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OUJ's New Challenge: The Supporting Systems for the Students with Disabilities in the Open University of Japan

Yoko HIROSE

放送大学の新しい挑戦：障害者支援の現状と課題

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is describing the present situation and the new challenge of the support systems for the students with disabilities (SWD) challenge of the Open University of Japan (OUJ).

In this paper, firstly, I would like to briefly discuss the support systems for the students with disabilities in higher educational settings from the viewpoints of international trends.

Secondly, I would like to focus on the present situation of those systems in Japan. In order to ensure the support for SWD, The anti-discrimination acts such as ADA (The Americans with Disability Act) and DDA (Disability Discrimination Act in UK) are necessary. These already exist in North America, Australia, and the EU. On June 19, 2013, in Japan, a new bill banning discrimination against disabled people by public agencies and private businesses was passed into law. It will be enforced in April 2016. The new law has a big impact on Japanese higher educational settings and there are many problems which we must overcome to realize the spirit of the law in practice.

Thirdly, I shall discuss the support systems for disabled students in the Open University of Japan (OUJ) in accordance with the development of information communication technologies. At OUJ, beyond the traditional media of television and radio broadcasting, Internet has been used to deliver lectures on demand. Distance learning is a vital resource for SWD. It is also an opportunity to tap the potential of new information and communication technologies when adapting learning resources to student needs and customizing teaching practice.

要 旨

この論文の目的は、放送大学の障害者支援の現状を紹介することにある。そのために、第一にこの領域の国際的な動きを概観し、第二に、近年の日本の高等教育における障害者支援の進展について議論する。米国、英国、EU諸国、豪州では強力な障害者差別禁止法によって、教育分野での差別が解消されてきた歴史がある。日本においても2013年に障害者差別解消法が成立し、2016年4月から施行されることになった。しかし、その実現のためには、乗り越える課題が山積している。第三に、放送大学の障害者支援、とくにICTを活用した支援について議論する。障害のある学生にとって学びやすい教材や教授法を開発することは、多くの学生にとって有益で、豊かな学びの環境を作り出すことにも繋がっている。

1. International perspectives for the support systems for the students with disabilities (SWD)

To describe the Japanese situation in the support systems for disabled students, it is important to have

a sense of where the Japanese system stands internationally to the development of services for disabled students.

Historically, even in Europe, the notion and the system of higher education differed so much from country to country. And more importantly, the notion of disability has been greatly different by society. We

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must be aware that a simple numerical comparison may lead us misunderstanding of the issues.

Internationally, inclusion of SWD in mainstream education is a relatively recent idea. In many countries, access to higher education is contingent on specific qualifications or competencies, generally awarded by the formal education in given societies.

According the OECD reportⁱ, in the United States and Canada, the support systems for SWD developed in the 1970s at the instigation of the civil right movement. In countries such as France or Germany, it has been developing slowly. There was a European Union publication describing opportunities and resources for SWD in universities throughout EU member states (European Union, 2001)ⁱⁱ.

In order to develop the support systems for SWD in a given country, the impact of anti-discrimination legislation is enormously effective. The US was the first Western state to introduce comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) 1990 provided the legal basis for equal opportunity and access for disabled people. The law prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in employment, state and local government, public accommodations, commercial facilities, transportation and telecommunications. Universities were covered by the Act from the start. In contrast, the British Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 excluded education until 2001.

The ADA has become a model for many other countries introducing anti-discrimination legislation.

In Europe, the development of support for disabled students used to be somewhat patchy and whereas most countries had some anti-discrimination legislation for disabled people, often in relation to employment.

However the situation in Europe has been changing. European Employment Directives established six grounds in relation to which discrimination may occur. These are gender, race, disability, religion or belief, age and sexual orientation.

In the past decades, in order to develop a common approach across the EU, member states have tried to harmonize their understandings of such key concepts as disability and discrimination.

In addition to it, the Erasmus Program (EuROpean Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students) takes an important role to standardize the services for the students in EU countries. This is the students exchange program established in 1987. It offers university students the possibility of studying or working abroad in another European country for a period of at least 3 months and maximum 12 months. Each year, more than 230,000 students study abroad through the Erasmus program. It also offers the opportunity for student placements in enterprises, university staff teaching and training, and it funds co-operation projects between higher education institutions across Europe. In order to promote the program successfully, the support systems for SWD in universities in EU countries must have a common understanding of disabilities and standardize the service for them.

Another strong force enhancing the services for SWD is the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Educationⁱⁱⁱ. This is an independent and self-governing organization established by EU member countries to act as their platform for collaboration regarding the development of provision for learners with special educational needs. In their web page, one can get the country information relating to support disabled students in all EU member countries. These challenging activities reflect both the EU member countries' priorities and agreed EU policies regarding learners with special educational needs and the promotion of their full participation within mainstream education and training.

To summarize, it is evident that countries which have had comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation in place for the longest period of time (the USA, Australia and, more recently the UK) have made most progress in provision for disabled students.

Many Asian countries such as China, Korea and Japan are now struggling to make up the delay in this field, since these countries are aware of the importance of UN Standard Rules for "the Equalization of Opportunities for persons with Disabilities" and "Salamanca Statement on Principles^{iv}, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education and a Framework for Action". In Japan, right now, we do not have the comprehensive regulations which enforce the support sys-

ⁱ Disability in higher education, OECD 2003

ⁱⁱ European Union 2001, Studying Abroad: European Guide for Students with Disabilities, Brussels.

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.european-agency.org/>

It is run by the Ministries of Education in the participating countries (member states of the European Union as well as Iceland, Norway and Switzerland) as well as supported by the European Union Institutions via the Jean Monnet programme under the EU Lifelong Learning Programme.

^{iv} Adopted by the World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality Salamanca, Spain, 7-10 June 1994

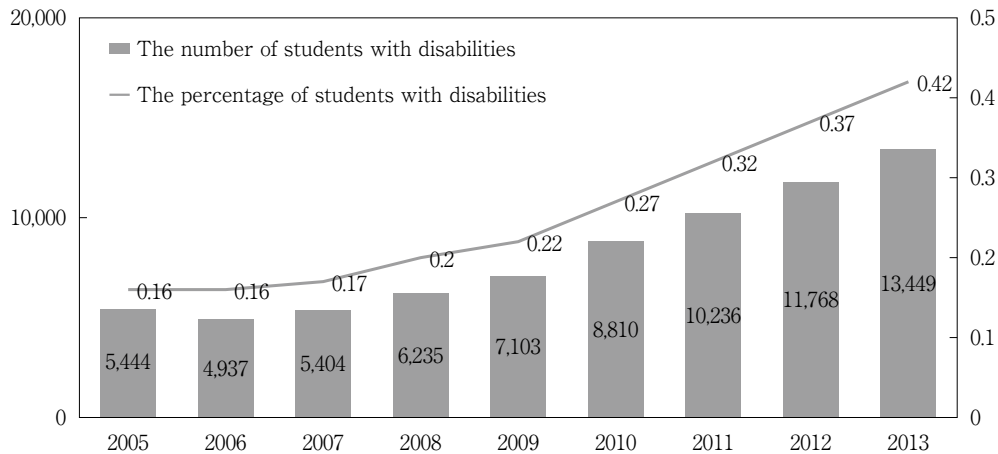


Figure 1 The number of SWD & the percentage of students with disabilities^{vi}

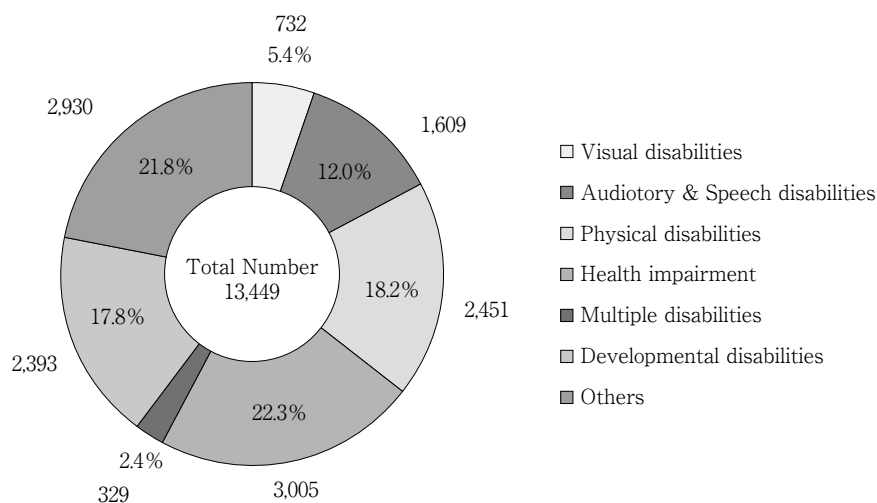


Figure 2 Number of students with disabilities by types of disabilities 2013^{vii}

tems for the SWD. So, those efforts are left to the individual institution level. The new law; anti-discrimination act which will be enforced in April 2016 will have a great impact on higher educational settings.

2. Representation of students with disabilities in Japanese Higher Education

2.1 The number of students with disabilities in higher education in Japan

In order to grasp the present situation of SWD in Japanese higher educational institutions, we shall look at the figures in the research conducted by Japan Stu-

dent Services Organization (JASSO)^v.

In the last decade, the number of SWD doubled in Japan, but the percentage of SWD is still very small.

2.2 Students with Disabilities at Universities, Junior Colleges, and Colleges of Technology

The total number of students in higher education institutions in Japan is 3,213,518 and the number of SWD is 13,449. So the percentage of SWD is 0.4%.

This figure is so small compared to that of USA in which nearly 10% of all students in higher education institutions are categorized as SWD.

One of the reasons for the numerical differences be-

^v Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO) : an independent administrative institution established under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (Mombukagakusho). JASSO undertakes research regarding support for students with disabilities and provides information necessary for this purpose in order to enhance the learning environment for students with disabilities at universities and other institutions of higher learning based on the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

^{vi} http://www.jasso.go.jp/tokubetsu_shien/documents/top_graph.pdf

^{vii} http://www.jasso.go.jp/tokubetsu_shien/documents/press_20140318.pdf

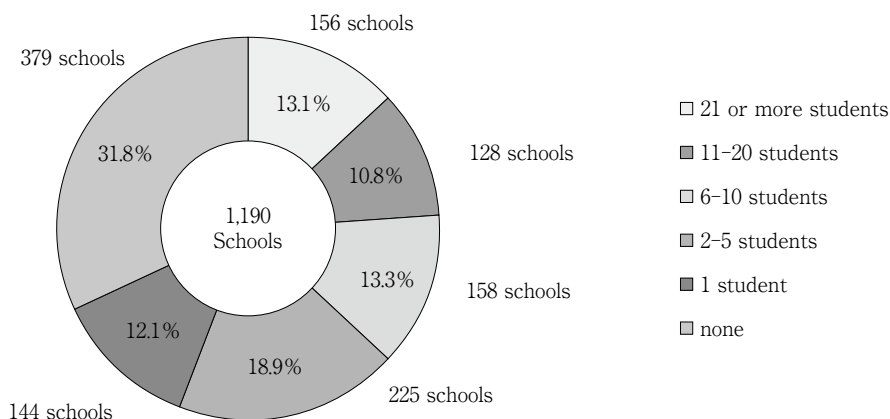


Figure 3 Number of schools with students with disabilities 2013^{ix}

tween USA and Japan is the way in which Japanese higher education institutions have treated the students with developmental disabilities. (The ministry of education, culture, sports, science and technology (MEXT) in Japan uses the term developmental disabilities as Learning Disabilities (LD), Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and others.)

JASSO started to conduct a statistic research from 2005, however, in that year, there was no category for the students with developmental disabilities. The term developmental disabilities started to appear in their research from 2006 due to the “Law to Support Persons with Developmental Disabilities” which was promulgated on December 10, 2004. Based on this Law, “Enforcement Ordinance Relative to the Law to Support Persons with Developmental Disabilities” was promulgated on April 1, 2005. It is interestingly to see that in 2006, the number of students with developmental disabilities was only 127; 2.6% of the whole population of SWD.

In short, the students with developmental disabilities such as Learning Disabilities (LD), Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and others in higher educational settings have been long neglected and uncounted in Japan. So the rapid increase in the number of disabled students in the last several years is due to those students.

From 2006, elementary and lower secondary schools have been stepping up their efforts to find, understand and support children with developmental disabilities. This kind of support has expanded the coverage of the support systems to kindergartens and upper secondary schools. Children thus supported be-

gan studying in universities or colleges a few years later, thus the number of students with developmental disabilities has gradually increased. Now in Japan, many universities are struggling to know how to provide the appropriate support to those students. The several guide books such as “Guidebook to Support Students with Developmental Disabilities” have been published by the National Institute of Special Needs Education; the material for college concerns especially those in charge of student counseling correctly to understand developmental disabilities and provide the necessary support. The understanding about those disabilities is still poor in higher educational settings, work places and society in general.

I visited several universities in the US and attended the conferences such as AHEAD (Association on Higher Education and Disability)^{viii} and I learned that in the US, more than 50% of the supports for the disabled students are the support for the students with developmental disabilities and psychological care.

2.3 The Number of schools in Japan with students with disabilities

The number of schools which responded to the survey is 1,190 and the number of schools with SWD is 811. The schools which have 21 or more students with disabilities are 156 schools out of 811 schools. That is 13.1%.

Out of 1,190 schools, 68.2% of them have SWD and most of them provide the supports for them in which the level of the support differs by school. In Japan, main target students to support are those with visual impairment, hearing impairment, physical disabilities

^{viii} <http://www.ahead.org/>

AHEAD is a professional membership organization for individuals involved in the development of policy and in the provision of quality services to meet the needs of persons with disabilities involved in all areas of higher education in USA.

^{ix} http://www.jasso.go.jp/tokubetsu_shien/documents/press_20140318.pdf

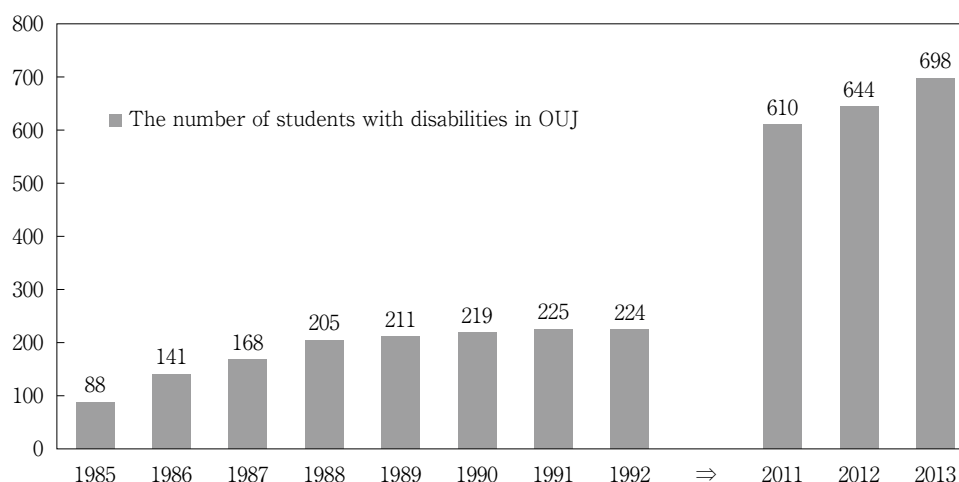


Figure 4 The increasing number of SWD in OUI

such as wheelchair users. Supporting the students with developmental disabilities has just started in a few institutions.

3. The Open University of Japan (OUI)

3.1 About OUI*

The OUI established in 1983, has grown to become the largest distance education institution in Japan. To date, over 1,100,000 people have studied at OUI, with over 50,000 of them graduating with a degree. Taking advantages of terrestrial digital broadcasting and satellite broadcasting, OUI provides effective broadcast lectures using vivid visuals in high-definition and information content developed by experts in the field.

The Faculty of Liberal Arts at OUI offers courses in a wide range of academic fields to meet the diverse needs of students and the general public, so as to broaden their education and deepen their knowledge in specialized fields that are related to their real lives. The following six areas of study are being offered.

- Living and Welfare
- Psychology and Education
- Society and Industry
- Humanities and Culture
- Informatics
- Nature and Environment

As of March 2013, more than 53,000 students are enrolled in the courses on 259 subjects (145 TV and 114 radio courses) and more than 3,000 schooling sessions.

Also, OUI has 50 Study Centers (4 in Tokyo), 7 Satellite Spaces and 70 Audio-visual Rooms throughout Japan. The Study Centers are used for conducting

face-to-face class sessions and credit certification examinations. In addition, tutorials, and academic counseling are offered there. There are facilities for students to view or listen to broadcast lectures, and library services are also provided at the Study Centers. They also function as venues for students to hold extracurricular activities and friendly exchanges. The Study Centers are located on campuses of public/private universities or in facilities of municipalities. The Satellite Spaces and Audio-visual Rooms are established for giving easier access to the above mentioned facilities to those students who live far away from the Study Centers in their prefectures.

Thus, OUI students can study at home, in their own time, from a multi-media learning system which includes printed materials, radio, television and internet.

This university system has met the educational needs of the handicapped that used to being alienated in the traditional educational systems by virtue of:

- no entrance examination
- special access to university education for people without high school graduate qualification
- studying at home through TV, radio, Internet and printed materials.

OUI enrolls more than twice the number of disabled students than other universities in Japan.

3.2 The growing number of SWD in OUI

The popularity of the OUI amongst disabled people is reflected by the growing number who enrolls every year.

In the second semester in 2013, there were 90,154 students of whom 698 had been identified as disabled

* <http://www.ouj.ac.jp/eng/about/overview.html>

(0.77%):

Visual impairment: 168 students

Hearing impairment: 32 students

Physically handicapped & Sickly individuals: 331 students

The others: 167 students

Among them, 27 students had multiple disabilities. Identification of disabled students is done by self-declaration. Before enrolment, the university holds an assessment meeting in which each applicant is assessed concerning disability for studying at the university and the special needs requirements.

These data may lack accuracy because they are on the basis of self-reporting. Moreover, vision, hearing, and athletic capability generally decline with aging. It is assumed that disability support services are more widely being required.

3.3 Special Support for the Disabled Students

● Special procedure for examination and assessments

There are special procedures for examinations and assessment which can be put into operation to benefit disabled students. These procedures include: granting extra time; use of specially provided rooms; use of amanuensis; use of word processor/tape/braille/reading glass; use of typewriter/braillewriter; provision of question papers in large print/braille or on tape.

● Special procedure for classroom lectures

Classroom instruction is carried out at the study centers. According to individual requests, the study centers provide special procedures. These procedures include: provision of parking space; the provision of sheets desired in the classroom; special contact with the lecturer in advance when special support is needed; allowing helper/interpreters for hearing impaired students; the provision of special desks for wheel chairs.

The services mentioned above have started from the beginning of OIJ. In the next chapter, I shall shed the light on the support related ICT.

3.4 The new challenges utilizing ICT; caption & digital text

The OIJ is one of the most advantageous Japanese higher institutions in terms of its ability to use ICT, but there still remain much to be done for SWD. OIJ lectures can be seen in TV and Radio and so that general public enjoy watching them, while the lectures via internet can be seen in the OIJ students' site to which OIJ students enter the site by their own ID number.

● Digital text to the students with visual impairment

The OIJ delivers the digital text to the students with visual impairment who can read the text by text-to-speech-reading equipment of computer. For brail users, Digital text can be transformed into brail by computer.

● Captions of TV lectures & Internet lectures

The OIJ delivers lectures by TV, radio, and Internet. Captions are helpful not only for the students with hearing impairment but also for elderly students and the students who have difficulties with Japanese language. Though the demand for captions is increasing, right now, captions are available only for 48.9% of the TV lectures of OIJ. (2015.)

We are trying to increase captioned lectures as much as we can. The TV lectures with captions are also broadcasted on the Internet.

● Radio lectures

The OIJ delivers 332 lectures by radio (2014. 11). These radio lectures are also delivered by Internet. If the students with hearing impairment request the scenario of radio lectures, OIJ can deliver them to the students. Those requests are very rare, however, so the students with hearing impairment may avoid taking radio courses or only study by printed learning materials.

● Speech recognition technology

A speech recognition rate of 90% or greater has been achieved with English language broadcast. Speech recognition of Japanese is more difficult than that of English due to the great number of homonyms, and automatic captioning is usually difficult. Recently, Kyoto University is developing a highly accurate speech recognition system for Japanese language, and the experimental joint project between Kyoto University & OIJ has started in 2013. The huge amount of audio university educational materials and the digital data of text books of OIJ will greatly contribute to build up the database for this system. In a few years, we expect to develop highly accurate speech recognition systems for university lectures in Japanese.

Caption can be translated into other languages using the translation softs and lectures can be enjoyed internationally.

4. Changing the Japanese higher education: Transfer of Credits

A Credit Transfer Agreement has been exchanged between the OIJ and other universities. In 2015, 381 schools enjoy this agreement. One of the professed aims of the OIJ is to cooperate with existing universi-

ties and to make full use of the latest knowledge and newest educational technology. In order to attain this aim, the OUJ is making great efforts for entering into similar agreements with a larger number of universities. The students with disabilities in other schools can take OUJ courses which are more accessible and earn the same credits.

● The problems of Open Universities;

The OUJ offers university education for anyone who has a motivation of learning. This is what we call the significance of existence of the OUJ, but from an administrative perspective it may cause difficult problems on the other hand. One of the problems is the lack of counselling support for students with mental disabilities or some kind of psychological disorder. Through learning in the OUJ, more and more students are returning to social activities after recovering from melancholia. These cases have great significance to society as a whole.

In the case that students with mental problems claim that they cannot concentrate on taking examination in a classroom with many other students, each learning center provides them support services as high quality as possible.

According to the questionnaire survey carried out by the Student Committee in the fall of 2014, however, some students with disabilities caused the eccentric behavior and troubles that was nuisance to other students in class or club activities. In some cases, faculty in the learning centers could not help but consult with the police or appeal to a trial to solve problems.

Up to the present, no learning centers have student counselor's office and counselors are not placed in any

center, too. Staff or directors of the learning center are supposed to deal with those problem students.

How should we manage these troubles? How should we support students with disabilities?

All the faculty and staff at the OUJ have to continue to think of how to settle these problems.

5. Conclusion

It is important to establish the support systems for SWD in traditional universities and colleges in Japan. We must provide the equal educational opportunity to all the people.

Distance education, as it should be practiced by the OUJ, contains significant advantages over traditional institutions when it comes to supporting SWD.

In that sense, while using credit exchange systems with OUJ, the traditional institutions can concentrate on providing special support for SWD in professional or vocational courses.

Such planning and credit transfer co-ordination would make for significant financial savings, economies which could then be funneled into improving the services which both the OUJ and the traditional professional schools provide to SWD. Moreover, sister institutions, volunteer organizations, and governmental services must coordinate their efforts in order to develop a comprehensive support system for SWD in higher education.

Making the learning environment in higher education accessible, all the students including various types of students will enjoy their higher education.

(2014年10月31日受理)