

Review

Comparative Study on National Policies and Educational Approaches toward Regional Revitalization in Japan and South Korea: Aiming to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals

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Abstract: Declining birthrates and aging populations are progressing globally, but this trend is particularly prominent in East Asia. Japan and South Korea face SDG-related problems, such as declining birth rates, aging populations, and depopulation in rural areas due to population concentration in urban areas. In this study, “regional revitalization” was set as a keyword for solving SDG-related issues in Japan and South Korea to conduct a comparative analysis of the relevant trends and characteristics of national policies and educational approaches in Japan and South Korea through a literature review. A comparative analysis of the policies and educational approaches to regional revitalization in Japan and South Korea reveals that policies and education are closely related to regional revitalization. Japan aims to increase the permanent population of young people through creating attractive regions in each region, and South Korea aims to alleviate the labor shortage caused by the declining population with labor immigration and aims for regional revitalization via comprehensive cooperation among its own citizens, immigrants, and people with multiple cultures.



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Keywords: SDGs; ESD; GCED; depopulation; aging population; education; Japan–South Korea comparison

1. Introduction

Aiming for a sustainable society has become a global trend. The Sustainable Development Goals are attracting worldwide attention, and various efforts are being made to address social issues such as poverty, gender equality, and plastic waste. Sustainability issues differ from country to country. For example, in developing countries, problems such as poverty, inadequate educational conditions, and outbreaks of infectious diseases caused by unsanitary water are viewed as problems. On the other hand, in developed countries, problems such as garbage and environmental pollution due to social backgrounds that emphasize convenience are being viewed as problems. Furthermore, in developed countries, problems such as declining birth rates, aging populations, and the depopulation of rural areas due to the concentration of the population in large cities are being viewed. According to the United Nations Population Estimates, declining birth rates and aging populations are progressing globally, but this trend is particularly noticeable in East Asia [1]. Furthermore, it is said that it will be difficult for Japan and South Korea to maintain their current social systems due to the declining birth rates and lack of human resources in depopulated areas [2]. Therefore, this research focused on Japan and South Korea, both of which are on the verge of a population decline due to the declining birthrate, aging population, and depopulation in rural areas. SDG education was adopted as the topic of this research as it was believed that the education provided in a country with problems concerning sustainability would play an important role in nurturing the younger generation who will lead society in the future. This research aims to clarify the policies for regional revitalization in Japan

and South Korea through a comparative analysis of the educational approaches based on the SDG concept and policies for regional revitalization in Japan and South Korea, which share common social problems. Through clarifying and deriving the current situation and issues, we propose what kind of education method should be adopted when aiming for regional revitalization in the future. In response to the above-mentioned content, in this research, it was hypothesized that Japan and South Korea, which share common social issues such as aging and population decline, may also use common methods regarding regional revitalization-related policies and educational strategies. This research focuses on the sustainability of Japan and South Korea in particular. However, there is a need to propose methods to solve problems such as declining birth rates, aging populations, and declining populations as various countries become developed nations in the future. The points mentioned above are the necessity of this research.

An integrative review method was adopted for the study design, and the databases used were Google Scholar [3] and Kyobo Library Scholar [4]. Since this research comprehensively analyzes the policy trends and educational approaches aimed at regional revitalization in Japan and South Korea, with regional revitalization as the keyword, the literature on policies, education, and SDGs associated with regional revitalization was collected and organized. This review provides people living in the SDG era with solutions to the problem of depopulation in rural areas due to an aging society, which has been viewed as a problem since the 1950s, and includes progress and new directions in research on SDG education and regional revitalization policies in an aging society with a low birthrate. The reasons based on the content given by the government and UNESCO were presented to clarify why education should focus on SDGs and regional revitalization as a sustainability issue. In addition, case studies were reviewed to understand the trends in policies and educational approaches that lead to regional revitalization.

1.1. Education and the SDGs

Rieckmann (2017) shows that UNESCO has formulated a vision of the importance of education as the fourth independent goal out of seventeen and that education is important to achieve all SDGs [5]. Moreover, a recent study of Japan from 2020 refers to developing leaders to achieve the SDGs [6]. Against the backdrop of the fact that the phrase “cultivating creators of a sustainable society” has been clearly stated, there is a need for excellent efforts to improve the qualities and abilities necessary for achieving the SDGs in the field of education [6]. For this reason, there is currently growing interest in Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) [7] to achieve the SDGs. ESD can benefit from broad stakeholder participation in the context of the institution’s vision, mission, and educational objectives, which can be a key driver of sustainability transformation [8]. Furthermore, since education in developed countries is also meant to develop the labor force [9], dealing with the SDGs in the context of education is considered to have important implications for securing human resources that will make the whole society sustainable in the future.

1.2. Local Sustainability Issues in Japan

Japan has the highest aging rate in the world. In 2021, while the population decreased by 510,000 from the previous year, the elderly population aged 65 and over reached a record high of 36.4 million [10]. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, from fiscal year 2022 onwards, 51.5% of all municipalities were designated as depopulated areas, and the breakdown is 885 out of 1718 municipalities nationwide, excluding the 23 wards of Tokyo [11]. This is the first time since 1970 that more than half of all municipalities have become depopulated [12]. Therefore, the government’s regional revitalization measures have not put the brakes on the decline of rural areas.

Among sustainability-related issues, Japan is facing depopulation from population decline due to the declining birthrate and aging population. The declining birthrate, aging population, and depopulation weaken the sustainability of the region in Japan. The SDGs Action Plan 2021 of Japan addresses the importance of regional revitalization in its

SDGs implementation guidelines [13]. From this, we can see the intention of the Japanese government to achieve regional revitalization in the context of the SDGs. With the fertility rate stagnating nationwide, it is difficult to raise the regional fertility rate, and even if the birth rate rises, it will take time for it to lead to an increase in the regional population. For these reasons, regional population growth policies tend to aim at increasing the population mainly due to social fluctuations [14].

1.3. Local Sustainability Issues in South Korea

South Korea is a developed country in East Asia like Japan, and it has problems such as depopulation and population decline. The depopulation and aging of rural areas and the seriousness of communalization have been issues that have been raised for years [15], and in 2018, South Korea has become an aging society. This change indicates that over 14% of the country's total population is over the age of 65, and it is predicted that South Korea will become a post-aged society in the mid-2020s [16]. Regarding the population decline in rural areas, in addition to social decline due to population migration from the non-metropolitan area to the metropolitan area and population migration to the city, there is a combination of a natural decline due to low birth rates and an aging population [17]. At the central and local government levels, various policies and projects aimed at revitalizing rural areas have been promoted, but the slump has not improved, and there are growing concerns that most of the villages will disappear [18]. In addition, although the populations of metropolitan cities other than Busan are increasing, the populations of small cities continue to decline [19]. In the social background of South Korea's sustainability, aging and depopulation in rural areas are issues that should be viewed as problems in the same way as Japan. At present, when the importance of SDGs is being emphasized, it is important to think about regional sustainability. Therefore, in this research, "regional sustainability", particularly within the concept of SDGs, is focused on and comparatively analyzes the policies related to regional revitalization in Japan and South Korea. In addition, through defining education that contributes to the development of human resources that support sustainable communities as "SDGs education" and through conducting a comparative analysis of SDG education in Japan and South Korea, the results expected from efforts toward regional revitalization in Japan and South Korea are examined.

2. Research Method and Originality

The research method in this paper is to analyze the actual situation of regional population decline, depopulation, and aging as sustainability issues in Japan and South Korea. In particular, this research carried out a comparative analysis of policy trends and educational strategies for regional revitalization in Japan and South Korea. This analysis is based on previous research on SDG-related policy and educational initiatives aimed at solving problems.

The originality of this research is that it does not focus on subject education but, rather, on SDG education from a broader perspective. Furthermore, this review discusses SDG education in the context of specific social problem solving and comprehensively analyzes the characteristics of national policies and educational targets in a depopulated area. In other words, this research suggests that SDG education contributes to achieving "regional revitalization". Moreover, this research addresses the case of Japan and Korea, which have common problems and different solutions. It also advances a model of sustainable community development.

2.1. Research Design

There are several approaches for conducting literature reviews, and in this study, an integrated review method was adopted. The reason for adopting an integrated review is that, in this study, it was necessary to conduct a comparative analysis of the reality of sustainability in Japan and South Korea, as well as the national and educational policies for regional revitalization, and it was difficult to obtain an overview from a review of only original articles. A study that summarized the literature review framework by category

summarized the integrated review as follows: the typical purpose of an integrated review is to comprehensively critique the subject through a literature review, the search strategy is not systematic, the characteristics of the sample include not only research papers and books but also other published texts, and the analysis and evaluation methods are qualitative [20]. In other words, an integrated review is appropriate for discussing a model for sustainable community development through taking a broad and comprehensive view of issues related to national policies, educational policies, and sustainability and interpreting them in the context of the SDGs, as in this study.

2.2. Literature Search

The databases used to search the literature are Google Scholar [3] and Kyobo Library Scholar [4]. The data and information provided by the national government were obtained from the websites provided by each ministry, and information on the SDG education cases was obtained from publications and other books. The main search keywords are depopulation, aging, SDGs, ESD, GCED, and regional revitalization. The literature search period was from 1955 to 2023, as the first paper dealing with the issue of population aging in Japan was published in 1955. Figure 1 is a schematic diagram showing the method of integrated review to carry out this comparative study.

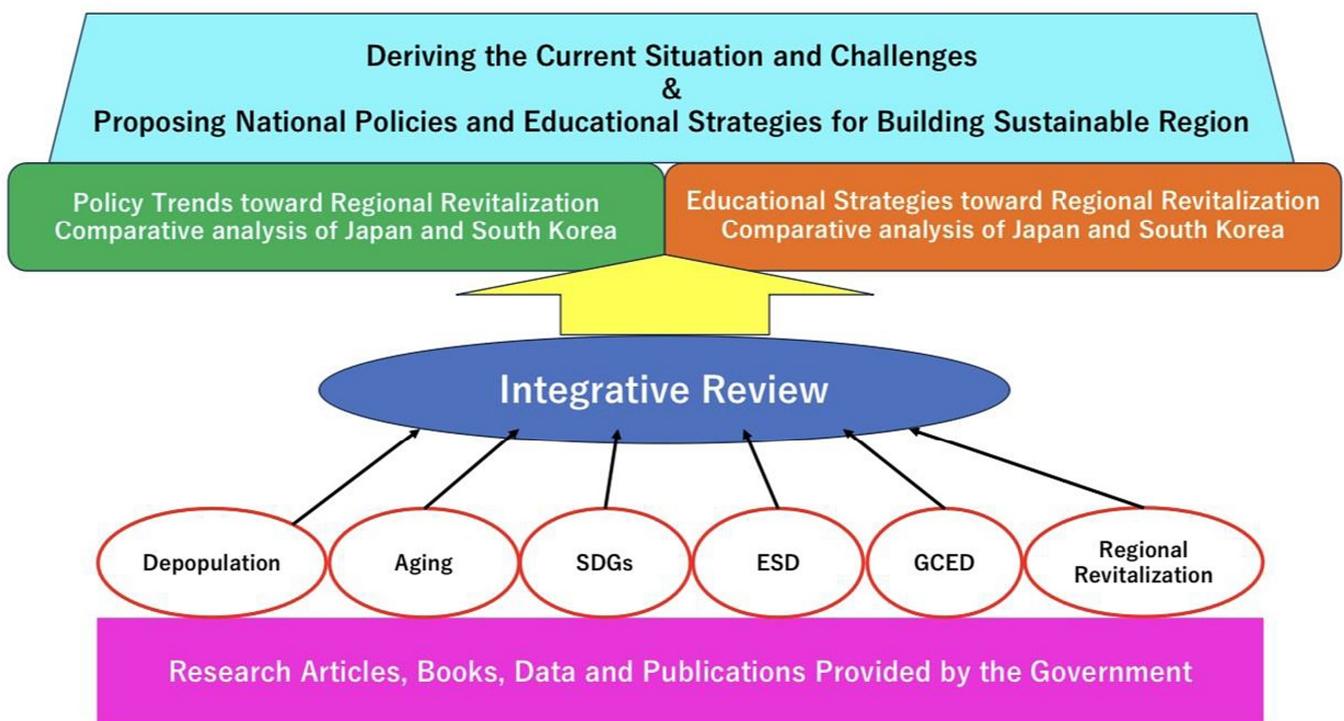


Figure 1. Schematic diagram of this research.

3. Comparative Analysis of Regional Revitalization Policy and SDG Education

3.1. Consideration of Regional Revitalization Policy

3.1.1. Japan

The problem of the aging population in Japan has been viewed as a problem since the 1950s [21]. The first paper dealing with population aging was by Kuroda (1955) [22]. From this, Japan was aware of the problem of aging for about 70 years. From here, we will discuss what kind of impact aging brings. Tanaka (2017) points out that how to maintain and promote economic growth in Japan, where the birth rate is declining and the population is aging rapidly, is a major issue [23]. In the “Soft Growth Strategy”, a productivity revolution is cited as a keyword of the growth strategy, and the importance of making the most efficient and effective investments has been pointed out to overcome supply-side

constraints in a society with a declining population [24]. In addition, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (2016) states that as of 2016, the active job opening-to-applicant ratio has exceeded 1 since 2014, suggesting the need to resolve the labor shortage in the labor market [25]. Furthermore, regarding the impact of regional population decline, such as depopulation and aging, on the regional economy, Lee (2017) argued that “population decline brings negative externalities to the regional economy”. The reason for this is that if labor productivity or the substitutability of capital and labor is not sufficient, the region’s total production and economy will shrink, thereby reducing employment opportunities from the region and promoting population outflow in search of employment [26]. Some studies point out that it is difficult to expand the working population quantitatively in Japan, where the birthrate is declining and the population is aging, and that recurrent education is necessary from the perspective of human capital [23,27,28]. Recurrent education means re-learning at each time even after leaving school education once [29]. Because we now have common SDGs, it is necessary to develop human resources that support Japanese society and the Japanese economy in school education. According to Morikawa (2020), the basic national policy of the Japanese government is to prevent population outflow from rural areas with low birth rates to large cities to prevent the acceleration of population decline across Japan due to shrinking regional economies, and it is pointed out that the introduction of foreign immigrants for population maintenance is not assumed in the regional revitalization comprehensive strategy [30]. In addition, Morikawa (2018) states that the decline of rural areas is due to the overconcentration of the population in Tokyo; he also points out that it is necessary to promote regional revitalization through preventing the outflow of young people from rural areas to Tokyo and balancing the movement of young people, thereby retaining human resources in the rural areas [31]. According to the Cabinet Office, the comprehensive strategy for regional revitalization has the following four goals: (1) create jobs in rural areas so that people can work with peace of mind; (2) create a new flow of people to rural areas; (3) fulfill the wishes of the younger generation for marriage, childbirth, and child rearing; and (4) create a community that matches the times, protect a safe life through developing “small bases”, and promote regional cooperation [32,33]. Summarizing the above, it is clear that the Japanese government’s policy is to create attractive regions in each region without relying on foreign human resources, such as immigrants, to achieve regional revitalization. In addition, it can be read that the policy is to prevent overconcentration of the population in big cities such as Tokyo through creating new population flows.

3.1.2. South Korea

South Korean society is experiencing one of the fastest demographic changes in the world, and the accompanying aging of the demographic structure is progressing at a very rapid pace [34]. South Korea is a very homogenous country, with most people from one ethnic group. According to Park (2018), the number of foreign residents in South Korea has doubled over the decade from 2007 to 2016 [35]. Furthermore, according to South Korea’s Ministry of the Interior and Safety (2019), the foreign population has reached 4.3% of South Korea’s total population (51,779,203 people) [36]. Eom (2008) points out that policy preparations for this will have to be carried out very systematically and from a medium- to long-term perspective, as there will be a fundamental change in the market, unlike anything we have seen before [37]. There are two major policies to increase the absolute number of laborers supplied to the labor market. There are methods to increase the utilization of the labor force with a relatively low labor market participation rate, such as the elderly and female labor forces [38], and methods to increase tolerance of foreign labor force [34]. Since the 1992 Kim Young-sam government’s declaration of “globalization”, the opening of the capital and labor markets has begun, and South Korea has become a full-fledged multicultural society [2]. According to Takayasu (2020), South Korea introduced an employment permit system in 2004 with a mechanism to limit the industries in which foreigners can work and prevent competition between Korean and

foreign workers, and the acceptance of foreign workers engaged in unskilled work began in earnest [39]. When accepting foreign workers, it is considered necessary to educate workers. As touched upon in the previous section, while medium- to long-term policies are necessary, it is thought that long-term efforts, such as worker education, are also necessary. Minami (2000) refers to educational care for foreigners (immigrants/migrant workers) in South Korea [40]. Haruki (2011) refers to policies for foreigners residing in South Korea (marriage immigrants) due to international marriages with Koreans, and as of 2010, 159 multicultural family support centers have been established nationwide, and generous social integration measures are being implemented, including Korean language education, cultural adaptation education, support for children's Korean language education, various skill training, and employment support [41]. Also, active education is being conducted, such as implementing Korean language education policies before and after entering the country for foreign workers [42]. With the increase in the number of married immigrants and the introduction of the employment permit system, Korea has rapidly transformed into a multicultural society, and in 2007, the "Plan for Educational Support for Children of Multicultural Families" was taken up as a national agenda and educational support was provided to suit the characteristics of students from multicultural families, which promotes the elimination of linguistic and cultural disparities, the early adaptation of children from multicultural families and children from mid-career immigrants, and the development of the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of students from multicultural families [43]. Comprehensively summarizing the preceding research, in South Korea, the declining birthrate and aging population are seen as a problem from the economic viewpoint of labor shortage, and the government is trying to solve the labor shortage through educating immigrants, such as foreign workers.

3.2. Characteristics of SDG Education

3.2.1. Japan

When discussing regional revitalization, it is necessary to discuss how to prevent population outflow from rural areas to urban areas. The results of the JILPT (2016) survey show that the main reason people move from their hometowns to other regions is to go to college or vocational school or move to find a job, and it points out that 18-year-olds make up the majority of the age groups that move to other regions [44]. The Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (2019) held a "Review Meeting on Future Immigration and Exchange Policy", and in the fiscal year 2016, the importance of measures focused on the "related population", which has diverse relationships with the region and its people, was discussed, rather than on the "settled population" who migrated to the area or the "exchange population" who came for sightseeing [45]. In addition, Owada (2020) points out that the "related population" is expected to solve regional issues and lead the region's development [46]. It is important not only to prevent the outflow of the population but also to settle the population in rural areas. Sugiyama (2012) researched population settlement in a region, and it was concluded that the intention to stay in the area and the intention to return to the area in the future, "regional orientation", including the intention to return to the area in the future, increase the population retention rate [47]. Comprehensively looking at these previous studies, we can see that to prevent the outflow of the population and increase the population retention rate, it is necessary to increase the regional orientation nurtured before the age of 18. As mentioned above, a recent study in 2020 emphasized the importance of treating SDGs in the context of ESD. As a result, the educational scene was pressed for the need for SDG education.

SDG education cannot be said to be a concept that suddenly started. Asaoka (2005) argued that ESD, which currently exists as a context for dealing with the SDGs, was actually derived from environmental education and that the concept of "environmental education" has changed significantly over several decades. It was pointed out that environmental education in the narrow sense, which focused on the protection and conservation of nature and pollution education, expanded to a broader concept of environmental education,

including “sustainability” and ESD [48]. Currently, the scope has been expanded to include the SDGs in general.

Project-based learning (PBL) is an educational method that can be seen when referring to SDG education in Japan. Komura (2018) points out that the new course of study emphasizes “how to learn” rather than “what to learn” and that the practice of “proactive, interactive, and deep learning” is expected; the study also describes the current situation in which PBL, which tackles common human issues such as the SDGs, is emphasized because learning to explore how to relate to society after applying the knowledge obtained is emphasized [49]. Nagaoka (2018) refers to PBL- and ESD-based social/community-based education as “community-collaborative education” and, as an example, introduces “high school community development”, which is the practice of high school–university collaboration and high school–university connection, the content of the project is that in Kanuma, Tochigi, and Nikko, high school students will carry out multi-generational symbiotic community development activities together with citizens who are engaged in community development and civic activities with the support of the government and universities [50]. Okubo (2021) takes up examples of SDG education conducted in collaboration with local governments, companies, universities, and schools. Since 2018, a full-time public high school located in Shiroishi City, Miyagi Prefecture, Miyagi Prefectural Shiroishi High School, has been working on classes on research activities related to SDGs, and it became clear that the students are considering solutions to regional issues in Shiroishi City and want to revitalize the city with new ideas based on local traditional culture, buildings, and local cuisine using special products [51]. Furthermore, there is also a study showing that students’ awareness of social issues, such as sustainability, increased before and after community-based SDG research activities at high schools located in depopulated areas [52]. Hida (2018) discovered that through a comprehensive study aimed at solving local problems, students became aware of their own ownership as members of the local community as part of a project to make high schools more attractive in a society with a declining population [53]. Regarding problem-solving education, there is a case report by Bansho (2022), and the Education Bureau of Hida City, Gifu Prefecture, is taking the leadership and developing human resources in the region through research on issues in which the region and schools collaborate [54]. In addition, Abe (2017) points out that through conducting active learning while collaborating with the entire community, a relationship of trust is created with the local residents, and as a result, the community is revitalized via cooperation between children and adults [55]. As a place of social education for sustainable community development, Naito (2019) focuses on local public facilities such as community centers and libraries as places to provide learning opportunities that contribute to the maintenance and revitalization of local communities, and it is pointed out that it plays a central role as a place to provide learning opportunities [56]. In addition, Masuda (2022) points out the importance of local governments acting as mediators to make the SDGs more closely related to local communities [57]. Furthermore, Nakato (2014) states that when considering the development and securing of human resources as a driving force for regional development, it is necessary to strengthen the awareness of “hometown” as a regional community that is not tied to blood or geographical ties [58]. Ishimaru (2020) notes that in Japan, there are many cases in which local universities provide SDG education in the context of regional revitalization to achieve the “Regional Revitalization SDGs” that combine the SDGs with the resolution of issues in local communities [59]. As demonstrated in this study, Japan has a characteristic of aiming for regional revitalization through treating the region as one and having all stakeholders belonging to the community cooperate to carry out SDG-related initiatives.

3.2.2. South Korea

In South Korea, the sense of multi-ethnicity and multi-culture is ethnocentric based on monoethnic ideology and has a strong exclusive recognition [60]. However, as mentioned above, South Korea is undergoing rapid globalization, so there is a need to change the

perception that Koreans are a single ethnic group and adopt the idea of multicultural education as an educational philosophy suitable for the age of globalization [60]. South Korea has adopted a policy of resolving the labor shortage through educating immigrants such as foreign workers. In South Korea, Global Citizenship Education (GCED) is being implemented in the context of SDGs. GCED is a core education program. The goal of the program is for “Learners respond to global challenges and think about better solutions at the local and international levels and through playing an active role, we aim to achieve a more just, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure and sustainable world”. Also, ESD and Global Citizenship are indicated as keywords in item 7 of SDGs Goal 4 “Quality Education” [61]. There are studies on the use of SDG concepts in GCED [62,63]. Kobayashi (2019) states that the GCED was adopted by the United Nations with UNESCO as the lead agency, starting with the Global Education First Initiative launched in 2012 by former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, a South Korean diplomat, and the reason for this is that, in the global age, the number of bicultural people with multiple cultural and ethnic affiliations has increased, and cultural psychological research on the pluralism of identity has become active [64]. Hong (2010) found that among international children with multiple cultural identities, those with higher levels of identity integration were more capable of coping with cognitive and social conflicts than those without high levels of identity integration [65]. In other words, in countries like South Korea, where people with multiple cultures is increasing, GCED for identity integration fosters tolerant and inclusive global citizens. Ko (2019) states that the increase in the labor force from multi-cultural families has positive aspects, such as filling the gap in labor shortages, raising the potential growth rate of the country, and promoting internationalization. On the other hand, the negative aspects must also be taken into consideration, and it is pointed out that the problems of multicultural families continue to be a vicious circle, such as lack of language skills that make it difficult to communicate well, family conflicts, economic poverty, and neglect of home and school education [66]. In addition, the economic situation of multicultural families in South Korea is at its lowest level [67], so the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology tried to strengthen the foundation of multicultural education and expand multicultural understanding, and emphasis is placed on enhancing the competence of parents of students from multicultural families and eliminating educational disparities among students with the “Multicultural Home Student Education Support Plan” [68]. Regarding South Korea’s SDG education efforts, Cho (2016) shows that the South Korean government is sharing South Korea’s educational experience with developing countries in connection with international development [69]. Noh (2019) points out that due to the influx of immigrants to South Korea, there is an international demand for GCED related to SDGs [70]. From these contents, it can be seen that South Korea is also focusing on multicultural education and GCED as international and external efforts related to SDGs.

4. Results of Comparative Analysis

So far, we have reviewed the characteristics of national policies and SDG education aimed at “regional revitalization” in Japan and South Korea, where depopulation in rural areas due to the declining birthrate and aging population and the concentration of population in large cities are seen as problems. Although they are both developed countries in East Asia, there are differences in their educational approaches to achieving “regional revitalization” and in their national policies. As a basic policy, the Japanese government attaches great importance to preventing the outflow of populations from rural areas to large cities. The comprehensive strategy for regional revitalization does not envisage the introduction of foreign immigrants to maintain the population but rather aims to make rural areas attractive as hubs for domestic young people to gather. Through creating a new flow of people, young people can work in the community with peace of mind and take measures to enable them to get married, have children, and raise children there. In addition, it turned out that as a response to the revitalization of local cities, within the framework of urban revitalization that includes not only local cities but also large cities, each existing

local city presented and planned measures using a bottom-up method. In South Korea, on the other hand, the labor market has changed fundamentally due to the rapid increase in the number of foreign residents due to the declining birthrate and aging population. As a policy to increase the absolute number of labor supply in the labor market, a method of increasing utilization of the labor force with a relatively low labor market participation rate, such as the elderly and women, and methods to increase the tolerance of foreign labor has been adopted. In addition, the introduction of a mechanism to prevent competition between Korean workers and foreign workers, such as the employment permit system, has made a full-scale acceptance of foreign workers engaged in unskilled work possible. It also became clear that social integration measures, such as cultural and language education, are being implemented for the increase in married immigrants. In addition, as a response to the revitalization of local cities, it was shown that South Korea's policies for regional revitalization are being implemented in a top-down manner within the framework of urban revitalization that includes large cities. In other words, as a result of a comparative analysis of policies for "regional revitalization" in Japan and South Korea, it was found that Japan's policy is to prevent the concentration of population in urban areas through making local human resources as domestic as possible, rather than foreign human resources such as immigrants, via creating attractive regions. On the other hand, it was found that South Korea is implementing legislation and educational policies to solve the labor shortage, like educating immigrants such as foreign workers. In addition, as a response to the revitalization of local cities, each local city in Japan is implementing measures using a bottom-up method. In South Korea, on the other hand, it became clear that policies for regional revitalization are implemented in a top-down manner within the framework of urban renewal, including large cities. Regarding regional revitalization, while Japan has many measures for local governments, it was found that South Korea is proceeding with measures within a larger framework. As a result, compared to Japan, South Korea may find it more difficult to fine-tune policies and plans according to regional characteristics.

Differences were also observed between Japan and Korea in educational approaches such as SDG education. As for Japan's SDGs, the new course of study emphasizes "how to learn" rather than "what to learn" and calls for "proactive, interactive and deep learning". It was found that the PBL method was mainly adopted, and high school students collaborated with the government and universities to carry out community development activities and consider solutions to regional issues. In addition, it was found that public facilities such as community centers and libraries are used as bases for providing learning opportunities when conducting ESD to achieve regional revitalization in the context of SDGs. On the other hand, GCED is actively carried out in South Korea. The reasons for this are the large number of immigrants and the adoption of the "Global Education First Initiative" by former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, a South Korean diplomat. In South Korea, along with the increase in married immigrants, the number of people with multiple cultural and ethnic affiliations has also increased, completed the GCED and multicultural education for identity integration, and cultivated people who are tolerant and inclusive of others. Thus, Japan treats a region as a single community and aims for regional revitalization through having all stakeholders belonging to that community work together to carry out SDG-related initiatives, and through GCED, it became clear that South Koreans, immigrants, and people with multiple cultures are becoming more tolerant and inclusive human resources and are working together to achieve regional revitalization. Table 1 categorizes the elements that are carried out in the context of regional revitalization and summarizes the commonalities and differences in the approach methods in Japan and South Korea.

Table 1. Comparison table of Japan–South Korea initiatives for regional revitalization.

Elements Involved in Regional Revitalization	Japan	South Korea
Sustainability issues	Aging society with a declining birthrate	Aging society with declining birthrate
Issues related to local sustainability	Depopulation due to declining rural population	Depopulation due to declining rural population
Status of foreign resident	2,823,565 people [71]	4.3% of 51,779,203 people [36]
Characteristics of policies aimed at maintaining population	Not considering the introduction of immigrants from abroad to maintain the population	Introduction of immigrants from foreign countries to maintain the population
Management policy for measures for regional revitalization	Bottom-up measures implemented by local cities for regional revitalization	Top-down measures within the framework of urban renewal, including large cities for regional revitalization
Characteristics of SDG education efforts	Community-based collaborative education for solving local problems	GCED for Plural Identity Integration toward people with multiple cultures

5. Conclusions, Discussion, and Future Research

This research aims to clarify the policies for regional revitalization in Japan and South Korea via a comparative analysis of educational approaches based on SDGs and policies for regional revitalization in Japan and South Korea. This study hypothesizes that Japan and South Korea, which face common social issues such as aging and population decline, may use common methods for regional revitalization-related policies and educational strategies. As a result, the hypothesis formulated in this study was rejected. The reason is that although Japan and South Korea share common sustainability issues, the policies for regional revitalization, the target they focus on, and the educational approaches are different. A comparative analysis of the policies and educational approaches toward regional revitalization in Japan and South Korea has revealed that national policies and education provided in the countries are closely related. Japan aims to increase the permanent population of young people through creating attractive regions in each region. South Korea aims to alleviate the labor shortage caused by population decline with labor immigration and aims to revitalize local communities via comprehensive cooperation among its own citizens, immigrants, and people with multiple cultures. Both make sense, and it is difficult to say which one is better. However, as the world is becoming more and more globalized, we believe that coexistence and cooperation with immigrants will be required in various countries in the future. Discussions on Japan’s immigration policy and the acceptance of foreigners have cycled between booms and stagnations [72]. According to Suzuki (2022), 2,823,565 foreigners resided in Japan as of June 2021, and among children born in Japan in 2019, 1 out of 25 had at least one foreign parent [71]. Japan’s Comprehensive Regional Revitalization Strategy does not envisage the introduction of foreign immigrants to maintain the population, but many foreigners are already involved in the survival of the country, even in Japan. For this reason, when each region aims for regional revitalization, it is necessary to develop the region in consideration of the current situation in Japan, and there is a possibility that the need to adopt a more comprehensive approach to education will increase. As an educational initiative, the 2008 revision of the elementary school curriculum guidelines included the introduction of “foreign language activities in elementary schools” and through deepening their understanding of different cultures, they aim to equip children and students with a certain tolerance for multiculturalization [73]. However, while the Japanese course of study mentions mutual understanding between nations and the development of Japanese who can play an active role in the world, there is no mention of minorities such as foreigners and ethnic minorities in Japan [2], and the fact that education policies are not being implemented from the perspective of multicultural education shows that the education policies themselves are taking an approach for the benefit of their citizens within the country. On the other hand, South Korea showed a more external policy and educational approach. If each region can establish its citizens in the region, even if it is

not perfect, it can be thought that the overconcentration of the population in large cities can be alleviated without relying on human resources from overseas. Since Japan and South Korea have different legislative and cultural backgrounds, it is not easy for both countries to apply each other's regional revitalization policies and educational approaches. Therefore, we think that there are elements that can be incorporated into each other rather than drastically changing the policies, national policies, and educational methods that are currently being adopted in each country.

As for the direction of future research, it is necessary to delve into the reality of globalization, which is progressing at the same time as the declining birthrate, aging population, and rural depopulation. As mentioned above, the number of foreigners and immigrants is increasing not only in South Korea but also in Japan. Therefore, through actually visiting depopulated areas in Japan and South Korea where multicultural people live and conducting interviews, etc., we will be able to learn more about the actual situation. Furthermore, the knowledge obtained from future research will provide hints for avoiding the critical situation of the sustainability of the region itself, which is likely to be faced as many countries that are currently still developing countries become developed countries in the future.

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