

Educational Support in the Local Mainstream Schools in Japan

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EDUCATION FOR THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED IN JAPAN

In Japan, visually impaired students (VI students) are mainly being educated in a school for the blind, a resource unit, or a local mainstream school. School for the Blind are for blind and partially sighted students, and there are 69 schools for the blind in Japan; at least one per every prefecture. School for the blind serves about 3,900 VI students and adults¹, and out of 3,900, about 2,000 are in their school age, and about 40% of these students are multiple handicapped. A resource unit is a unit usually located in a mainstream school, mainly open to partially sighted students. There are 164 units in this country serving about 200 students in Japan. A local mainstream school is mainly for partially sighted students, and it is a type where a student would receive a support from near by school for the blind, or a near by resource units for the partially sighted. There are about 170 students being educated in this way. It is estimated that more VI students are in other special schools and mainstream schools, and not yet being identified.

FUTURE PROSPECTIVE OF EDUCATION FOR THE VI IN JAPAN

Japanese government basically states that students with severe visual impairment (blind) should be educated in the school for the blind. However, there have been cases where, blind students are admitted to a local mainstream school since the 1970s. Yet, since the government did not allow it, there are no official statistical data regarding this matter and had

¹ School for the Blind serves are a vocational school for persons with visual impairment who are over an age for compulsory education.

been left untouched for a quite sometime. In the year 2002, the government established a system for an exception which allows VI students to attend mainstream schools if he or she requests, and if the local education committee permits. Due to this, we expect to see an increase in the number of VI students being admitted to the local mainstream schools.

However, there are regional differences in the types of support given and in many regions these supports remain minimal.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The goal of this research was to study the educational needs in the mainstream school by conducting a survey targeting visually impaired persons who have entered a mainstream school and transferred to a school for the blind.

Data used in this presentation were collected through open-ended, indepth interview with 5 visually impaired people. All of participants had experienced education in the local mainstream schools (primary education) and in the National School for the Blind (attached school of University of Tsukuba), a selective school which offers advanced academic courses for the visually impaired students.

FINDINGS

Respondents	A	B	C	D	E
Gender	female	Female	female	female	Male
Visual Condition	Totally blind	profound low vision	Totally blind	Totally blind	Profound low vision
Period Enrolled	1990-1994	1986-1992	1986-1992	1982-1987	1978-1984
Area Enrolled	Kantou area	Kantou area (Tokyo)	Kyushu area	Kantou area (Tokyo)	Kyushu area
Availability of braille texts	○	○	○	○	×
Supplied by	Private groups	Private groups	Private groups	Private groups, mother, teaching assistants	—
Availability of teaching assistants	1 st & 2 nd grade only	○	1 st & 2 nd grade only	○	×

Knowledge regarding VI (teaching assistant)	x	x	x	○ knowledge of Braille	—
Knowledge regarding VI (classroom teacher)	x	x	x	○ knowledge of Braille	x
Other	Support from the local blind school	—	—	—	—

Kind of support received:

Four out of 5 students had Braille text books; although some local authority committees funded for these text books, they were transcribed by unofficial private groups. Four out of 5 students had an assistant teacher; 3 of 4 assistant teachers did not have any special knowledge regarding visual impairment. In addition, 4 out of 5 students said that class teachers did not have any special knowledge regarding visual impairment.

The educational support that visually impaired persons were able to receive in the mainstream schools differed depending on the area of their mainstream schools and the year which they were receiving education, but were all minimal.

Academic Experiences:

Four out of 5 student said all the reading materials were in Braille form; however, wrote letters using the raised line drawing kit for assignments. The followings are comments made by the respondents.

“I understood geometry since all the figures were in a tactile form, but when I had to learn how to compute on paper, it was different. Although in a school for the blind, we learn abacus instead of using paper and pencil to compute, I had to learn how to compute on paper using the raised line drawing kit. Although all the text books and handouts were in a tactile format, I could not understand it at all.” (Respondent A, Math)

“Most of the science experiments were done in groups, and I never had a chance to do them. In observing plants, when other students are observing by sight and drawing what they have seen, I observed tactually and drew what I touched using the raised line drawing kit.” (Respondent A, Science)

“Although all the experiments were done in groups, the teacher provided me and the assistant teacher a set of experiment tools just for us to use. Although I was in the same science lab, I was practically isolated from rest of the class and doing the experiment with the assistant on a one-on- one bases.” (Respondent B, Science)

“I did the warm-up exercise with the whole class, after that, I was basically with the assistant doing different activities from the class.” (Respondent B, Physical Education)

“In art, when I had to sketch something (for example, a school) , I had my mother draw it using the raised line drawing kit the night before, and practically copied that drawing during art.” (Respondent A, Art)

“The teacher would bring objects so that I could touch and draw, but the rule of perspectives was something that she would teach me, but never understood.” (Respondent D, Art)

CONCLUSIONS

Many of the special arrangements that are being done in a school for the blind in order for the VI students to learn were absent in the mainstream schools and many of the respondents had difficulty understanding the subjects since they were taught from a visual perspective.

Although all of the respondents were happy with the experience they had in the mainstream school, they commented that it was after taking the classes in school for the blind that they understood the subject materials. In order for the VI students to understand the subject materials in the mainstream school, many of the respondents felt the need of an assistant teacher with knowledge in education for the VI, and for practical based subjects, felt the need of a teacher that was specialized in the subject and also in the education for the VI. In addition, a need for some sort of knowledge regarding the education for the visually impaired in the classroom teacher was apparent, so that all the subjects are taught by the subject teacher, and not the assistant teacher.

There also seemed to be a strong demand from the parents to have their visually impaired child to participate in all of the activities that are done in a mainstream class. Due to this, extensive time and effort was put in by the parents and the students in activities (ie; drawing, computing on paper) that was difficult for the visually impaired child to do. A need for guidance for parents by a VI specialist was evident.

Lastly, Further research is recommended which targets broad range of VI students which explores different aspects of the two schools.