Concepts and Challenges of Afterschool Program Quality in Japan

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Abstract: This study examines concepts surrounding the quality of afterschool programs in Japan and related challenges using qualitative and quantitative methods. A content analysis of government guidelines for afterschool programs provided by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) is conducted, and the differences in the concepts of afterschool program quality (APQ) between them are explored. Second, using government statistics, the author looks at the current situation and systems of instructional features meant to improve quality. Third, the characteristics of the human resource development system of MEXT and MHLW for APQ are clarified using the social capital theory.

Keywords: quality, afterschool program, extended education, instructional features

Introduction

Improving afterschool program quality (APQ) is a critical issue worldwide. Numerous studies have examined various measures to define program quality (Huang, Matrundola, & Leon, 2014). Additionally, it has been noted that "an increasingly [*sic*] number of research studies are available on the educational quality of extended education, especially in the United States" (Schuepbach, Allmen, Frei, & Nieuwenboom, 2017).

Providing high-caliber afterschool programs in Japan is seen as a significant issue in both practice and theory. In Japan, afterschool programs in public schools are government funded and can be divided into two types: (1) afterschool children's clubs (herein referred to as *AS clubs*), which are subsidized by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW); and (2) afterschool classes for children (herein referred to as *AS classes*), which are supported by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). Both ministries have thus far mainly focused on the quantitative expansion of each afterschool program (MHLW & MEXT, 2018a).

However, the Social Security Council's (SSC's) Special Committee inspected APQ recently and submitted a report stating that each program needed to enhance its quality as well as quantity (MHLW, 2018a). Furthermore, the promotion of education through cooperation between schools and communities is being implemented as an important national educational policy in Japan. It is highly desired that various stakeholders such as local residents, companies, NPOs, and related institutions and parties will participate in the afterschool programs as both providers and instructors (Kanefuji, 2018). Such cooperative activities are expected to lead to the improvement of regular class activities as well as APQ, along with the revitalization of the local community itself. In order to respond to the abovementioned recommendations from the expert committee and national education policies, it has come to be recognized that

APQ is an issue that must be addressed by the national government, local governments, and relevant parties who receive national financial support.

Although both ministries have tried to promote cooperation between their programs since 2007 (Kanefuji, 2018), several differences remain in terms of organization, the environment, and instructional features, depending on the sponsoring agency. Thus far, few studies have compared the concepts and circumstances of quality between MHLW's and MEXT's afterschool programs. By shedding light on concepts of quality and the characteristics of the two programs and examining their differences, this paper aims to provide insights for Japan's future national education policy, which aims to integrate the abovementioned programs. At the same time, I aim to demonstrate that the two programs have distinct approaches regarding the training and securing of human resources (HR) to guarantee quality; understanding their methods will have strong implications for the development of high-quality management systems for afterschool programs not only in Japan, but abroad as well. Using a blend of qualitative and quantitative techniques, each afterschool program's envisioned concept of quality and the challenges associated with achieving it will be explored thoroughly. My aspiration is that this paper will provide knowledge for policymakers and practitioners of afterschool programs who consider APQ and also provide profound insights for researchers who examine human resource development system to implement high-quality afterschool programs.

Literature Review

Studies on APQ

Diverse studies have explored APQ's impact on children and youth, with a focus on organizations and systems, the environment, and instructional features. For example, since the 2000 s, investigations on APQ and pertinent indicators have included meta-analyses of afterschool program evaluations (Scott-Little, Hamann, & Jurs, 2002; Lester, Chow, & Melton, 2020), program quality assessment and tools (Kahn, Theokas, & Bronte-Tinkew, 2008; Grossman, Goldsmith, Sheldon, & Arbreton, 2009; Huang & Dietel, 2011; Little, 2014; Huang et al., 2014; Oh, Osgood, & Smith, 2015; Schuepbach, Allmen, Frei, & Nieuwenboom, 2017; Jutzi & Woodland, 2019), and program quality and its effects on children (Leos-Urbel, 2013; Fukkink & Boogaard, 2020). Additionally, studies have been conducted on reviews of evaluation research of afterschool programs for adolescents (Apsler, 2009), and on definitions of APQ (Palmer, Anderson, & Sabatelli, 2009).

On the other hand, in the context of an international comparative study on the quality of after-school programs, these studies are just beginning, although progress is being made. For example, the World Educational Research Association (WERA) and the American Educational Research Association (AERA) held international comparisons on the quality of after-school programs as symposia in their annual meetings (Schuepbach, M., Noam, G., Ljusberg, A., Kielblock, S., Stecher, L., Kanefuji, F., & Klerfelt, A ,2019a; Schuepbach, M., Noam, G., Kanefuji, F., Stecher, L., & Bae, S., 2019b). There, research presentations on APQ were conducted by researchers from the United States, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, and Japan.

The popularity of such international comparative studies suggests that the issue of APQ and quality assurance of after-school programs is a common issue in each country.

There are some points to keep in mind when making international comparisons of national policies regarding APQ and the quality assurance system of after-school programs. First, the planning and implementation of after-school programs are not directly conducted by national administrations but are often left to local governments such as provincial governments, prefectures, and municipalities. In other words, the quality assurance efforts of afterschool programs may differ depending on the region within a country. Therefore, in the international comparative analysis of national policies regarding APQ, it is necessary to comprehensively summarize national efforts in consideration of regional differences, and, at the same time, it is necessary to clarify the scope of analysis. The second point to note is that if the administrations in charge of the afterschool program differ even within the same country, the approach to quality assurance of the after-school program may differ, and it is necessary to elucidate the actual conditions of each country as a prerequisite for international comparative studies. Thus, while this literature helps to put the current study into context, it is important to remember that nationally based studies are inherently varied. This study adds to the available literature by providing an overview of Japan's APQ; as the field develops, the results will be useful for scholars in other countries to have a comparison point based in Japan.

The Quality Benchmark Rating System: A Tool for Appraising APQ Based on Japanese Guidelines

Using a systematic review of assorted investigations, Huang et al. (2014) developed the Quality Benchmark Rating System (QBRS) to analyze APQ. Regarding their study's background, Huang et al. said: "There is a need for less complex tools [in] afterschool programs that lack access to internal or external assessments, with a background in afterschool program evaluation. They need an easy-to-use tool that focuses on benchmarking, so that programs can begin the process of ongoing self-improvement" (p. 21). The process of elaborating the QBRS unfolded as follows:

First, searches were conducted of multiple library databases using CSA Illumina (ERIC, Education: A Sage Full-Text Collection, NITS, and PsycINFO) by employing variants of the term 'afterschool program' as a keyword or descriptor. Second, searches were made for afterschool program studies and reports on the websites of the Afterschool Alliance, the Afterschool Corporation, the Harvard Family Research Project, the RAND Corporation, and public/private ventures. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were then established to determine which studies and reports should be further reviewed. Studies eligible for inclusion (a) were published or written between 1985 and 2007; (b) were written in English; (c) referred to programs for K-12 students; and (d) either concluded with, or commented on, quality indicators of afterschool programs. Further, to cover a broad range of relevant literature, studies could be either empirical investigations that identified characteristics of effective afterschool programs, or reviews of literature that summarized quality indicators based on existing literature and/or the author's own experience and knowledge (Huang et al. 2014, p. 22).

The QBRS was formed based on 54 studies in the final sample: "Each study was coded for the presence of quality indicators…centered on the three broad categories of program organization, program environment, and instructional features." Among the 54 articles, "14 benchmarks with substantial overlapping consistencies emerged. Each of the benchmarks received support from at least one-quarter of the sources" (Huang et al. 2014, p. 23). Details of

a total of 14 benchmarks and 56 indicators over three areas of QBRS, which were used in this paper for analyzing Japanese guidelines, are shown in Tables 1 to 3.

In the content analysis, the author of this article theorizes that QBRS could be used to judge APQ in practice, as well concepts of quality for afterschool programs. First, the QBRS aggregates findings from a huge amount of related research, and reveals key components of APQ. Second, the QBRS is geared toward students ranging in age from kindergarten to high school. Third, the benchmarks and indicators presented are easy to understand and considered necessary to ensure quality, despite cultural differences. Fourth, in Japan, no tool comparable to the QBRS has been created to measure APQ. For these reasons, I employed the QBRS in content analysis to scrutinize Japan's national guidelines for afterschool programs, thus establishing the potential of the QBRS for use in other cultures; the findings offer suggestions to improve the QBRS.

Literature Review on APQ in Japan

Several studies have empirically probed APQ in Japan. In looking at central government initiatives concerning investigations on afterschool programs' impact on children and youth, MEXT revealed positive behavior modifications and children's transformed perceptions through commissioned research (SRDI, 2008a, 2008b). At the same time, since there is a strong demand for scholastic reform to promote education through the cooperation between schools and local communities (CCE, 2015; MEXT, 2016), an investigation has been launched to build a portfolio to appraise the quality of practice, including in afterschool programs (Mitsubishi UFJ Research and Consulting, 2020).

Other empirical studies regarding APQ have explored its effects on children's social and emotional development (Kanefuji, 2015); teachers' positive relationships with students (Kanefuji & Iwasaki, 2013); and teachers' recognition of their work (Kanefuji, 2017). However, research on the country's APQ is still lacking, both theoretically and empirically.

The Current Conditions of Instructional Features in Japan

Before delving into the status of the instructional features of Japan's afterschool programs, it is worth reviewing recent movements regarding teachers and the instruction they provide in such programs. Overworked teachers have become a grave social problem. According to the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) carried out by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Japanese teachers work the most hours in afterschool programs and extracurricular activities compared to teachers in other nations (OECD, 2014, 2018).

To mitigate this issue, Japan's Central Council for Education (CCE) published a report in January 2019 (CCE, 2019) seeking to reform teachers' work style. The report defines afterschool (including sports and cultural) activities as one type of school activity; however, the report asserts that they should not necessarily be run by teachers. The basic idea of the report is that exhausted, overworked teachers will not benefit students. Because of the CCE's findings, MEXT is being pressured to not require full-time teachers to do too much work as supporters and instructors of afterschool activities. Thus, both MHLW and MEXT increasingly need to

hire different staff members, rather than asking regular teachers to instruct afterschool programs.

Social Capital Theory as an Analytical Perspective for Examining Instructional Features and Approaches to Improve APQ Conducted by MHLW and MEXT

The concept of "social capital" has received considerable attention recently among sociologists, economists, and political scientists (Arrow, 2000). Social capital theory was also examined in educational studies, and it was revealed that it has a high utilization potential regarding social educational research in Japan (Ogino, 2013). Afterschool policies of national and local governments in the Ministry of Education are implemented through social education or lifelong learning-related bureaus in Japan. Therefore, based on the high applicability of social capital theory in the field of social education research, and on the fact that the related administrative bureau plays a central role in Japan's afterschool policy, I considered that social capital theory can be used as an analytical perspective for examining instructional features and approaches to improve APQ in Japan.

The definitions of social capital are quite diverse, ranging from a narrow (Putnam, 2000) to a broader definition (Coleman, 1988; Serageldin & Grootaert, 2000). In this article, I regard social capital using a broad definition, considering it to include social and political environments such as governments, political systems, and the rule of law. More specifically, I focus on social networks in social capital theory and examine the differences in human resource development systems for afterschool programs conducted by MHLW and MEXT. Furthermore, research on the distinction between bonding and bridging social capital types is used to provide an analytical perspective (Granovetter, 1973, 1985, 2000). The human resource development systems of each government ministry are examined based on the characteristics of the bonding and bridging types. This analogy with the two types of social capital will clarify the differences between the two systems.

Methods and Data

The Target of this Research

The afterschool programs under study are primarily held at public schools and consist of AS clubs or AS classes (mentioned earlier).

Data and Methods

First, I scrutinized concepts of quality for Japanese afterschool programs based on a document analysis of the government guidelines mentioned earlier. I explored the newest ones provided by MHLW (2015) and MEXT (2017) using the QBRS, grounded in the three categories discussed earlier—(1) program organization; (2) program environment; and (3) instructional features—as well as 14 benchmarks and 56 indicators. I also extracted descriptions that do not fall under these norms but that involve enhancing program quality.

Second, I inspected current staff conditions and structures related to APQ (as pedagogical features) using nationwide surveys conducted in 2018 by MHLW (2018b) and MEXT (2018a). These surveys aimed to examine the current conditions of afterschool support. I reused the results of these surveys to compare the afterschool human resource development systems of both governments.

Third, the project of the Japan Research Institute (JRI, 2018)—commissioned by MHLW—regarding municipal administrative efforts to boost APQ will be used in this study. These data were collected by JRI to clarify the conditions of afterschool programs. I examined the JRI project's data (from 983 [57.2%] of Japan's municipalities) as secondary data and considered the characteristics of municipalities' measures to enhance the quality of afterschool programs.[1]

Research Questions

I sought to answer the following:

(1) What types of descriptions do the national guidelines contain? Are there any differences in concepts of quality between AS clubs and AS classes?
(2) What differences emerge in terms of instructional features and systematic organization to ensure APQ between AS clubs and AS classes?
(3) What steps have municipal administrations taken to increase APQ?

Results

Content Analysis of the MHLW and MEXT Guidelines

Tables 1 to 3 display the findings of the content analysis of the MHLW and MEXT guidelines, specifically the types of descriptions in relation to the three classifications created by Huang et al. (2014) (particularly the 14 benchmarks and 56 indicators). The two lines to the right of each table present the outcomes of verification. A cell is marked when a description concerning an indicator is identified in the guidelines; a blank and shaded cell signals no corresponding description. If neither program has a description for a particular indicator, the explanatory texts of the benchmarks and indicators are also shaded. Although the two programs' guidelines are written differently, I found that they encompass many items from the 14 benchmarks and 56 indicators; however, some benchmarks and indicators are not included.

Regarding program organization (Table 1), the MHLW and MEXT guidelines contain descriptions from 17 of the 24 benchmarks. However, there are no descriptions about securing/planning the budget for the program or for staff salaries. Neither set of guidelines remarks on methods with which to evaluate staff, program activities, or student engagement. In terms of the program environment (Table 2), among the total 19 benchmarks, MHLW's guidelines do not touch upon staff serving as role models for positive adult relationships. MEXT's guidelines do not allude to the two benchmarks of nutritious snacks and the student-

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1   At the time of the research (March 2018), there were 1,724 municipalities nationwide. The author participated in the JRI project as a member of the research committee.

staff ratio. For instructional features (Table 3), neither set of guidelines comments on instruction offered in various core academic areas, nor on athletic programs (which should include both competitive and non-competitive team sports). Later, I consider why neither set of guidelines describes a budget, evaluations, or academic activities.

Some highlighted descriptions in both guidelines should be taken into account when conducting afterschool programs, even though the benchmarks and indicators of the QBRS do not encompass them. These include (1) considering, and responding to, children and youth with disabilities and special needs; and (2) complying with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and related laws. Further, MEXT's guidelines incorporate many descriptions on methods and procedures for how to build a community cooperation network for learning and education (CCNLE). These items are critical elements and should be examined to strengthen APQ in Japan.

Staff Conditions and Training for MHLW's AS Clubs

For MHLW's AS clubs, the government sets staff qualification requirements. According to legal regulations, afterschool instructors must meet one of nine qualifications. They must be (1) a childcare worker, (2) a social worker, (3) a high school graduate with more than two years' experience in child welfare work, (4) a person with elementary school, junior high school, or high school teaching qualifications, (5) a person with a university degree in social welfare, psychology, education, sociology, art, or physical education, (6) a person who has been admitted to a graduate school because of excellent undergraduate grades in social welfare, psychology, education, sociology, art, or physical education, (7) a person with a graduate degree in social welfare, psychology, education, sociology, art, or physical education (or an equivalent field), (8) a person with a foreign university degree in social welfare, psychology, education, sociology, art, or physical education (or an equivalent field), or (9) a high school graduate with more than two years' experience in afterschool childcare and approved by the mayor as an appropriate instructor. In other words, MHLW has been seeking to maintain a certain standard by clarifying qualification requirements for instructors.

According to government statistics, 90,769 staff (MHLW, 2018b) meet the above-mentioned criteria for MHLW's AS clubs. However, since hiring staff is a huge challenge for local public organizations, the National Governors' Association and the Municipal Presidency[2] called for relaxing qualification standards; MHLW revised the ministerial ordinance in March of 2018, and the central government made a Cabinet-level decision to ease them in December of 2018 (MHLW, 2018d). They expanded the qualification criteria for AS club staff, and added "a person with more than five years of experience in afterschool childcare and approved by the mayor as an appropriate instructor" as a tenth requirement. Because of a lack of HR, personnel specifications have been altered to respond to current conditions. This means that a person who is only a junior high school graduate can be a staff member of an AS club if he or she has more than 5 years of experience in afterschool childcare and is approved by the mayor. There has been a divergence between MHLW's philosophy and practice for enhancing APQ. In other words, the qualification criteria have been deemed inconsistent with

2   These are national organizations. The National Governors' Association comprises all governors of prefectures, while the Municipal Presidency includes all mayors of cities, towns, and villages.

practice and have been modified to make it more manageable. However, such regulatory changes could dilute APQ.

MHLW legally requires all staff to participate in on-the-job training. In terms of MHLW's programs, local governments must provide training consisting of 16 subjects for a total of 24 hours. All staff must complete the training by 2020; as of the end of 2018, 58.5 % of personnel had finished it (MHLW, 2018b). That is, although MHLW sets strict training regulations, its implementation rate is not necessarily high.

Staff Conditions and Training for MEXT's AS Classes

MEXT uses different strategies to manage and promote its AS classes; 23,931 staff serve as coordinators (MEXT, 2018a). In addition, as mentioned earlier, MEXT established CCNLEs to foster collaboration between schools and communities.

A municipal board of education assigns coordinators and supporters, but there are no specific qualification requirements. In MEXT's AS classes, encouraging education through cooperation between schools and local communities is a key concept (Kanefuji, 2019). Various HR (e.g., local residents, parents, and staff from both non-profit and for-profit groups) participate as stakeholders in AS classes. Hence, government statistics do not report the precise number of instructors in AS classes. Training for coordinators and instructors is entirely left to prefectural and municipal boards of education, and the government does not make decisions regarding any particular training program or regulation. Thus far, the systematization of training for AS classes by prefectural and municipal boards of education has not been developed.

Instructional Features: A Comparison of Both Programs

Table 4 compares MHLW and MEXT regarding (1) staff qualifications and the state of their training programs; (2) staff diversity; (3) current conditions coupled with a lack of HR; (4) the provision of training decided upon by the government; and (5) staff attendance at training events.
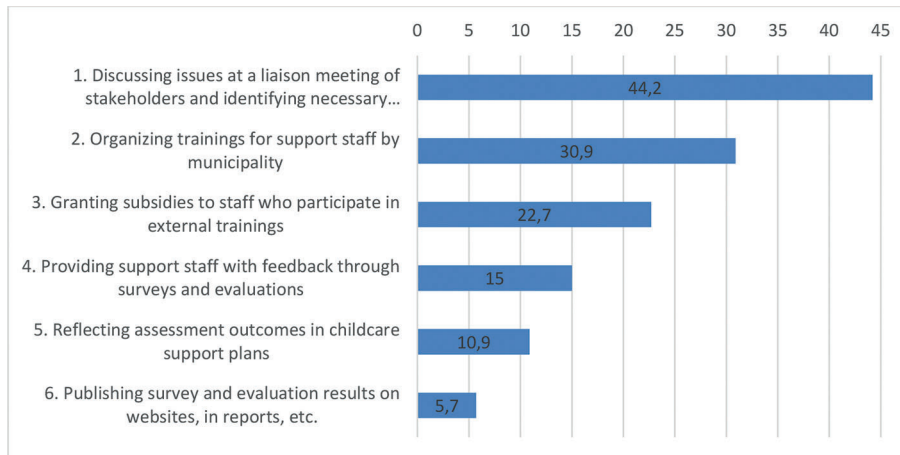
MHLW's program seeks to ensure the quality of its staff by imposing strict standards and training programs created by the government, thus aiming to boost program quality. However, MEXT's program does not stipulate strict qualification criteria for staff or enforce nationally established trainings but grants discretion to prefectures and municipalities and encourages various HR to participate. MEXT has tried to reinforce its APQ by adopting such an approach. Thus, MEXT's program may have more staff diversity than MHLW's. However, as mentioned above, it is very difficult for both programs to hire HR personnel.

Municipal Administrative Efforts to Improve APQ

Figure 1 presents the findings on municipal administrative actions to increase APQ, showing the top six. The most common technique, stated by 44.2 % of the 983 municipalities that took part, is "discussing issues at a liaison meeting of stakeholders and identifying necessary countermeasures." The second and third efforts relate to policies linked to boosting APQ;

these include "organizing trainings for support staff by municipality" (30.9%) and "granting subsidies to staff who participate in external trainings" (22.7%). Between 20% and 30% of municipalities implement such human development activities. In contrast, few municipal governments have "providing support staff with feedback through surveys and evaluations" (15.0%), "reflecting assessment outcomes in childcare support plans" (10.9%), or "publishing survey and evaluation results on websites, in reports, etc." (5.7%).

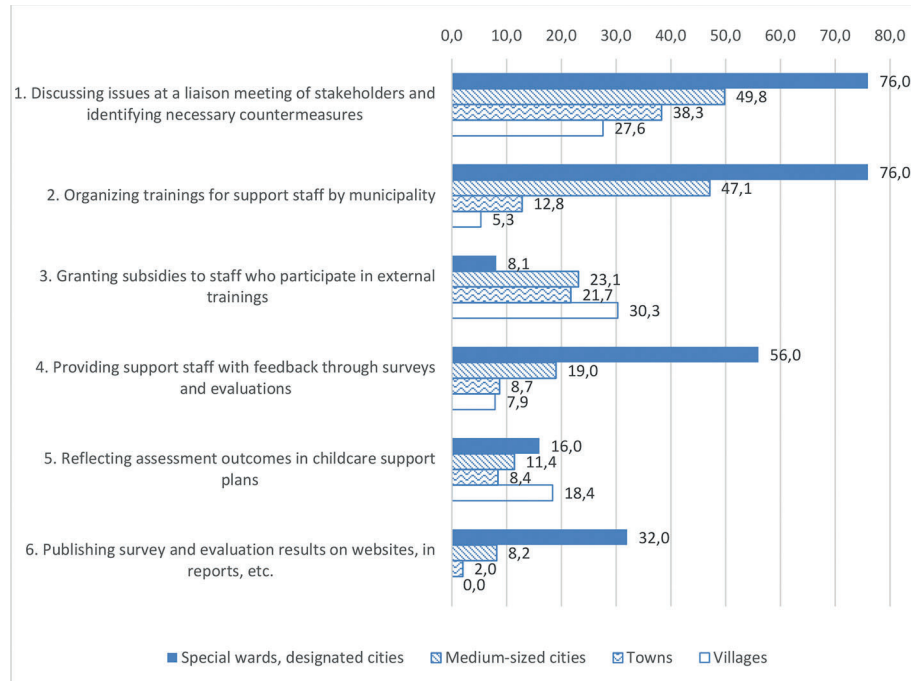Figure 1. Municipal administrative actions to improve APQ.[3]

I also discovered a relationship between a municipality's population size and its rate of taking steps to enhance APQ. Figure 2 demonstrates the connection between these measures and city scale. The number of efforts carried out increases along with city size. Thus, staff hired by large cities have more opportunities to attend trainings than staff in small cities.

Notwithstanding, "granting subsidies to staff who participate in external trainings" resulted in higher implementation rates as city size shrank. Between 20% and 30% of relatively small municipalities are working to strengthen the quality of personnel by granting subsidies to staff that attend external trainings. The overall implementation rate is not as high in small cities, towns, or villages. In particular, implementation rates for evaluation items (nos. 4, 5, 6) are relatively low.

3   The author created Figures 1 and 2 based on data from the JRI project (2018, p. 93).

Figure 2. The connection between municipal administrative actions and city scale

Legend:
■ Special wards, designated cities   ◨ Medium-sized cities   ☒ Towns   ☐ Villages

Discussion

Concepts of Quality in the MHLW and MEXT Guidelines

The content analysis of the guidelines revealed that some benchmarks and indicators are not described for either program. Regarding program organization and instructional features, there are no descriptions on securing a budget for the program or for staff salaries; assessment techniques for staff, students, and activities; or methods for student participation in the evaluation process (Table 1). For instructional features, neither set of guidelines mentions instruction offered in certain academic areas or types of enrichment (Table 3). In contrast, in terms of the program environment, differences emerged in terms of which benchmarks and indicators were not commented upon (Table 2).

One reason why the guidelines do not address securing a budget for the program or for staff salaries is that these tasks are not carried out based on the discretion of the afterschool program's site but rather by municipal administrative entities (such as boards of education). The absence of such a statement has likely led to staff being paid low wages. Similarly, the dearth of remarks on program activities, developing evaluations for staff, and student par-

ticipation in assessment might cause major practice issues, such as the non-development of proper appraisal methods and tools.

Both guidelines fail to mention instruction in specific academic spheres. At the elementary school level in particular, they do not have academic improvement as a goal, but rather aim to provide comfortable spaces and diverse experiences for children's playtime to foster social and emotional development. However, various types of support for strengthening academic abilities are needed not only in secondary education but also in primary education. Because of inadequate learning support, children from high-income households wishing to enhance their academic abilities tend to go to private cram schools rather than to school-based afterschool programs. Such learning support could further reinforce regular classroom education. In the future, the guidelines should be revised to include descriptions of instruction offered in specific academic fields or connections to regular classrooms.

I also stress some highlighted descriptions that both guidelines should take into account, even though they are not found in Huang et al.'s (2014) benchmarks and indicators. Both MHLW and MEXT review considerations for, and responses to, students with disabilities and special needs, as well as compliance with the UNCRC and related laws. These statements are deemed to be contained within the guidelines, since compliance with pertinent regulations forms the basis of quality assurance for afterschool programs. Consideration of children with disabilities and those who require special assistance, as well as compliance with child rights laws, are among the items that might need to be included in future improvements to the QBRS.

Instructional Features and Approaches to Improve APQ

As shown in Table 4, the instructional features and human resource development systems of the afterschool programs run by MHLW and MEXT are very different. By using social capital theory and investigating the distinctions between the two systems using an analogy with the two types of social capital, I found the characteristics of each human resource development system to be as follows:

In order to guarantee APQ, MHLW seems to be trying to build a bonding type of human resource development system, because it specifies the necessary qualifications of staff and attempts to create a relatively homogeneous staff organization. MHLW's staff training emphasizes that its national training programs are for qualified personnel only. The approach to training for human resource development in the MHLW system is extremely formal. Therefore, trust among the constituent staff members is substantial and the members are connected to each other with strong ties. In addition, MHLW's staff network only includes employees with appropriate qualifications, excluding others; therefore, the network can be understood as internal. All of these features match the characteristics of the bonding type identified by social capital research (Granovetter, 1973,1985)

On the other hand, MEXT seems to be trying to build a bridging type of human resource development system in order to guarantee APQ. Because MEXT's system does not specify staff qualifications in a clear manner, it tries to create an afterschool support organization with diverse human resources. Staff training is entirely entrusted to local governments, and participation in training is not compulsory for all instructors. In other words, MEXT is attempting to form an organization which strongly emphasizes connecting diverse human resources with different characteristics. In MEXT afterschool support, pupils do not always work with the

same instructors, and various people often participate as part-time workers. Therefore, trust between the instructional members cannot be said to be as strong as that in the MHLW system; it can be predicted that they are connected by loose and weak ties. The MEXT staff network is diverse and has a strong external orientation. These features also match the characteristics of the bridging type. The results of this analysis show that MHLW and MEXT have a completely different approach for organizing human resource development systems to secure APQ. However, unfortunately, the shortage of human resources remains a serious problem that cannot be solved by either approach, as shown in Table 4.

Comprehensive Municipal Administrative Measures to Improve APQ

Municipalities are taking different steps to strengthen APQ. However, as demonstrated by their administrative efforts (Figures 1 and 2), the rates of assessments carried out by municipalities (as a comprehensive action to advance afterschool programs) are very low. The guidelines' lack of a description of evaluation is one of the critical factors that reduces its rate in practice. As the SSC's Special Committee on Afterschool Children's Measures released a report involving information disclosure, staff self-evaluation and publication, and third-party assessments, it is highly expected that these elements will be carried out in practice (MHLW, 2018a).

This study's elucidation of the link between city size and efforts to enhance APQ has vital implications for future policies. The underlying reasoning is that the larger a city's population, the higher the proportion of the kinds of measures being implemented. In contrast, municipalities with a small population have a low rate of completing steps to increase APQ overall. Medium and small-sized cities, towns, and villages might not be able to afford to develop their own training programs due to a shortage in the total budget. Simultaneously, small cities have less administrative manpower than large cities, so it might be difficult to conduct evaluations and to create assessment techniques.

I have proven that local governments' population and budget substantially influence whether APQ is guaranteed. To maintain future APQ, the level national government support should correspond to these aspects.

Conclusion

Using qualitative and quantitative methods, I have analyzed concepts of quality related to afterschool programs described in MHLW's and MEXT's guidelines. I also found what was missing from the guideline descriptions that would preserve APQ, and which features of APQ are not shown in the analytical framework. Items not described in the guidelines include crucial issues that need to be considered to improve Japan's afterschool programs.

Based on the examination of government statistics and the government-commissioned JRI project, I have explained the current challenges facing Japan's afterschool programs. I have also revealed that MHLW and MEXT have been developing unique approaches to building a system to ensure APQ. To boost APQ, would it be better to have HR development/ training using a bonding type system and strong network ties through legal development/

regulations, as MHLW does? Or, like MEXT, would HR development/training using a bridging type system and loose and weak network ties be more desirable? To answer this question, it is necessary to closely inspect Japan's future efforts and carry out a deeper quantitative and qualitative analysis as to which approach leads to higher quality. Japan's case could serve as a model to compare the differences between each approach.

Finally, it is necessary to address remaining issues. Alone, I investigated the content of the guidelines using the QBRS. To verify the validity of the results, scholars and practitioners should scrutinize the guidelines' content, as well as the degree of agreement between the outcomes. Data based on national statistical research is a reconsideration using published data, so the data's reliability is high. The interpretation of MHLW's and MEXT's HR development systems, based on those surveys, is my own interpretation; hence, there is room for further research in the future.

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Appendix

Table 1. Huang et al.'s (2014) program organization checklist and findings regarding the MHLW and MEXT guidelines

Benchmarks and indicators	MHLW	MEXT
Program Management: **Program has a collaborative management system to meet specific goals outlined in the mission statement.** 1 Does the program consider staff input in decision-making?	✔	✔
2 Does the program consider student input in decision-making?	✔	✔
3 Is there a clear mission statement present for the program?	✔	✔
4 Is there day school and afterschool collaboration?	✔	✔
Program Administration: **Program has effective management and plan for long-term sustainability and growth.** 1 Have program policies been developed for student participation and attendance?	✔	✔
2 Is the budget maintained and adjusted to meet resource needs?		
3 Is a long-term financial plan in place for sustaining and fostering program growth?		
Staff Support: **Program staff are given adequate support.** 1 Is the staff well-paid?		
2 Is the staff provided performance feedback?	✔	✔
3 Does staff receive an orientation before working with youth?	✔	✔
Staff Experience and Training: All staff members have adequate training and experience to ensure high-quality instruction. 1 Is there an adequate staff-student ratio?	✔	✔
2 Is the staff competent in core academic areas?		
3 Does the staff participate in professional development?	✔	✔
4 Does the program director participate in professional development?	✔	✔
5 Does the staff reflect the cultural diversity of the community?	✔	✔
Family Involvement: **Program has a clear plan for family involvement.** 1 Does the staff regularly communicate with parents/families?	✔	✔
2 Is there a program plan in place for parent involvement?	✔	✔
3 Are parents provided with opportunities to provide feedback about the programs?	✔	✔

Benchmarks and indicators	MHLW	MEXT
Community Partnerships: **Program engages in community partnerships.** 1 Are youth encouraged to participate in service projects/programs?	✔	✔
Evaluation: Program has a system in place for evaluation of students, staff, parents, and program activities. 1 Is there a method of evaluation for staff performance?		
2 Is there a method of evaluation for program activities?		
3 Is there a method of evaluation for student engagement?		
4 Is students' academic/social skills' improvement evaluated?		
5 Are evaluation findings used for program improvement?	✔	✔
Total number of checks / Total number of indicators	17/24	17/24

Table 2. Huang et al.'s (2014) program environment checklist and findings regarding the MHLW and MEXT guidelines

Benchmarks and indicators	MHLW	MEXT
Safe Environment: **Program space is safe, clean, and secure.** 1 Is the program space safe, clean, secure?		✔
2 Is a system in place to keep unauthorized people from taking children from the program?	✔	✔
3 Are youth carefully supervised?	✔	✔
Student Health and Well-being: **Program environment should enhance students' health.** 1 Does the program environment enhance students' health?	✔	✔
2 Are healthy and nutritious snacks provided?	✔	
3 Is the equipment safe for activity play?	✔	✔
Well-equipped/Suitable Physical Space: **Program provides physical space that is appropriately equipped and suitable for afterschool.** 1 Does the program's indoor and outdoor space meet the needs of all program activities?	✔	✔
2 Is the space arranged well for a range of activities?	✔	✔
3 Is the space arranged well for simultaneous activities?	✔	✔
Positive Relationships: **The program develops, nurtures, and maintains positive relationships.**	✔	

Benchmarks and indicators	MHLW	MEXT
Student-staff relationships 1 Is there a small student-staff ratio?		
2 Does the program have guidelines about staff-student expectations?	✔	✔
3 Does the staff relate to children and youth in positive ways?	✔	✔
4 Does the staff respond appropriately to the individual needs of children and youth?	✔	✔
5 Does the staff encourage children to become more responsible?	✔	✔
6 Does the staff interact with children to help them learn?	✔	✔
Child-Child Relationship 7 Do children interact with one another in positive ways?	✔	✔
Staff-Staff Relationship 8 Does the staff work well together to meet the needs of children?	✔	✔
9 Does the staff communicate with each other while the program is in session?	✔	✔
10 Does the staff provide role models of positive adult relationships?		✔
Total number of checks / Total number of indicators	18/19	17/19

Table 3. Huang et al.'s (2014) instructional features checklist and findings regarding the MHLW and MEXT guidelines

Benchmarks and indicators	MHLW	MEXT
Quality of Implementation: **Program provides a variety of age-appropriate activities that reflect the goals and philosophy of the program.** 1 Are the activities appropriate (i.e., ages, learning styles, and abilities) for the children in the program?		✔
2 Are the activities in line with the interests of the children in the program?	✔	✔
3 Do the activities reflect the languages and cultures of the families served?	✔	✔
4 Do the activities meet the physical, social, and emotional needs of the students?	✔	✔
5 Does the program use a variety of instructional methods and strategies that reflect current research and policies on teaching and learning?	✔	✔
6 Are children offered multiple opportunities for developing and practicing new skills?	✔	✔
Variety of Activities: **Program provides a balance between academics and enrichment.**	✔	✔

Benchmarks and indicators	MHLW	MEXT
Core Academics 1 Is high-quality academic support offered, such as tutoring and homework help?		
2 Is instruction offered in a variety of core academic areas?		
Enrichment 3 Are there enrichment opportunities in a variety of areas?	✔	✔
4 When provided, do athletic programs include both competitive and non-competitive team sports?		
Socialization 5 Are children provided regular opportunities for socializing?	✔	✔
Activities Support Youth Development: **Activities provide opportunities for development of personal responsibility, self-direction, and leadership.** 1 Does the program promote youth development?	✔	✔
2 Does the program enable participants to develop life skills, resiliency, and self-esteem via activities?	✔	✔
Total number of checks / Total number of indicators	11/ 13	11/ 13

Table 4. Instructional features and human resource development systems of MHLW and MEXT

	AS clubs (MHLW)	AS classes (MEXT)
1) Staff qualification requirements and legal provisions	The law sets forth detailed regulations and qualification requirements.	There are legal provisions, but few strict staff qualification criteria.
2) Staff diversity	Staff diversity is relatively low. Only those who meet the qualification requirements are hired.	Diversity is high when the personnel consist of parents, local residents, non-profits, non-governmental organizations, local experts, and people related to the company.
3) Current conditions coupled with a lack of HR	There are challenges to following national regulations in practice, and the government has relaxed qualification requirements.	A diverse range of personnel can be involved, but a staff shortage problem remains.
4) The provision of training programs decided upon by the government	There are training programs and regulations set by the government. Prefectures and municipalities are obliged to provide	The prefectural and municipal boards of education conduct staff trainings. There are no

	AS clubs (MHLW)	AS classes (MEXT)
	programs based on national regulations.	severe regulations for staff trainings created by the government.
5) Staff attendance at trainings	All staff are obliged to go through training, but not all staff have completed it.	Since staff training is entrusted to prefectures and municipalities, the government does not collect certain statistics (e. g., the number of participants). Staff attendance at trainings is unknown.