnel, and individual schools that conduct self-evaluations. Quality is measured through a mix of national assessments, mandatory school-level self-evaluation, and external evaluations conducted by MEXT. Key processes include responding to global rankings like PISA, rotating high-performing teachers and leaders to support struggling schools, and publishing accountability reports. Underperformance can lead to corrective measures or increased intervention by boards of education.

RQ 3 – Managing change and policy processes

Accountability policy is led by MEXT. The policymaking process emphasizes stakeholder collaboration through parent and staff consultations and expert review committees, especially when reviewing the system's direction. Special committees and working groups are also convened by the Central Council for Education to guide MEXT on specific issues, such as compulsory education reform. Additionally, feedback from school inspections, involving supervisors and inspectors, is used to inform and develop accountability reforms. The process is designed to be collaborative and responsive to expert and community input.

RQ 4 – Assessments of effectiveness and evaluation

The policy sources reviewed for this report did not specify the processes for how Japan's overall accountability policy is evaluated. Likewise, there was no information available regarding the official definitions of what constitutes successful accountability policy or how

the results of any such evaluations are used to inform future policy decisions.

RQ 5 – Historical, cultural, and political influences

Japan's accountability system is heavily shaped by its socio-cultural and political context. Reforms have been driven by the introduction of New Public Management (NPM) principles in the late 1990s, which created a tension between business-world advocates for competitive, external evaluations and education professionals who prioritized improvement over rankings. A key socio-cultural factor is an "affective ambivalence" towards testing, where a cultural belief in the importance of exams for social status ("degreeocracy") coexists with a focus on the "principle of education" (using tests for learning) over the "principle of measurement" (using tests for objective assessment). Exogenous shocks have also been powerful catalysts for change; the tragic 2011 bullying-induced suicide in Otsu prompted major legal reforms in 2014 that clarified and centralized accountability within local government.

RQ 6 – Impact on outcomes and workforce

Research indicates accountability policies have had significant unintended consequences for the workforce, with new teacher evaluation systems causing distress, powerlessness, and increased workload. While one 2014 reform successfully increased the recognition and reporting of school bullying, other policies have been met with criticism. Teachers reported that evaluation systems intended to foster professional growth instead increased competition, bureaucracy, and demoralised collaboration. There is a clear divergence between intended mechanisms and perceived reality; headteachers often felt the new systems improved communication, whereas a majority of teachers disagreed, viewing communication as unilateral. Many teachers resisted goal-setting and ranking aspects, feeling they conflicted with holistic educational values. Test-based accountability had mixed impacts on teacher autonomy, though weaker accountability in Japan was associated with higher teacher involvement in decision-making compared to other countries. The reviewed studies reported no clear evidence on student performance.

Timeline- recent accountability reforms

- **Late 1990s: New Public Management (NPM) Reforms:** Rationale: To introduce market-oriented administrative practices into the public sector. Key Features: Initiated the national school evaluation policy, creating a debate between competitive external evaluation and school improvement models.
- **2002: Mandatory Self-Evaluation:** Rationale: To enhance the autonomy and accountability of individual schools. Key Features: MEXT required all schools to conduct a self-evaluation of their educational and management activities each year.

- **2007: School Education Law Amendment:** Rationale: To formalize and standardize the practice of school evaluation nationwide. Key Features: Made school evaluation a statutory duty for all schools and mandated the public disclosure of evaluation results.
- **2011: Otsu Bullying Suicide:** Rationale: N/A (sentinel event). Key Features: A tragic student suicide exposed deep flaws in the local education accountability system, sparking a national crisis and widespread public demand for reform.
- **2014: Local Educational Administration Law Revision:** Rationale: To clarify responsibility and strengthen accountability in response to the Otsu incident. Key Features: Restructured local governance by shifting authority from education boards to mayors, who could now directly appoint superintendents.