

Japan Faces Record Teacher Shortages

VOCABULARY WORDS

1. **Disability (noun)** /ˈdɪs.əˈbɪl.ə.ti/: A physical or mental condition that makes it difficult for a person to do some activities.
Example: Specialized schools provide essential support for children with a learning disability.
2. **Academic (adjective)** /ˌæk.əˈdem.ɪk/: Relating to schools, colleges, and universities, or to connected study and thought.
Example: The 2025 academic year began with a significant lack of qualified staff.
3. **Parental leave (noun phrase)** /pəˈren.təl li:v/: Time that a parent is allowed to spend away from work to take care of a new baby.
Example: One reason for the shortage is the increasing number of young staff taking parental leave.
4. **Applicant (noun)** /ˈæp.lɪ.kənt/: A person who formally requests something, especially a job.
Example: The number of applicants for teaching positions has reached a historic low.
5. **Substitute (noun/adjective)** /ˈsʌb.stɪ.tju:t/: A person or thing that takes the place of another.
Example: Schools are struggling to find a substitute teacher when a full-time staff member is sick.



For a considerable period, Japan has grappled with a persistent shortage of educators, a crisis that shows no signs of improvement. According to data from Japan's education ministry, more than 2,800 public schools across the nation reported vacancies at the commencement of the 2025 academic year. The ministry derived these findings from an extensive survey involving

approximately 32,000 public institutions, including elementary, junior high, and high schools, as well as facilities dedicated to children with disabilities.

The survey revealed a total of 4,317 vacancies across these institutions, marking a dramatic increase of 1,759 compared to the 2021 results. The primary factor contributing to this decline is the difficulty schools face in finding qualified individuals to replace teachers who are away on parental or sick leave. While this issue affects all educational sectors, it is most prevalent in schools for children with disabilities, where approximately 25% of institutions reported shortages. This is likely due to the fact that the number of specialized classes for these students has expanded by 15,000 over the past five years.

Demographic shifts are also playing a significant role in this educational crisis. As a large wave of veteran teachers reaches retirement age, younger replacements are being hired; however, these younger educators are more likely to utilize parental leave benefits. Furthermore, the profession is becoming less attractive to the younger generation. According to *The Mainichi*, there was an average of only 2.9 applicants for every teaching position in 2025—the lowest ratio ever recorded in the country's history.

The education ministry has formally acknowledged the "serious situation" and has proposed several initiatives to mitigate the problem. These strategies include the recruitment of full-time substitute teachers, the implementation of better working conditions to prevent burnout, and increased funding for teacher-training universities. Despite these efforts, experts argue that more radical changes may be necessary to restore the prestige of the teaching profession and ensure a stable future for Japan's students.

DISCUSSION

1. In your opinion, why are fewer young people choosing to enter the teaching profession?
2. How do you think a lack of teachers affects the quality of education for students?
3. Should the government offer higher salaries to attract more people to teaching?
4. Do you agree that working conditions are more important than salary for modern workers?
5. How can technology, such as AI, help reduce the workload of busy teachers?
6. Why is it important for a society to have specialized teachers for children with disabilities?
7. In your country, is teaching considered a high-status or low-status career?
8. Do you think a "four-day work week" would make teaching more popular among young people?
9. What was the most important quality of your favorite teacher when you were a student?
10. If you were the Minister of Education, what is the first change you would make to help schools?