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AN EXAMINATION OF THE EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN JAPAN

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Abstract:The present article discusses the issue of inclusive education in Japan.

Keywords:special education, japanese education, special school, special class committee.

The study of the problems of special education in Japan was practically non-existent in the domestic literature until recently. It is widely acknowledged that Japan is a leading nation in numerous pivotal social indicators, including its notably high life expectancy, the efficacy of its pension and medical services, its relatively low crime and unemployment rates, its competitive wages, and its robust educational system.

It is widely acknowledged among international experts that the Japanese primary and secondary education systems are among the most effective in the world. It is the ultimate pride of the Japanese people, among whom the perception that Japanese primary education is outstanding has taken root. The broadening and quantitative augmentation of schooling, its high efficiency and balance are widely lauded. It is an established fact that 95% of Japanese children are enrolled in upper secondary school. L. Ellington, professor of education at Tennessee's Chattanooga State University, estimates that the average Japanese graduate from a full high school has the same level of education as the average American with two years of college under his belt.

The social and political role of the school in Japanese society is of significant importance. A significant number of functions that are typically performed by various social actors in other countries, such as the family, church, and community, are instead carried out by the school in Japan. Japan is the only developed country in the world where the salary of primary and secondary school teachers exceeds that of local government officials.

The rationale behind Japan's protracted preeminence in educational attainment relative to other nations can be attributed to the Japanese capacity for learning. The process of learning is not confined to the sphere of education. In the Japanese educational system, the emphasis is placed on continuous learning from birth to death. This learning takes place in various settings, including the home, school, workplace, and everyday life. There is a widespread consensus in society regarding the significance of learning. Japan is a society that is mobilised for the purpose of learning.

The study of government policy for the development of special education in Japan is of extreme interest. The government's endeavours in this domain are noteworthy, and the progress made is commendable. It is in this context that the social and humanistic orientation of public policy becomes

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particularly evident, with the government making concerted efforts to educate and support children facing developmental challenges, with a view to preparing them for life.

This attitude towards persons with developmental disabilities has deep roots. The establishment of guilds for disabled individuals in Japan can be traced back to the fourteenth century. Guilds for the blind were the most widespread, and included musicians and acupuncturists who were blind.

In 1868, a radical transformation in the situation occurred as a consequence of the bourgeois revolution. The establishment of a central government and a centralised education system was initiated with the objective of transforming Japan into a militarily strong and economically prosperous power. Following the implementation of the bourgeois reforms, Terakoya schools were disbanded. The introduction of compulsory education for children with developmental problems was not implemented. The majority of children afflicted with developmental issues were educated within the confines of their familial residences.

The provision of special education in Japan commenced towards the close of the 19th century. The first institution of its kind was established in Kyoto in 1878, with a similar establishment following in Tokyo in 1880. The first class designed specifically for children with intellectual disabilities was established in Matsumoto in 1890. In 1896, an institution for individuals diagnosed with mental retardation was established, with educational and training programmes grounded in the physiological approach pioneered by Sequin. The establishment of such schools and special classes in various parts of the country was a gradual process. By 1907, the number of special schools in Japan had reached 38. The first institution for the physically handicapped was opened in 1926. It is important to note that the earliest special schools were private institutions.

Consequently, the establishment of special educational institutions emerged as a response to address social challenges, operating on a foundation of donations and characterised by financial constraints.

In the context of the democratisation of society and the influence of Western countries, the Japanese education system has increasingly begun to protect the interests of individuals with developmental problems. The democratic climate of the time served to elevate the concept of protecting the rights of disabled people into the public consciousness. The provision of education and care for disabled individuals in the United States was cited as a prime example of the promotion of their rights. It was asserted that individuals living with blindness and deafness were considered as integral members of society, entitled to the same rights as their non-disabled peers, including the right to education. In 1923, a significant educational reform took place with the separation of schools for the blind and deaf-mute. The responsibility for the establishment of such schools was delegated to the prefectures. Consequently, the attendance rate at schools for blind and deaf-mute children increased from 15 per cent to 50 per cent. The establishment of special classes was a notable development. To illustrate this point, the Forderklass or Hilfsklass, special classes modelled on the German example, were established to address the educational challenges faced by children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Furthermore, in addition to national education, separate institutions were founded with the purpose of educating those who were labelled 'stupid' and 'lame'.

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By the 1930s, the number of special schools and classes for children with various disabilities had increased, but the rise of militarism and the outbreak of World War II destroyed the special education system. In 1937, an educational council was established with the objective of reorganising the education system. The purpose of education and upbringing in the country became the preparation of schoolchildren to accomplish feats. Children afflicted with developmental issues were consigned to a similar fate to that of the nation as a whole.

The recommendation to make education compulsory for children with developmental problems in special classes or schools was officially recognised, but the war prevented the implementation of such a policy. During the war, the school system for children with developmental problems suffered severe losses; only 30 per cent of schools for children with developmental problems were able to continue to operate.

By the conclusion of the Second World War, the majority of special schools had been destroyed by aerial bombardment, and children with developmental impairments were compelled to relocate to rural areas devoid of adequate facilities for their needs. With the exception of one class in Tokyo, all special classes were closed. Concurrently, the Biuoko Ganzen Residential Hospital was constructed for children with developmental problems, providing a living environment and access to medical treatment.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the field of special education underwent a period of reconstruction, with its foundations being laid anew on the basis of democratic principles that had been introduced by American observers.

The development of special education in Japan after World War II can be divided into three periods:

The development of the system of special schools and classes for children with special educational needs and disabilities took place between 1947 and 1979.

The introduction of integrated education was a period spanning from 1980 to 2000.

The development of special education for those with special needs is of paramount importance.

This is the year 2000. The present day is the current point in time.

In 1947, the Education Act was passed, establishing a system that made nine years of education compulsory. Following the adoption of the Law, special education underwent a period of rapid development. The re-establishment of special schools for blind and deaf children was observed, along with an increase in the number of special classes for children with intellectual disabilities.

In the period following the Second World War and continuing until 1979, state policy was orientated towards the augmentation of the number of special schools and classes. This notion was broadly accurate, as noted by the eminent Japanese professor K. Yamaguchi, though it lacked absolute precision. Japan, it is argued, has demonstrated a capacity to provide adequate educational opportunities for children facing developmental challenges, albeit in select institutions such as special

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schools or classes. The issue of transportation to educational facilities by children was a significant concern. The necessity for them to travel to special schools by transport resulted in an additional expenditure of time. Furthermore, the distance between their place of residence and the school was such that residing on-site was an unavoidable necessity. Professor K. Yamaguchi acknowledges that the institution erred in its approach by failing to prioritise the principle of creating the least restrictive educational environment. By approximately 1979, the movement to introduce integrated education in the country had begun to grow and become stronger. In certain instances, physical force has also been employed to expedite the implementation of integration policies. For instance, at Gakugei University in Tokyo, a radical group of students, along with external supporters, occupied the office of the university president and demanded a break with the Special Education Division. Their argument was that the implementation of existing educational policies contributed to discrimination in education.

Concurrently, the integrated education movement in Japan faced criticism in Western countries on the grounds that children were being 'thrown' into an educational environment ill-prepared to cater to their special needs. The notion of integrated education was regarded as impractical in Japan, as few teachers were willing to provide suitable education for children with developmental difficulties within conventional mainstream classrooms. A significant proportion of speech-language pathologists lacked an understanding of the significance of promoting education in special compulsory schools. Furthermore, there was a prevalent belief amongst this group that integrated education was not a viable option for children facing multiple developmental challenges, who thus faced an inability to receive an education in mainstream schools. Consequently, the movement for integrated education reached an impasse.

Subsequently, the notion of integrated education underwent a paradigm shift, giving rise to a novel movement that began to accrue momentum. The objective of this movement was to establish a system of special education that would cater to the unique requirements of children with special needs.

The reform of special education was carried out by several special committees formed in the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in the 1990s and early 21st century.

The inaugural reform committee in the special education system, the Committee for the Organisation of Special Classes, was established in 1990 under the chairmanship of Professor K. Yamaguchi. A bespoke educational framework was developed for children exhibiting developmental disabilities of a limited severity. Such children are enrolled in the majority of their classes in regular primary or lower secondary school, with a proportion of their lessons being delivered by teachers in special classes according to the children's abilities. The Committee submitted its report on special classes to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in 1992. Subsequent to the findings and recommendations of the aforementioned report, the School Education Act was amended in 1993, thus incorporating special classes into the special education system, in conjunction with special schools and special classes. Consequently, the number of children receiving special education in resource classes began to increase on an annual basis.

Resource classes function as a conduit between conventional classes and special schools or classes, thereby integrating them within a unified educational framework.

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In 1992, following the deliberations of the Committee on Special Classes on educational provisions for children with learning difficulties and developmental problems, the establishment of a further committee, the Committee on Children with Learning Difficulties and Developmental Problems, was initiated at the behest of a group of parents of children with developmental problems. This committee was chaired by Professor K. Yamaguchi. The Committee's final report was published in 1999, following a period of seven years dedicated to deliberations. The report states that children with learning difficulties do not exhibit any significant developmental intellectual delay; however, they do encounter difficulties in acquiring and applying the skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing, and counting. The Committee was presented with a preliminary plan for identifying such children, determining the type and location of their education, setting out the responsibilities of the main teaching staff, the forms of teaching the children, and the arrangements for specialist sessions.

In the year 2000, an additional Committee on 'Special Education in the 21st Century' was constituted under the chairmanship of Professor H. Kawaja. The final report of this Committee, published in 2001, defined the modalities of providing appropriate education for children with special educational needs. The primary message of the report is encapsulated in the following definition: 'Special support education is the positive teaching of children with learning difficulties who are in mainstream classes and require special support education, in addition to the teaching provided to children in special schools and special classes'.

The final Committee, entitled 'Providing Special Supportive Education Now', was established in 2001 under the chairmanship of Dr N. Kobayashi, a paediatrician. The final report of the Committee presented a series of innovative plans for special education reform, which involved the abolition of special schools for students with special needs. Instead, the proposal was put forward that community schools be established, with the objective of providing support for all students. The intention was for these schools to function not only as regular education centres, but also to cater for the needs of students requiring special education. In order to address the needs of children with special educational needs, a number of measures have been implemented. These include the establishment of dedicated educational facilities for children with special and resource classes, the appointment of special coordinators in primary, secondary and special schools, the organisation of school committees to discuss the needs of all children with learning difficulties, the preparation of individual teaching programmes for each child with special needs, the improvement of teaching quality, and coordination between relevant agencies and professionals.

Conclusion: Consequently, special education in Japan, with its 130-year history, is undergoing continuous development in response to contemporary demands, ensuring that children with developmental difficulties receive a high-quality education.

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