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*Article*

# Barriers to Education for Special Educational Needs Students at Japanese Universities

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**Abstract**
In Japan there has recently been a national movement to include students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in mainstream education. In recent years, Japanese universities have seen a rise in SEN student numbers. As English is a compulsory subject for first year students at most universities in Japan, it is not unreasonable to predict that regular contact between SEN students and English faculty will occur on a regular basis. Studies have shown that negative attitudes of faculty members have had an adverse effect on SEN students (Kendall, 2016) and that SEN students are more likely to face obstacles such as lower academic expectations, inferior pedagogy, and a lack of access to the core curriculum (Wolanin & Steele, 2004). If this is true, then it is imperative that English-teaching faculty at Japanese universities are aware of any barriers in their classrooms that may contribute negatively to the education of SEN students. In order to determine if barriers exist, fifteen English teachers working at Japanese universities were interviewed to ascertain their experiences, interactions and perceptions with regards to SEN students. The findings show that, while positive attitudes and behavior toward SEN students exist, so do barriers to learning. The writers conclude that awareness building and training regarding SEN is key to reducing these barriers. Finally, examples of possible training courses are given, as are recommendations for university English teachers.

**Keywords**
Special educational needs, barriers to education, Japanese universities, English teaching faculty, teacher and peer group attitudes

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## 1 Background

Over the past 15 years in Japan there has been a national movement to include students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in mainstream education. Prior to 2007, SEN students in compulsory education were separated from the mainstream student body. As Isogai (2017) explains, before 2007, "Special education focused on providing thorough care to children with disabilities in special settings such as 'special schools' and 'special classrooms'" (p. 29).

In 2007, Japan was the 140th country to sign the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRDP, 2006), which was finally ratified as law in 2014. This ensures that "States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels…" (p.16), and that "Persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability" (UNCRDP, 2006, p.17). The UNCRDP was further strengthened in April 2016 when The Act for Eliminating Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (2013) took effect. The law is a directive to municipal governments and private sector entities to ban unjust discrimination against disabled people and take reasonable accommodation to remove social barriers for those with disabilities (Otake, 2016). The Act for Eliminating Discrimination against People with Disabilities (2013) has led both private and public universities in Japan to produce their own policies with regards to the new law.

Globally, there has been a common thread among those countries ratifying laws born of the UNCRDP. In countries such as Australia (Zimitat, 2003), Russia (Volosnikova & Efimova, 2016), UK (Barnes, 2007), USA (Quick, Lehmann & Deniston, 2011), Portugal (Martins, Borges & Goncalves, 2018) and Spain (Moriña, 2017), an increase of students with SEN entering tertiary education has been well documented. The percentages of disabled students in formal education in these countries are thus relatively high. As the National Center for Educational Statistics (2012) reported, in 2012 approximately 11% of students in post-secondary education in the USA were disabled. In the United Kingdom, disabled students represent 13% of the student population (GOV.UK, 2019) and, in Ireland, the number stands at 6.4% (Association for Higher Education Access and Disability, 2018).

In Japan, a rise in SEN student numbers has also occurred. However, this rise is small in comparison to those countries mentioned above. According to the Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO, 2020) the number of officially registered disabled students studying at universities in Japan rose from 0.44% in 2014 to 1.7% in 2019. However, while this increase may not seem significant, it should be pointed out that this rise represents an increase of 286.4% in official disabled student numbers over a period of five years, and that Japan is only just embarking on its journey of inclusion in higher education. Now, given Japan's increased emphasis on inclusion, the mandate to provide reasonable accommodation for disabled people and the focus on removing barriers for the disabled, we may see an increase in the proportion of SEN students entering higher education comparable to those of the USA, Ireland and England.

If this increase in SEN students continues, then it is imperative that university faculty prepare for the many changes that an increase in SEN students may bring to their workplace. This is especially so for English language departments. At many universities in Japan, English is a compulsory subject for first year students, and most Japanese university students are required to attend an English language course during their university education (Poole, 2005). Throughout their four years of study at university, students may also continue to take elective English courses that are generally provided by universities, as well as English courses specific to their own faculty, for example, engineering and medical departments. As there is a high number of English courses at Japanese universities, and as English is a compulsory subject at many institutions, it is not unreasonable to predict that SEN students and English faculty members may regularly come into contact should Japan follow a similar trajectory as other countries with regards to the process of inclusion.

This study follows the approach of Love et al. (2015) and is an attempt to reveal any barriers that may contribute negatively to the education of SEN students studying English at several Japanese universities. The justification for the study is based on the above-mentioned changes in Japanese educational policy and the belief that if, as studies have shown (Kendall, 2016; Forlin, Earle, Loreman, & Sharma, 2011; Hartman-Hall & Haaga, 2002), the impact of faculty members on SEN students has potentially negative consequences, then it is imperative that English-teaching faculty are aware of any barriers in their classrooms. The emphasis is on how SEN education relates to English language teachers, specifically teacher and peer group attitudes toward SEN students, teacher relationships with SEN students, and teacher expectations for SEN students.

## 2 Barriers to Education for SEN Students: A Review of the Literature

As yet, little has been written in English regarding barriers to education for SEN students at Japanese Universities. Official documents, such as those published by JASSO (2020), present researchers with useful statistics and information pertaining to university SEN students at a general level. As of writing, with the exception of Ooiwa and Yap (2020) and Ruddick, Pryor and Diaz (2021), papers in English focusing on barriers to education for university SEN students at the classroom level seems non-existent. By contrast, much has been written about this subject by researchers in western universities that began their journey towards inclusion years before Japan, in some cases decades before.

The following section focuses on research from mainly western countries. The studies highlighted in this section deal with barriers created by negative teacher attitudes and teacher relationships with SEN students, negative peer attitudes, and lack of teacher training. As this study focuses on these areas specifically, and considering how little has been written in English regarding barriers to education for SEN students at Japanese Universities, a review of the literature highlighting barriers to SEN students at western universities will serve to elucidate the current investigation.

### 2.1 Teacher attitudes and teacher relationships with students

In general, it has been found that, around the world, university faculty members in higher education institutions have a positive attitude toward SEN students (Benkohila, Elhoweris & Efthymiou, 2020; Leyser & Greenburger, 2008; Rao & Gartin, 2003). Nevertheless, it has been found that the attitudes of faculty members to SEN students can unwittingly create barriers to learning. In a survey of teachers in Canada, Hong Kong, Australia, & Singapore, Forlin, Earle, Loreman, & Sharma (2011) found that faculty members who have no training with regards to SEN students establish low expectations which, in turn, reinforce low self-esteem, low motivation and low self- confidence among SEN students. In Kendall's (2016) study of SEN student experiences in higher education, British students reflected on how faculty members viewed their disability as a barrier to academic achievement, which left them feeling disadvantage, frustrated, "fobbed off" and "let down" (p.7). Also, according to Wolanin and Steele's (2004) report for the Institute for Higher Education Policy in the U.S.A., students with disabilities are more likely to come across obstacles such as lower academic expectations, inferior pedagogy, and a lack of full access to the core curriculum.

SEN students also reported that their relationships with faculty members are of the utmost importance with regards to succeeding academically. Vogel, Wyland and Brulle (1999) show that, of the various factors that contribute to the success of SEN students, two of them are faculty understanding of their disability and inclusive, accessible teaching practices. This idea is further supported by Wilson, Getzel and Brown (2000) who, in their survey of SEN students at an American university, found that the instructional faculty impacted SEN students more than any other campus

entity, and that SEN students believed that they had little chance of succeeding academically without classroom faculty support.

### 2.2 Peer attitudes

It has been noted that the perceptions and attitudes of non-SEN peers can create barriers to education for SEN students. Akin and Huang (2019) found that college student's negative perceptions of students with disabilities can affect the "confidence and self-perceptions of a student with a disability … which in turn may impact his or her choice of college major, career aspirations, academic performance, and motivation to seek academic help" (p.23). Marshak et al. (2010) highlight the barriers to disability services and accommodations faced by SEN students at a university in America. The writers state that, because of a fear of resentment from peers, and not wanting to be singled out by peers because of their disability, SEN students were less likely to seek out and make use of disability services and accommodations. This, for example, could lead to students not asking for extra time during tests, or those who need note takers on their courses being "faced with deciding whether the help is worth other students perhaps noticing the accommodation" (p.159). A study at a Norwegian university (Magnus and Tøssebrob, 2014) found that SEN students withheld disclosure of their learning difficulties for fear of being socially isolated by their peers. One student, who suffered from epilepsy, claimed that, after witnessing her having a seizure, her fellow students, "withdrew from her… excluding her from planning for group work and information on appointments" (p.323). Another SEN student in the same study reported that, because of fear that her peers would perceive her as "stupid" (p.323), she refused accommodations, despite the fact that she believed she would fail her exams by doing so.

### 2.3 Training

A lack of faculty member training has also been highlighted as a potential barrier to inclusive education. Given the importance that SEN students attribute to faculty members and the impact faculty members can have on their academic success, the training and sensitization of teachers has been a focus of attention for many researchers (Love et al., 2015; Wilson, Getzel and Brown, 2000; Lombardi, Murray, & Gerdes, 2011). In many studies, faculty members themselves have been vocal about the need for training in SEN issues and inclusive education. According to Sniatecki, Perry and Snell (2015), university teachers in the United States had an interest in learning about best practices for teaching SEN students. Although faculty members at a midwestern university in the USA had little knowledge about SEN students, they were motivated to learn more about them (Brockelman, Chadsey & Loeb, 2006). In the studies of Murray, Wren, and Keys, (2008), and Volosnikova and Efimovab, (2016) SEN training correlates with faculty member willingness to provide accommodations. Despite this willingness to provide accommodations, however, a lack of training and development regarding SEN in tertiary education has been highlighted around the world (Leyser et al., 2011; Bazon et al., 2018; Mag, Sinfield & Burns, 2017; Martins, Borges & Goncalves, 2018).

## 3 Methodology

Presented in this section is an overview of the methodology used to collect data. The section will expand upon the procedure and the instrumentation used, as well as the participants who took part in the study.

For this study a qualitative research design was chosen similar to that employed by Hunter-Johnson, Newton and Cambridge-Johnson (2014), Martins, Borges and Goncalves (2018) and Love et al. (2015).

As mentioned, the objective of the study was to reveal any barriers that may contribute negatively to the education of SEN students studying English in Japanese universities. In order to reach this objective, fifteen English language teachers working at both public and private universities were interviewed. One member of the research team interviewed individual participants and digitally recorded the interviews. The three members of the research team then transcribed the interviews separately. Each member of the research group then read the interviews, and coded the data by theme and category to achieve triangulation. All participants were made aware of the above stated objectives of the project and the research methodology that would be used before the interviews were undertaken. It was also explained to the participants that data from the interviews would be kept confidential and that, should they need to, interviewees could retract their data from the study at any time.

A list of interview questions was developed (Table 1) by the research team covering the following categories: teacher and peer group attitudes toward SEN students, teacher relationships with SEN students, classroom accommodations and strategies designed to lower barriers for SEN students, and teacher expectations for SEN students.

Table 1

*List of Interview Questions*

| |
|---|
| 1. Has inclusion changed things in terms of an increased workload? |
| 2. Do you think that the inclusion of SEN students in your classes affects the other students either positively or negatively? |
| 3. Are your expectations for your SEN students the same as for your non-SEN students? If yes, why? If no, how is it different? |
| 4. What is usually the outcome for special needs students in your classes? Or has been in the past? |
| 5. How would you describe the relationship you have with SEN students in your classes? |
| 6. Is your relationship different with non-SEN students? |
| 7. Do you have any SEN training? |

The study employed a convenience sampling method similar to that used by Hunter-Johnson, Newton and Cambridge-Johnson (2014). The criteria for selection were based on the length of full-time work at the university level in Japan (5 years or more), and academic qualifications (MA or higher). This ensured the uniformity of the sample population. All participants were given a preliminary questionnaire to elicit this information. Eight male and seven female teachers took part in the interviews. A variety of nationalities was represented in the participant sample and included one Australian, four British, four Canadian, one New Zealander, four American, and one native Japanese instructor.

## 4 Data Analysis and Results

In this section the data collected from the interviews is presented and analyzed. The section is divided into part I “barriers to education for SEN students in Japan” and part II “positive attitudes, behavior, and interactions”.

### 4.1 Barriers to education for SEN students in Japan (part I)

The analysis presented in this section shows that, as with the results of the studies from western countries, for SEN students in Japan, barriers to education pose a problem.

Regarding classroom interaction, teachers recalled such cases as when non-SEN students became annoyed at having to work with SEN students. Several reasons were given for this attitude/behavior. One teacher stated that, during her class there was a slight "No go effect" among non-SEN students pertaining to pair and group work with one specific SEN student. She stated that when it was their turn to be his partner, they would spend most of the time taking care of him, as opposed to their own education. In this context, "taking care of him" relates to the non-SEN student helping the SEN student to understand and complete his classwork. This was echoed by a teacher concerned that non-SEN students have to not only complete the activities that are set by the teacher, but they also have to give help and support to a SEN student, which can add an extra layer of difficulty for them. Another interviewee stated that students who are focused on their education may become frustrated by the extra time that the teacher gives to an SEN student, or the slow pace of a lesson because the teacher is spending time supporting SEN students rather than focusing on the whole class.

Several of the interviewees spoke of the various ways that non-SEN students would not accept SEN students. This took place in the guise of "giggles", and "mockery", according to one teacher. Another spoke of SEN students being "attacked or laughed at" in class. One teacher, recalling his experience stated that "It was nasty". He went on to describe a situation where SEN students were ostracized and non-SEN students did not want to work with or talk to them.

Interviewees also commented on how the behavior of the SEN students, due to their various conditions, affected the class negatively. One teacher related how a female SEN student caused problems when she refused to participate in group work. Another teacher also recalled an uncooperative SEN student who refused to speak in group activities. Because of the SEN student's refusal to cooperate, the teacher had to move him from group to group more often than was usual. The teacher added that the non-SEN students probably felt a bit uncomfortable working with him.

The majority of the teachers interviewed believed that their relationships with SEN students were different to those they have with non-SEN students. Three teachers reported that, because of the extra support that some SEN students need, they found themselves spending more time with SEN students than with non-SEN students, a situation that left them frustrated. One teacher stated that he spent too much time keeping SEN students on track with the rest of the class. The experience distracted him and left him drained after class. Four more teachers reported that communication affected how they interact with SEN students as compared to non-SEN students. One teacher stated that the relationship he had with SEN students was not different, but the way he communicated was. Two teachers explained that they had difficulties communicating with students with autism or mental disabilities. Another interviewee claimed that, because of the various problems that his SEN students have had, mainly "mental handicap", or "mental challenge", the framework of communication he would have with normal people did not necessarily exist.

Six of the teachers interviewed claimed that their workload had increased and had caused problems. They cited the following examples for the increase: meeting with SEN students outside of class to offer additional support about class work and homework, changing the way classroom activities are done to accommodate SEN students, working one-on-one with SEN students in, and outside of class, making sure SEN students are aware of their schedules and assignment deadlines, and designing new courses for students with difficulties.

One teacher mentioned that, because of her lack of knowledge about the needs of some of her SEN students, she had to take time out to learn about their specific conditions. As she said, "…I had to research. What can I do? How can I handle this situation? Talk to people. Read about it. Also, figure out how to accommodate the student's needs." Another teacher reported that, although his workload had not increased dramatically with regards to the classroom, because he sat on a support team for two SEN students at his university, his workload had risen with regards to his administrative duties.

All participants anticipated that their students would reach the same standards academically as non-SEN students. However, some interviewees stated that expectations of how SEN students reached that point would be different. Two teachers stated that in terms of product, or academic work, they expected the outcomes for SEN students to be the same as those for non-SEN students, but in terms of action, such as the length of time it took to reach those outcomes, the process would be different. Another said that he had the same expectations for all his students but that he was more flexible for his SEN students. Some teachers gave more detail about how they helped their SEN students to reach the goals expected of them. One teacher said that, although he was told to treat a student with Autism the same as he would a non-SEN student, he was more lenient in his assessment because he thought the student would fail the course otherwise.

Talking about outcomes for SEN students, several of the interviewees explained that their SEN students generally complete their courses with a pass. However, the teachers stipulated that these students were just scraping by. Expanding on this, two of the interviewees talked about the scores of SEN students who have completed their classes. As one teacher said "They are getting their 60% (The basic pass mark at Japanese universities) and that's it really". He then went on to explain that getting his SEN students to the pass level required a lot of support, and that some students that had passed his courses maybe should not have. Another claimed that, although he had never failed a SEN student, the grades of his SEN students were not so high. He stated that his SEN students did not achieve top grades but gained mostly C grades with occasional B grades. He then went on to say that, when his SEN students were borderline fail, he would "bump up the marks a little", believing that failing them might damage their confidence. Related to this, one interviewee remarked that he had never completely failed a SEN student. However, rather than "bumping up the marks," the interviewee claimed that if he saw that the student was in the danger area, he would take the student aside and explain to them that they had to do more work in order to complete the course. One teacher explained that, as she did not expect the students to use English after they finished her class, or graduated, she hoped that they would learn academic skills, and not necessarily vocabulary or phrases.

Apart from one participant who had had some SEN based training at graduate school, none of the interviewees reported that they had received SEN training. Some teachers reported that their knowledge of SEN was gained through their life experience or reading about the subject in their own time. Most participants also claimed that there had been no formal in-house training relating to SEN at their institutions. Although some participants mentioned attending meetings and workshops related to SEN, they claimed there was little valuable information, practical advice or a coordinated, coherent approach to SEN in these meetings. However, many interviewees agreed that training was, or could be, a key element in improving SEN pedagogy and the implementation of SEN policy.

### 4.2 Positive attitudes, behavior and interactions (part II)

It should be mentioned that, while this research project uncovered many barriers to learning for SEN students, it also revealed many positive aspects of peer interaction and student-teacher interrelations. This section highlights those positive aspects.

Regarding the positive effects of having SEN students in their classrooms, most teachers pointed to the acceptance and support that non-SEN students offer SEN students. One teacher highlighted the willingness of non-SEN students to volunteer help in the classroom. She claimed that the non-SEN students in her classes were happy to assist the physically disabled students by taking notes for them and moving classroom furniture. Talking about students with more emotional or mental disabilities, the same teacher mentioned that in her class those students were not excluded from group work by non-SEN students. Another teacher claimed that he had seen examples of classes where SEN students were

accepted as part of the group and thought of as people with strengths and weaknesses which are different from the mainstream. In these classes the students were not ostracized, but seen as valued as members of the classroom community.

Several of the interviewees additionally discussed the positive role of SEN students in their classes with regards to community building. They noted that in classes with more mature, empathetic students, inclusion and community building was made easier. One teacher reported that, because of the positive integration of SEN and non-SEN students in his lessons, his classroom had changed from a teacher/student orientation to a SEN mentor/non-SEN student dynamic. Another teacher recalled a group of female students working with an SEN class member who found integrating/collaborating difficult. He remembered that their group collaboration brought out the best in them.

Five of the teachers talked about how having SEN students in the classroom is a positive educational opportunity. They saw the inclusion of SEN students in the classroom as a chance for non-SEN students to deal with difference and learn tolerance, kindness, and cooperation. Two of the interviewees mentioned that having SEN students in their classroom reflects the diversity of society and is therefore a positive learning experience for both SEN and non-SEN students. One teacher said he saw SEN students as members of society, and that they needed to learn to be with others in society, just as others in society needed to learn to be with them.

Many of the teachers presented a positive attitude concerning their relationships with SEN students. Seven of the interviewees claimed that the inclusion of SEN students in their classrooms had increased their workload, but that this increase was not a large burden. A good example of this claim came from one teacher who works with a large number of SEN students on a daily basis. He stated that the extra workload had become part of his regular teaching schedule and that providing the students with an opportunity to learn was his major goal. Another teacher said that, although she has to spend more time with SEN students, she does not see this as a negative thing as she would give more of her time to any student that was having difficulty in her class. A third teacher said that although it was frustrating having SEN students in his class, he did not mind doing the extra work to involve them. Further commenting on this the teacher stated that, because of the extra work, he felt that he had become closer to his SEN students than his non-SEN students.

Concerning positive outcomes for SEN students, five of the interviewees focused on the personal achievements of SEN students, or the progress that SEN students have made. One teacher talked about the positive change he had seen in his SEN students while they studied at university. He stated that SEN students who initially seemed uncertain or uninterested in studying, had become more involved in the learning process once they understood that their classroom peers viewed them as a classmate rather than an outsider. Related to this, another interviewee talked about her SEN students adjusting to her classes, commenting that, if she was clear and explained the roles she expected of them, they were able to do what she required of them. Two teachers recalled SEN students who achieved, or had the potential to achieve, great personal accomplishments. One of the teachers mentioned a blind student who went on to present at a graduate showcase at a national conference on language, while the other remembered a SEN student who had a great talent for translating from Japanese to English, and for whom she had great hopes. Finally, one teacher summed up her experience of SEN student outcomes by claiming, “Well, they’ll succeed if they work. They do succeed.”

In summary, we find that, as with western universities, barriers to education and inclusion for SEN students exist in Japan. Working with SEN students leaves teachers distracted and drained. There are problems due to increased workload. Some participants talked about the intellectual disabilities of SEN students and the communicative problems that they have experienced. Several teachers expressed low expectations for SEN students. In their classes students were “just scraping by”, “borderline failures” and gaining basic pass marks, which led some participants to be more lenient in their grading. The

interviewees also described students not wanting to work with SEN student peers, SEN students being mocked, laughed at, ostracized and ignored by non-SEN peers. They highlighted the attitudes and behaviors of some SEN students affecting the class negatively.

However, while barriers exist, the findings show that the positive attitudes and behavior of some teachers and non-SEN students were creating a more inclusive, barrier free environment. Interviewees believe that inclusion provides educational benefits for both SEN and non-SEN students. They assumed that their SEN students would reach the same standards as their non-SEN students. They also mentioned that having SEN students in their classrooms adds to the diversity of the population. Moreover, interviewees talked about their relationships with SEN students in positive terms. They described non-SEN students accepting and supporting SEN students, SEN students becoming valued members of the classroom community, and the positive role of SEN students in community building.

## 5 Discussion

The findings above are promising in that they highlight the participants attempting to accommodate their SEN students to the best of their ability, without training, based on their own experiences of the classroom and dealing with students in general. This attitude is consistent with the findings of Benkohila, Elhoweris and Efthymiou (2020), Leyser and Greenburger (2008), and Rao and Gartin (2003) and the observation that, around the world, university faculty members in higher education institutions have a positive attitude toward SEN students. While this attitude is admirable and shows the participants standing steadfast in their duty, barriers to inclusion for SEN students still remain. If a rise in the number of SEN students occurs in Japanese higher education, and if this rise is comparable with that of other countries, then the type of barriers to inclusion highlighted above will need to be addressed by English teaching faculty. The findings of this study show that there is a need for more awareness about SEN students and SEN teaching practices. A higher awareness of the different types of learning disability, the problems they can pose for the student, and how they can manifest in behavior would undoubtedly be of use to teachers dealing with intellectual difficulties, communication problems, negative behavior from non-SEN students, and difficult behavior from SEN students. Likewise, further knowledge about teaching practices would be useful for those teachers whose workload has increased because of inclusion and who are distracted and drained, or have low expectations of their SEN students. Training in these areas would enable teachers to identify students with regards to physical disability and issues such as dyslexia, ADHD, and autism, and to adapt their teaching and assessment in a manner which is effective. In fact, research has shown that the main issues to be addressed in this area are those of a raised awareness of SENs and training in SEN (Love et al., 2015; Wilson, Getzel and Brown, 2000; Lombardi, Murray, & Gerdes, 2011; Murray, Wren, and Keys, 2008; and Volosnikova and Efimovab, 2016). Indeed, training was a solution highlighted by the participants themselves.

Research in SEN training is extensive and many SEN training courses have proven to be effective. One such course is an intensive four-day training program (Table 2) designed to raise understanding of SEN students for faculty members (Murray, Lombardi, Seely and Gerdes, 2014). This course covered four overarching themes including *awareness* (definitions of SEN and prevalence), *laws*, *accommodations and university supports* (an historical overview of special education), *practice* (planning and delivering instruction) and *institutionalizing* (developing training ideas and goals). The information on each day of the course was presented by experts in the field. According to Murray et al. (2014), the training sessions significantly raised the self-efficacy of participants with regard to teaching SEN students.

Table 2
*Overview of an intensive four-day training program*

| |
|---|
| *Day 1: Awareness* |
| Definitions |
| Prevalence |
| Learning Characteristics |
| Social, Emotional, Psych |
| Student Speakers |
| |
| *Day 2: Laws, Accommodations, University Supports* |
| Brief History & Post-School Outcomes |
| Federal Legislation |
| Defining Accommodations |
| University Supports & Disability Services |
| |
| *Day 3: Practice* |
| Universal Design |
| Adaptive Technology |
| Planning for Instruction |
| Delivering Instruction |
| Evaluating Instruction & Assessment |
| |
| *Day 4: Institutionalizing* |
| Overview of faculty & student surveys |
| Developing Training Ideas |
| Developing Personal & Training Goals |

The negative behavior of non-SEN students has also been the subject of research into SEN training. According to Loewen and Pollard (2010) and Cory, White, and Stuckey (2010), instruction related to disability studies and closer interaction with SEN students helped non-SEN students to understand and think more positively about their SEN student peers. Campbell (2007) suggests that student attitudes became more positive when their SEN student peers directly presented information about their disability to the class. Myers and Lester (2016) call for courses in disability studies for all students at the higher education level and Gillespie-Lynch et al. (2015) find that the stigma related to autism among college students decreased after taking an online course about the subject. With regards to negative peer attitudes, the evidence tips overwhelmingly toward instructional intervention or awareness building with regards to SEN students.

Japanese universities, now at the beginning of their journey toward inclusion, are in a unique position in that they are able to learn, and choose from, a barrage of evidence and solutions provided by practitioners and researchers in SEN.

### 5.1 Barriers at the administrative level

If this study shows, in microcosm, that which is occurring on a larger scale, then the implications for

practice, for both English teachers and SEN students, are highly problematic. To continue in the manner described here is to maintain barriers to education. Training in SEN is the most likely solution to this problem. As well as the questions raised above about the type of training courses that should be provided, problems regarding implementation also exist.

The first problem to overcome, in this case, relates to time, and the willingness of institutions to establish such training. In the past decade, reforms intended to make Japanese universities more competitive in the global market have been instituted by the Japanese government. The corporatization of Japanese universities has led to an ever-increasing workload for faculty members as the usual work balance of teaching and research has been expanded with increased administrative responsibilities (Watanabe, Murasawa, and Abe, 2013). This, combined with budgetary constraint problems (Watanabe, 2011), will, no doubt, influence the decisions of institutions as to whether the kind of courses mentioned here are implemented.

A further problem related to recent changes to Japanese universities is the proliferation of adjunct faculty. Corresponding with the rise in adjunct faculty hiring in North American higher education (Wicks, Greenhow, and Tyler 2020), over the past 20 years Japanese universities have been consistently hiring adjunct faculty in lieu of full-time staff. This is especially so in the field of English language teaching. As mentioned, due to the subject being compulsory, Japanese universities offer a high volume of English language courses, many of them taught by part-time teachers. Recently, a trend in providing courses through English as a medium of instruction (Aizawa and McKinley, 2020) has further added to the increase of adjuncts. Furthermore, changes in employment law in 2013 have resulted in many English language teaching faculty members being limited to temporary, five-year contracts rather than permanent employment (Brookes, 2015), further adding to the turnover of staff.

This increase in a staff of part-time/short term contract employees could be problematic for any organization attempting to implement serious SEN training courses. Again, this concerns the time, willingness and finances of universities and whether the university administrations believe it is worth investing in teachers who may leave at the end of a semester, or whose contracts may be terminated due to in-house financial constraints or departmental changes.

A final problem is specific to university language teachers working in foreign countries. Ruddick, Pryor and Diaz (2021) found that because of differing levels of Japanese language ability, native English-speaking teachers may have overlooked emails and other university documents relating to SEN students and SEN policy. In their study, most participants claimed to have little knowledge of SEN policy and felt that, while there was some SEN training for Japanese faculty, this was not available to foreign faculty. Ruddick, Pryor and Diaz (2021) associate this with, not only language differences, but with the marginalization and exclusion of foreign teachers (Whitsed & Wright, 2011; Whisted & Volet, 2010; Hashimoto, 2009; McVeigh, 2002). They further state that the provision of official SEN information and training may not be forthcoming due to the extra work this would require and the lack of resources available to organizations.

## 6 Recommendations

As we can see from this study, the present problem is complex. For any SEN training course to be effective, many groups (teachers, non-SEN peers, and the university administration) need to be involved in the creation, implementation, and participation of said courses. An effort at the institutional level would be the most effective way of reaching each group and implementing courses, and it may well be worthwhile for teachers to canvas their respective organizations with this goal in mind. However, If the resources and willingness needed to implement relevant training at the institutional level do not exist, then teachers, either individually or at the department level, may need to take matters into their own

hands. To reiterate the words of one participant in this study:

> I had to research…What can I do?' How can I handle this situation? Talk to people. Read about it. Also, figure out how to accommodate the student's needs.

In other words, rather than waiting for a top-down solution, a bottom-up solution may be the best response.

As mentioned, research in SEN training is extensive and many training courses that exist have proven effective. Now may well be the time for individual teachers or departments in Japanese universities to search for, to learn from, and implement such courses. Another potential avenue is participating in an online course such as those provided by The Asian College of Teachers. Through this organization, and others like it, it is possible to participate in accredited short diploma level courses in SEN teaching through to B.A. and M.A. courses in SEN. However, while these methods may be effective, they will take time and money, and for many teachers, time is a luxury that cannot be given away lightly.

Another avenue to explore may be taking SEN related topics into the classroom as part of the course curriculum. One way of doing this is to create class projects wherein students survey their university buildings for disabled access, for example wheelchair ramps, elevators, widened doors or chair lifts. This could be extended by having students research and report on the kind of services their university provides for SEN students, and further supported by having SEN students present information about their disability, or the barriers they face at university, to the class. Finally, the students involved can decide together if their university gives sufficient support to SEN students and whether changes need to be made. The results of this survey can then be presented as a PowerPoint in class or written as an academic report. This kind of hands-on project will heighten awareness of SEN for both students and teachers taking part.

It is to be hoped that, over the coming years, as more SEN students enter higher education, more research from English language teachers will produce more methods of training and awareness building. The data that they produce while attempting to answer these questions will, undoubtedly, contribute to future research in SEN teaching in Japanese higher education. Many questions need to be addressed. For example, what should such training courses look like? How should these courses be similar to, or different from previous courses of this type? Who should provide/create the training course? As of writing, these issues relating to SEN training for English faculty have not been the focus of study in English within Japanese higher education. However, these are questions that future research may well answer.

## 7 Conclusion

Internationally, over the past 30 years, the number of SEN students entering higher education has risen. Changes in Japanese society regarding laws for eliminating discrimination against people with disabilities may precipitate a similar rise in Japanese higher education. It is thus important for English teachers employed at Japanese Universities to work toward reducing any barriers that may hinder the education of SEN students. The research described in this study is based on interviews with 15 English teachers working at universities in Japan. The goal of the research was to reveal barriers to education for SEN students. From the data collected it was shown that while the majority of teachers were positive in their attitudes, relationships and expectations, there were some challenges: teachers being distracted and drained, problems due to increased workload, communication problems, low expectations for SEN students and non-SEN students not wanting to work with SEN student peers. As a solution to these challenges, training in SEN was suggested. As literature in this field has highlighted, training in specific SENs, accommodations, inclusive assessment and also non-SEN student peer training, have been shown to reduce barriers. Some possibilities for training were presented as were recommendations and possible subjects for future research for SEN education in Japanese higher education.

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