

Comparative Analysis of Kindergarten Teacher Induction Training Policies in Japan and China

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Abstract. Over the past quarter-century, early childhood education has drawn sustained international attention, and recruitment of novice kindergarten teachers has expanded in both Japan and China. Enthusiasm at entry, however, does not always translate into ease in real classrooms; the first year often requires structured support that helps novices move from coursework to practice. Taking the national training guidelines as the anchor, this study examines how Japan and China legally define and operationalize induction. The two systems share three elements: clear policy authorization, wide-ranging content, and an explicit equity orientation under government stewardship. Their trajectories diverge in notable ways. Japan institutionalized induction earlier and provides coverage through both public and private providers, yet its national guideline has changed little in recent decades. China's legal architecture is more recent, and requirements for novices—particularly in private settings—remain insufficiently specified. The analysis suggests two complementary policy paths. For Japan: update the national framework to include emerging competencies such as ICT integration and inclusive education, and tighten evaluation and feedback loops. For China: establish legal definitions that unambiguously cover novice induction, decentralize implementation to match local conditions, and adopt lighter-weight, needs-based formats that reduce workload while improving practical outcomes.

Keywords: Novice Kindergarten Teachers, Japan, China, Comparative Study, Teacher Training

1. Introduction

High-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) plays a foundational role in promoting children's development and social progress [1]. This view is not only supported by international organizations but also widely recognized by both the Japanese and Chinese governments [2,3]. As the core of ECEC, kindergarten teachers must possess strong professional competencies to ensure educational quality [4].

Official statistics show rapid growth in the kindergarten workforce: Japan moved from 106,703 teachers in 2001 to 192,169 in 2022, and China from 546,200 to 3,123,018—reported increases of 80% and 83%, respectively. Such expansion implies a large annual influx of novices. Enthusiasm at entry notwithstanding, the first year is formative; targeted training helps shape professional identity and supports longer-term development [5,6].

Yet adaptation to day-to-day classroom realities is uneven. Studies document a persistent gap between pre-service preparation and actual responsibilities, with the mismatch contributing to early

attrition [7]. Recurrent pain points include shaky self-efficacy, anxiety around child safety, fragile professional identity, and underdeveloped practical repertoires [8,9].

Both Japan and China have introduced supports, but frictions remain. In Japan, in-school and external offerings are structurally in place, although time pressures and constrained opportunities for peer learning can limit access or utility [7,10]. In China, public-sector teachers generally receive more training than their private-sector counterparts, and needs assessments are not consistently conducted or acted upon [11].

Because policy sets the terms of induction—who is covered, what is taught, and how programs are resourced—it functions as both the foundation and the guarantor of implementation quality. Against current challenges, two questions follow: do existing policies in Japan and China adequately help novices navigate psychological and environmental transitions; and how, if at all, have these frameworks evolved with changing social conditions?

This study addresses those questions by examining the legal architecture and the principal national policy documents governing kindergarten-teacher induction in both countries. Through comparative analysis, it identifies strengths and weaknesses on each side and distills implications to guide subsequent policy refinement.

2. Methodology

This study selects key legal and policy documents from Japan and China related to the induction training of novice kindergarten teachers. A qualitative content analysis method is employed to systematically analyze, examine, and compare the evolution and characteristics of the induction training systems in both countries. The primary policy documents analyzed include Japan's 2004 revised version of Together with New Teachers (MEXT Model for Training Newly Appointed Kindergarten Teachers) and China's Implementation Guidelines for the Standardized Training of Newly Appointed Kindergarten Teachers.

3. Evolution of induction training for kindergarten teachers

3.1. Changes in laws and policies on induction training for kindergarten teachers in Japan

Since the enactment of the Special Act for Education Personnel in 1949, Japan has legally guaranteed the rights of teachers to receive professional training. In 1988, a revision to the law mandated one year of practical training for newly appointed teachers, including those in kindergartens and certified centers for early childhood education and care. In 1992, temporary kindergarten teachers were also included as eligible trainees.

On this legal footing, MEXT released Together with New Teachers in 1998 and updated it in 2004. The guide spells out the aims, core content, and delivery structure of induction, giving the system a clearer backbone and greater internal coherence. Momentum continued with the 2006 Early Childhood Education Promotion Action Plan, which explicitly called for the inclusion of private kindergarten teachers, extending the reach of induction initiatives beyond the public sector.

In 2020, MEXT issued an interim report stressing the need for a comprehensive training system spanning different career stages. In 2022, further revisions to the Special Act for Education Personnel introduced indicators for improving competencies of public-school principals and teachers, identifying five key areas including ICT use and special needs support. Japan's induction training is entering a new phase of multi-tiered development.

3.2. Changes in laws and policies on induction training for kindergarten teachers in China

Since the 1990s, China has moved from policy pilots to a legally grounded system of continuing teacher education. The 1993 *Teachers Law* codified both the right and the obligation to pursue professional training, extending a statutory basis to early childhood educators. The framework was tightened in 1999 with the *Regulations on Continuing Education for Primary and Secondary School Teachers*, which set a minimum of 120 training hours for newly appointed teachers—including those in kindergartens—thereby converting earlier guidance into enforceable requirements.

In 2002, the Private Education Promotion Law extended training obligations to private-sector teachers, promoting their integration into national development systems. Momentum increased in 2010 with the National Education Reform and Development Plan (2010–2020) and the State Council’s Opinions on the Development of Preschool Education, which introduced innovative training models and large-scale programs for principals and lead teachers.

A major shift occurred in 2018 with the Opinions on Deepening the Reform of the Teaching Profession and the Teacher Education Revitalization Action Plan, which emphasized digital integration, structured induction systems, and broader training coverage. By 2019, training programs had become more diverse and content rich.

This policy trajectory culminated in the 2020 Implementation Guide for the Standardized Training of Newly Recruited Kindergarten Teachers, which clarified objectives, content, methods, and evaluation. Finally, the 2024 Preschool Education Law institutionalized the framework by mandating systematic, role-specific training, marking the transition from policy guidance to a legally guaranteed professional development system.

3.3. Comparison of relevant policies between Japan and China

Both Japan and China emphasize the role of induction training in improving education quality and equity. However, they differ in legal frameworks, implementation structures, and the institutionalization of training for new kindergarten teachers.

First, in terms of legal foundations, both countries mandate continuous professional development. Japan’s 1949 Special Act on Education Personnel, revised in 1988 and 1992, introduced a mandatory one-year induction training for new teachers, including those in kindergartens, and clarified administrative responsibilities. These developments led to the issuance of *With New Teachers*, which provided systematic guidance on training content and methods. In contrast, China’s 1993 Teachers Law offers a general legal basis for training but lacks detailed provisions or enforceable mandates specific to induction, signaling a slower legal institutionalization.

Second, in terms of policy development, both countries followed legal enactments with supportive policies. Japan established detailed training systems encompassing both public and private teachers, including temporary staff. China began emphasizing induction in 1999 through the *Regulations on Continuing Education for Primary and Secondary School Teachers*, but it wasn’t until the 2018 Teacher Education Revitalization Action Plan that integrated induction programs were prioritized. In practice, China has focused on addressing disparities in rural and under-resourced regions, leaving formal induction training for kindergarten teachers underdeveloped.

Third, regarding system development, Japan has a well-established continuum covering induction, mid-career, and leadership training. It emphasizes early-career support and reflective growth. China’s system began as remedial support but is gradually evolving. The 2020 Implementation Guidelines for the Standardized Training of Newly Appointed Kindergarten Teachers and the 2024 Preschool Education Law signal progress toward institutionalizing induction training, though specific implementation for new teachers remains vague.

In sum, Japan has built a mature, law-integrated training system with early institutionalization and wide coverage. China is moving from policy-led experimentation toward legal consolidation, with a focus on educational equity. Understanding how these frameworks operate in practice requires closer examination of their core policy documents.

4. Comparison of induction training policy documents

Currently, the key policy documents guiding kindergarten teacher induction are Japan’s Together with New Teachers (MEXT model) and China’s Implementation Guide for the Standardized Training of Newly Recruited Kindergarten Teachers. This section compares them in terms of goals, structure, content, and evaluation mechanisms.

4.1. Comparison of relevant policies between Japan and China

In Japan, induction training is led by prefectural and designated city education boards. It aims to develop practical teaching abilities, a sense of mission, and broader pedagogical understanding. The program includes 10 days of in-school and 10 days of off-site training annually, with a 5-day residential component. The curriculum is organized into four core domains.

In China, the program is provincially designed, municipally coordinated, and implemented by county-level authorities. It spans a full year, beginning with a two-week pre-service intensive, followed by semester-based base and school-based training, and ending with a third intensive phase in the second year. Content is divided into four modules across 18 topics. The specific details are shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1. Comparison of policy contents between Japan and China

Category	Japan	China
Policy & Legal Basis	With New Teachers (2004); Special Act for Education Personnel	Training Guidelines (2020); Teachers Law of the PRC
Objectives & Duration	Develop practical skills, mission awareness; 1 year (20 days total)	Enhance qualification and competence; 1 year (≥6 weeks)
Governance & Planning	Led by prefectural/city boards; plans set locally with stakeholder input	Guided by provinces; plans co-developed with universities/training centers
Implementation & Participants	Conducted at training centers and home kindergartens; new public/private teachers	Delivered at local institutes, base schools, and home schools; all new hires
Training Methods & Content	Off-site workshops and in-school practice (10 days each); focus on literacy, classroom, curriculum, and child development	Three-phase model (centralized, base, in-school); covers ethics, teaching, child support, and development
Evaluation & Support	Evaluation not specified; partial access to manuals and videos	Multi-dimensional evaluation; access to official documents and video materials
Funding	Not clearly stated	Publicly budgeted across all government levels

Source: Compiled by the author based on Together with New Teachers (Japan) [6] and the Implementation Guide for the Standardized Training of Newly Recruited Kindergarten Teachers (China) [12].

Table 2. Comparison of specific training contents

Training Module	Japan	China
Professional Ethics & Foundational Beliefs	Service mindset, ethics, inclusion, local context, management understanding	Ethics, role models, traditional culture, codes of conduct
Classroom Management & Professional Growth	Class management, parent communication, internal research, career planning, reflective learning	Home-school collaboration, career planning, lifelong learning, research ability
Curriculum & Instructional Practice	Goal setting, activity planning, teaching tools use, environment design, care observation	Activity planning, play and daily routine, care reflection, collaboration
Child Understanding & Support	Development observation, behavioral support, documentation, primary school transition	Child differences and behavior support, developmental assessment, applying research

Source: Compiled by the author based on Together with New Teachers (Japan) [6] and the Implementation Guide for the Standardized Training of Newly Recruited Kindergarten Teachers (China) [12].

4.2. Key commonalities

Both Japan and China’s induction training policies are issued by national education authorities and legally mandated, ensuring training quality and educational equity. Each emphasizes practical competencies through a combination of in-school and off-site training, with content covering professional ethics, classroom practice, and child development. Both also support teacher growth through career development and reflection components. While China explicitly includes training costs in education budgets, Japan provides indirect financial support through the 2017 Child and Childcare Support System, offering monthly subsidies to promote skill development [13]. These frameworks help standardize training nationwide and reduce disparities across regions.

4.3. Key differences

Japan introduced induction training earlier and offers a more structured framework, but its core policy has not been updated in over two decades and lacks content on ICT or AI education. China’s newer policy includes career planning and lifelong learning but is less explicit regarding the inclusion of private school teachers. Governance also differs: Japan promotes central-local collaboration, allowing for more responsive planning, while China’s top-down model may limit local flexibility. Training content diverges—Japan focuses on situational application, whereas China emphasizes ethics and cultural knowledge. Evaluation systems also differ: China employs a multi-dimensional approach, while Japan’s assessment framework remains limited and underdeveloped.

5. Conclusion

This study shows that both Japan and China attach strategic weight to early childhood education and to structured induction for kindergarten teachers, yet notable implementation gaps persist.

For Japan, shifting social demands argue for an update of the core national guidance. MEXT should revise the legacy document to reflect competencies now expected in schools—ICT integration and applications of AI—and pair these with clearer evaluation rubrics and feedback loops. Elements of China’s tiered approach to policy execution could inform a more graduated evaluation scheme that links expectations to local capacity.

For China, durable gains hinge on legal clarity. Statute should unambiguously define the status and entitlements of novice kindergarten teachers, specify mandatory timelines for initial induction,

and articulate enforcement mechanisms that raise participation and compliance. Delegating greater discretion to local governments would enable programs calibrated to local labor markets, provider mixes, and resource constraints.

Both systems face practical constraints. The 2018 OECD survey identified scheduling conflicts and staffing shortages as major barriers to participation in Japan—pressures that are likewise evident in China [14]. Delivery models that embed training within contracted hours, or that offer modular, flexible formats, are more likely to sustain engagement while containing workload.

In short, progress requires concurrent movement on four fronts: tightening legal bases (who is covered and with what obligations), modernizing policy content (ICT/AI and inclusion), optimizing delivery (time-sensitive, modular, work-embedded formats), and sharpening evaluation (criteria, evidence, and feedback). Taken together, these steps would strengthen induction architectures in both countries and, by extension, improve the quality and equity of early childhood education.

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