

## **Instruction of Special Needs Education to Japanese Undergraduate Students in English Teacher Training Courses**

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### **1. Background**

As soon as teachers are employed, they are considered professional educators; therefore, they are required to have fundamental knowledge and skills when they finish pre-service teacher education. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in Japan (MEXT, 2005) requires teachers to have the ability to deal with diverse students. However, in pre-service teacher training courses, there are not enough opportunities to learn the characteristics of students with special educational needs, including how to support them in mainstream schools.

Hoshika (2015) explored the teaching difficulties that junior high school English teachers faced when teaching students with learning or behavioral difficulties in mainstream classes. Hoshika (2015) also explored how to solve the difficulties and to what degree teachers are knowledgeable about developmental disorders. From the study, it can be assumed that when teachers understand the principle of special needs education (SNE), the central role of SNE coordinators and teachers in SNE schools, the characteristics of developmental disorders, and some ways to support students with such characteristics, they can decrease the setbacks and problems faced when teaching students with difficulties and provide appropriate support.

Kato (2013) pointed out that 66.7% of the universities inspected by MEXT in 2011 were warned because they did not clarify whether they had classes about disorders, which are compulsory in their syllabuses. In addition, no clear requirement for the integration of the knowledge about subject teaching and SNE is mentioned. However, the actual situation of SNE instruction in pre-service teacher education in Japan has not yet explored; consequently, the purpose of this study is to explore the SNE instructions that have been provided, if any, in pre-service teacher education.

### **2. Method**

#### **2.1 Participants**

The participants were 52 English teachers of national universities with pre-service English teacher education courses. The rate of collection was 51.9% with 27 responses.

## 2.2 Materials

A questionnaire was created by the author. There are four questions: 1) Do you provide SNE instruction in an English teaching methodology class? 2) Do you provide SNE instruction in classes of English linguistics/literature/communication or understanding other cultures? 3) Do you provide SNE instruction in an *educational practice seminar*? And 4) Do you provide SNE instruction in any other situations? If the respondents chose “yes,” they were asked to choose appropriate answers from answer options about teaching styles (e.g., lecture, class observation, problem-solving style) and contents (e.g., principle of SNE, knowledge about physical disorders, developmental disorders).

## 2.3 Procedure

The questionnaire was sent by mail in July 2015. The mail included a cover letter, questionnaire, and stamped envelope for reply. The participants were asked to answer the questionnaire and send it back in the enclosed envelope.

## 3. Results and Discussion

As shown in Figures 1 to 4, few universities provided opportunities for learning about SNE in the English pre-service teacher education.

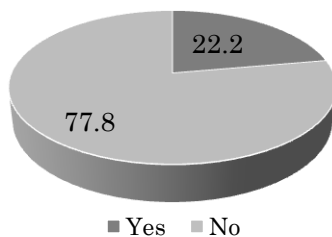


Figure 1

Approximately a quarter of the universities mentioned how to support students with difficulties in English teaching methodology classes.

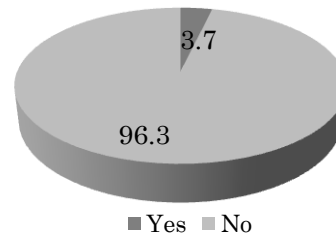


Figure 2

Almost all of the universities did not mention how to support students with difficulties in other English classes.

Specifically, in other English classes, only 3.7% of universities mentioned learners with difficulties in the class on understanding other cultures. In addition, in the *educational practice seminar*, teacher candidates are required to reflect on their learning in their courses and be aware of their weaknesses so they can start their teaching careers smoothly (MEXT, 2006). This class can be utilized as an opportunity to integrate their SNE knowledge and English teaching abilities; however, only 18.5% provided SNE instruction in the *educational practice seminar*, and SNE professionals were in charge of the classes.

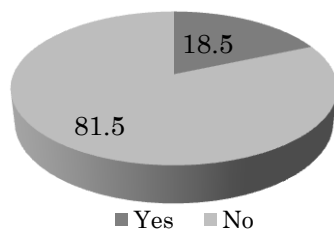


Figure 3

Approximately a quarter of the universities mentioned how to support students with difficulties in English teaching methodology classes.

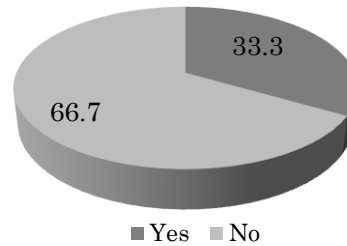


Figure 4

Almost all of the universities did not mention how to support students with difficulties in other English classes.

It is mandatory for teacher candidates to participate in an internship at social welfare facilities and SNE schools and to take at least one class about students with difficulties; however, they do not have enough time to integrate their knowledge of SNE into a subject-specific teaching ability. Therefore, SNE instruction and more opportunities to integrate SNE knowledge into English teaching abilities should be provided during pre-service teacher education.

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