Original Article

A New Perspective in Special Education of Overseas Japanese Students with Special Educational Needs: Three Overseas Schools in Singapore

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The aims of this study are (1) to investigate the characteristics of international schools attended by overseas Japanese students, (2) to analyze the current situation of overseas Japanese students with special educational needs in international schools, (3) to analyze how international schools can provide upper secondary education in different countries, and (4) based on these findings, to indicate a desirable future direction for upper secondary education. Data was obtained by a literature survey, two interview surveys, and a questionnaire. These surveys were completed by three international schools in Singapore. Based on the data from the surveys, the following elements were identified as important: A. From the perspective of current international school students who come from a Japanese-educated school: 1) Retaining a Japanese volunteer continuously, or retaining a volunteer with knowledge of special education; 2) Ensuring use of the Japanese students' native language by establishing an integration program with overseas Japanese schools; 3) Employing a bilingual special education teacher; and 4) Employing a Japanese teacher if possible to teach a whole Japanese class for students of similar developmental age. B. Elements of the international school that could be incorporated into the overseas Japanese school: 1) Maintaining use of the Japanese language by establishing integration programs with overseas Japanese school students; 2) Having volunteers in the overseas Japanese school, or use of a maid who is hired by the child's family if the budget is limited; 3) Setting up a special education center in the overseas Japanese school; 4) Considering providing education to students up to the age of 21.

Key Word: overseas Japanese students, special educational needs, international school, special education, limited English proficiency

1. Introduction

"States should recognize the principle of equal primary, secondary and tertiary educational opportunities for children, youth and adults with disabilities, in integrated settings. They should ensure that the education of persons with disabilities is an..."

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integral part of the education system” (United Nations, 1994). In Japan, the government has recently begun improving the upper secondary school environment for youth with special educational needs (SEN) and the majority of such students can be enrolled. This is a step in the right direction, though greater improvement is necessary to enable students with SEN to attend overseas Japanese schools; such schools must be brought to the same level as those in Japan. Overseas Japanese schools were established for the purpose of providing and promoting education in the Japanese language. The Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs subsidizes building expenses; the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture Government of Japan provides the school with about 80% of experienced teachers from Japan, while private enterprises donate and parents pay reasonable fees. No previous research on students with SEN has investigated the number or condition of overseas Japanese students with SEN who attend local or international upper secondary schools. However, it was found that some students with SEN who graduated from overseas Japanese secondary schools could not attend overseas Japanese upper secondary schools with regular students but were, rather, forced to attend international schools conducted in different languages such as in English (Nasuno, 2000). Here, “SEN” refers to students who need special education because of their disabilities. But students with SEN tend to have limited English proficiency. According to the same survey of overseas Japanese schools, these situations occur because under the current system, upper secondary education is not compulsory for Japanese, and it is difficult for overseas schools to guarantee upper secondary education for all students.

Therefore, it was suggested in that report that it was important to discover how other international schools had been able to establish a system that guarantees the upper secondary education for students with SEN. Thus, this study examined the future of prospective upper secondary education for Japanese overseas students with SEN, surveying not only overseas Japanese schools but also international schools attended by Japanese students with SEN (Nasuno, 1999). This study focuses on the students with SEN at the international schools in Singapore, who were investigated in a previous report (Nasuno, 2000).

2. Purpose of the Study

The general objective of this study was to indicate a future direction for upper secondary education of Japanese overseas students with SEN. Specifically, this study aimed to address the following: (1) The characteristics of international schools attended by overseas Japanese students with SEN; (2) The current situation of overseas Japanese students with SEN attending international schools; and (3) How international schools can provide upper secondary education for students with SEN in other countries.

3. Methodology of the Study

3-1. Subjects

These surveys were conducted at three international schools in Singapore. These
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### Table 1 About Subjects and Surveys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Type of school</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Type of survey</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>International school with special education center</td>
<td>Receptionist of special education</td>
<td>The first interview</td>
<td>1999/05/17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The literature survey to each school was carried out by May 1999.

Schools were chosen from a list of seventeen international schools in Singapore (Ministry of Education, 1998), all of which were contacted by telephone or visited on the 17th of May 1999, to ascertain whether they offered special education at the upper secondary level, and by referring to the previous study (Nasuno, 2000).

The literature survey and the first interview survey were respectively conducted at three international schools. The questionnaire survey and the second interview survey were also conducted these three schools, two of which of responded. The respondents included the school principal, the teacher who was in charge of Japanese students with SEN, and the receptionist of special education (see Table 1).

### 3-2. Procedures

The surveys were conducted in the following order for the following purposes: (1) The literature survey and the first interview survey were conducted to investigate the characteristics of international schools attended by overseas Japanese students with SEN. (2) The questionnaire survey and the second interview survey were conducted to analyze the current situation of overseas Japanese students with SEN in international schools, and to speculate on ways in which international schools can ensure upper secondary education overseas.

### 3-3. Methods of Analysis

The literature survey was carried out at three schools by getting each school’s brochure and application for enrollment. Based on the literature survey, the first interview survey was conducted to obtain the information for the comparison.

The questions in the questionnaire and the second interview survey were discussed by one ex-teacher who was in charge of overseas Japanese students with SEN in the Japanese secondary school, two university teachers, and three doctoral
## TABLE 2 School summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
<th>School C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of School</strong></td>
<td>International school with a special education center (Private non-profit school)</td>
<td>International special school (Private non-profit school)</td>
<td>International special school (Private non-profit school)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year Founded</strong></td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educational System</strong></td>
<td>United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia, India, and Singapore System</td>
<td>American and Australian system</td>
<td>American system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enrollment Age</strong></td>
<td>2 years-21 years</td>
<td>18 months-no limitation</td>
<td>2 years 5 months-21 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enrollment Requirements</strong></td>
<td>Application including assessments</td>
<td>Application including assessments</td>
<td>Application including assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of students</strong></td>
<td>About 70</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of staff</strong></td>
<td>24 (Including qualified teachers, assistant teacher and therapists from the center for special education)</td>
<td>25 (Including qualified teachers, assistant teacher and therapists)</td>
<td>10 (Including qualified teachers, assistant teacher and therapists)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>About volunteers and maids</strong></td>
<td>Volunteer activities of students with SEN and people in need are encouraged for regular students.</td>
<td>Permitted volunteers and maids to be involved in a child's program.</td>
<td>Permitted and encouraged volunteers and maids to be involved in a child's program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Curriculum</strong></td>
<td>Implementation of IEP (Individual Educational Program)</td>
<td>Implementation of IEP</td>
<td>Implementation of IEP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integration Program</td>
<td>Integration Program</td>
<td>Integration Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(SEN students’ special needs teacher as a full-time support assistant in the mainstream class)</td>
<td>(In the kindergarten, other international schools or own school)</td>
<td>(In facilities outside of the school for physical education lessons or field trips)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 2 (Continued)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School A</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Tuition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other fees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

students who were specializing in disability sciences. The second interviews included observations in classes in which there were Japanese students with SEN.

3-4. Contents of the Questionnaire Survey and the Second Interview Survey

The questionnaire survey and the second interview survey asked three main questions as follows:
(1) About overseas students with SEN whose native language was not English (3 items):
   • Enrollment restrictions according to type or level of disability
   • Languages other than English that are understood by the students
   • Teachers' instruction language in languages other than English
(2) About Japanese students with SEN in the school (3 items)
   • The current number of Japanese students with SEN
   • The total number of previous Japanese students with SEN
   • The current situation of Japanese students with SEN
(3) The reason why the school can offer special education at the upper secondary school level (1 item)

3-5. Survey Terms

The literature survey was carried out in May 1999. The first interview survey was conducted during July and August 1997 and May 1999. The questionnaire survey and the second interview survey were conducted during October 1999 (Table
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4. Results and Discussion
4-1. Characteristics of the Schools

The following results, shown in Table 2, are based on the literature and the interview survey.

The schools are of two types: one is an international school in which a special education center has been established (School A); the other two are international special schools (School B and School C).

The three schools have several things in common: they are private non-profit schools, do not receive any subsidy from the government, and provide upper secondary education. All three schools guarantee basic education to the age of 21. With regard to enrollment restrictions, there were no limitations based on language difficulties or the level of disability of the child. However, due to limited capacity, new enrollment might be sometimes restricted. To enroll in any of the three schools, completion of an application including assessment tests is required. A small number of Japanese students with SEN were enrolled in the schools at the time of the survey. The school fees at these three schools are dramatically higher than those of the local upper secondary special education schools (which have an annual fee of S$240); tuition at the former is 70-80 times higher. Tuition is similarly high at other international schools. Qualified teachers in special education and specialists are on staff, and consultation with a therapist is available. They have volunteers at their schools. At School A, volunteer activities with students with SEN and people in need are encouraged for regular students. At School B and School C, they permitted volunteers and maids to be involved in a child's program. In Singapore, there are many couples where both husband and wife work. To support this working environment, it is produced the job-market as a maid especially for foreigner. Usually 'maid' means a person who works in the home, but here this term is used in the meaning of private care worker for a child with a disability. Even the local special schools in Singapore utilize maids as volunteers at their schools. This might have happened because there is lack of a support system such as qualified teachers or funding for special education. We are not concerned here with the question of whether it is good or bad to permit maids to be involved in a child's program, but seek for the possibilities. Further, after completion of upper secondary education, vocational training is available or will be in the near future.

The schools differed in the following major respects: 1) at School B, there was no upper limitation on enrollment age, and 2) integration.

At School A, integrated education suited to the individual child is promoted. In an effort to achieve fully integrated classes, the special needs teacher is a full-time support assistant.

At School B, integrated education is effected for 2 hours a day in the kindergarten adjoining the school. For the remaining curriculum, there is a support program for integrating into other international schools. This program aims at encouraging the
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FIG. 1 The current situation of Japanese students at international schools.

OVERSEAS JAPANESE SCHOOLS

- Having volunteers or the maid of student's family
- Setting up a special educational center
- Considering education up to the 21

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

- Retaining the Japanese volunteer continuously, or retaining a volunteer with knowledge of Special Education
- Employing a bilingual special education teacher
- Employing a Japanese teacher if possible to teach a whole Japanese class of similar development age

INTEGRATION PROGRAM

- Ensuring the students' native language

FIG. 2 A proposed model for overseas Japanese students with limited English proficiency.

students with SEN to be integrated with regular students from other schools. Some international school students came to this school about twice a week for certain elective extracurricular activities (e.g., Community Services for Society).

At School C, integration into society was being attempted; for example, facilities
outside the school were used for physical education lessons, and field trips to places such as a university restaurant were taken.

The government publication "Singapore Facts and Figures" (Ministry of Information and the Arts, 1997), when introducing 6 international schools, mentioned special education only with regard to the overseas Japanese schools, which offered "a special program for the mentally and physically handicapped". According to the publication, integrated education was also being carrying out in the overseas Japanese primary and lower secondary schools. However, because integrated education does not continue to upper secondary school, it does not meet the needs of the students with SEN and their parents. In comparison, other international schools provide for students with SEN throughout their upper secondary education.

The result of our survey suggested to overseas Japanese schools that it is possible to 1) establish integration programs at overseas Japanese schools in order to maintain Japanese language skills of students who were graduated from overseas Japanese schools, 2) utilize volunteers in the overseas Japanese schools, or a maid who is hired by the child's family if the budget is limited, 3) creating a special education center in overseas Japanese schools and 4) considering ways to provide education up to the age of 21.

The following discussions about School B and School C are based on comparing the results of surveys of overseas Japanese schools (Nasuno, 2000). The data on School B and School C were obtained by mailing out questionnaires and conducting thorough interview surveys.

4-2. Overseas Students Whose Native Language Was Not English (3 items)

1) Enrollment restrictions according to type or level of disability. Prior to enrollment of an overseas student whose native language is not English, some necessary documents such as the results of assessment tests must be submitted, and there is also an interview with the parents in both schools (Table 3).

As was mentioned in "1. Characteristics of the schools" about school enrollment,
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different from overseas Japanese schools, there is no restriction on children who have language or other difficulties in both schools. On the other hand, some overseas Japanese schools still have enrollment restrictions according to type or level of disability (Kato, 1992; Nasuno, 2000). Obviously, the participation of the parent with the child is greatly emphasized to compensate for the child’s language problem.

2) *Languages other than English that are understood as a native language.* At School B, there were three languages other than English which students had as a native tongue (Table 3). At School C, there were eight languages other than English which the students used as their native language (Table 3). There are students who need instruction in their native language. Some parents use English at home for their child, even when their native language is not English. But some students gradually understand English; others still do not understand it because of their disabilities or environments in other language. It is not clear how many students use those languages other than English. But it was found that Japanese was not the only other language at these schools.

3) *Teachers' instruction in language other than English.* At both schools, Japanese was not used as the teachers’ instruction. But at School B, a teacher bilingual in English and Chinese was guaranteed. Singapore is a bilingual country, and it is therefore easier to acquire teachers who are bilingual in languages other than English, such as Chinese, Malay, or Tamil, than in Japanese. School B reported that it was also able to employ a special education teacher bilingual in Japanese and English. On the other hand, at School C, the only instruction language was English. This was in consideration of the fact that the students had various language backgrounds; one language was selected for instruction use, based on its accessibility. School C reported that there was no strong need for an English-Japanese teacher, though they did have a local teacher who could speak a little Japanese. The school mentioned that they would consider employing a bilingual English-Japanese teacher who is certified as special education teacher, that is, they succeeded in establishing an IEP (Individual Educational Program) in English.

4-3. *About Japanese Students with SEN in the Respective Schools (3 items)*

1) *The present number of Japanese students with SEN.* In School B, there were two Japanese students with SEN in primary education and three Japanese students with SEN, two of whom graduated from the overseas Japanese school and one who transferred from a school in Japan, in upper secondary education. In School C, there was one Japanese student with no language skills in English or Japanese in elementary education, and another Japanese student with mild learning difficulty who had been previously educated in English. The Japanese students all reported having the experience of not feeling accepted in an overseas Japanese school in lower secondary education because they did not receive any education in Japanese, and their parents reported worrying about their future in Japan when the parents’ returns to Japan or after the parents’ death.

2) *The total number of previous Japanese students with SEN.* Both schools had
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previous experience with Japanese students with SEN. Approximately 4-6 (based on a selective process) Japanese students with SEN were accepted at each school. Since 1989, Japanese students with SEN from overseas Japanese schools have been in attendance at School A (Nasuno, 2000). Since the respective openings of School B and School C, Japanese students with SEN have been in attendance. The consistent attendance of Japanese students with SEN in these schools suggests that there is a population of overseas Japanese school students with SEN who are searching for upper secondary education.

3) The current situation of Japanese students with SEN in an English education environment. Japanese students with SEN have difficulty understanding teacher’s instruction and perspective of the lesson in English. In order to overcome these problems, visual cues (used at School B and School C) and the use of Japanese volunteers (School B) are employed. At School B, there are seven students in the senior class; three of them are Japanese who graduated from overseas Japanese schools and Japanese schools in Japan, whereas the other four were English-educated but their parents’ English is not as a native language but as a second language. School B reported that, “Communication with the parents is more problematic than communication with the children. Representatives of the school are unable to speak in depth with the parents about the child’s needs or problems. It would be good to have a Japanese-speaking teacher, but funds cannot support this. The students’ ages range from 9 to 24, so it would be inappropriate to put them in one class.” Although School C reported having noticed difficulties, it commented that, “There are Japanese students who had no more difficulty in acquiring language than children from an English-speaking home. The Japanese parents have all been extremely supportive and cooperative with regard to their child’s program and with the school. No disadvantages.”

Both schools reported having difficulties calming the children down on occasions when they experienced panic. The Japanese volunteers were used to solve this problem. School B remarked that the children experienced panic not only because of the language problem but also because of the volunteer’s specialty and their sustainability. According to the Japanese students’ teacher at School B, “Volunteers come once a week. There are three Japanese students in the senior class, and it would be helpful to them if the volunteers came about three times a week.”

In response to the question whether teachers and students can communicate in English, it was reported to be “sometimes difficult” (School C), and “often difficult” (School B). With regard to this, School B considers that it is caused by the time at which students enter the school. The students at School B enrolled in upper secondary education stage after they have been graduated from overseas Japanese schools or Japanese school in Japan.

For Japanese students, although they have difficulties with English language, the effort to use visual cues was seen in each school to try to overcome this disadvantage. Other efforts included contacting the child’s parents daily through notes (this is mandatory) or observe their child class (this is elective). In School B, communication...
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with the parents was reportedly more difficult than that with the child, especially when the communication was related to the child's individual problems. School C reported that the Japanese students' parents were competent at English, and that consultation with and guidance from the parents regarding the children went smoothly.

Therefore, not only the student's language ability but also the parents' language ability has an influence on the child under the condition of receiving educational instruction in a language other than the native language. The School B agreed that it was a good idea to establish an integration program at overseas Japanese schools in order to ensure that the Japanese students sustained a connection with their native language as well as regular students. School B has a support program for integrating with regular students into other international schools; some international school students volunteered to come to this school about twice a week for extracurricular activities. In addition, the Japanese parents approached their children's former overseas Japanese school a few times, but it was difficult to establish programs because of a lack of coordination between the two schools resulting from language differences. It means there is no coordination teacher, no chance to be held students' extracurricular activities like School B does.

As a result of this situation, there seems to be a need to ensure that the Japanese students with SEN sustain their understanding of the native tongue by establishing an integration program with regular students, some of who used to be in the same class, at overseas Japanese schools.

4-4. The Reason Why the International Schools Can Offer Special Education at the Upper Secondary School Level (1 item)

Both schools pointed out that it is natural to guarantee upper secondary education. The schools had pondered this question, and inquired why overseas Japanese schools did not offer special education at the upper secondary education level. They also mentioned that their schools are special schools, and their educational systems provide special education up to the age of 21 (see "1. Characteristics of the schools"). Moreover, School B has a vocational program for students over 21 years of age. School C intends to implement a vocational program within the next five years. Such programs address the difficulty overseas people with disabilities may have getting a working visa in Singapore, where even many Singaporeans with disabilities often must wait to get jobs. Notably, both schools are based on the original educational system, but also attempt to modify the system to meet the needs of the students (Table 2).

In a previous report (Nasuno, 1999), it was suggested that because upper secondary education is not compulsory under the current Japanese educational system, it is difficult for overseas schools to guarantee upper secondary education. In fact, many international schools have no special education program, even if their original educational system offers upper secondary education or integrated education. Some international schools reported that they had never had students with SEN,
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whereas other international schools reported that they refer parents of students with SEN to three other international schools (included here) because they do not accept them (based on the telephone or visit to the schools survey on the 17th of May 1999).

In the USA, which guarantees special education and is based on the same educational system as the schools examined herein, it was noticed that "the challenge of achieving fully inclusive education still remained, particularly for those in the age range of 12 to 21" (OECD, 1999). The challenge is to create a better educational environment not only inside the country but also in other countries when new schools are established.

A representative of Singapore's Ministry of Education visited an overseas Japanese school in Singapore to see the resource room for students with SEN and inclusive education (Nasuno, 2000). Most overseas Japanese schools are in developing countries, and the schools therefore play an important role in informing the Japanese educational system directly to the local people who are searching a better educational environment. Japan also has students with SEN who need special education in their native language (Asahi newspaper, 1999; The British Embassy, Tokyo, 1999). It is hoped that the results of this study will clarify and confirm that special education is needed everywhere, even when we go out of our own countries.

5. Conclusions

Based on the survey data, the following elements were identified as important. They are ordered from outside resources (outside the school) to inside resources (within the school).

A. From the perspective of current international school students who come from a Japanese-educated school: 1) Retaining a Japanese volunteer continuously, or retaining a volunteer with knowledge of special education; 2) Ensuring use of the Japanese students' native language by establishing an integration program with overseas Japanese schools; 3) Employing a bilingual special education teacher; and 4) Employing a Japanese teacher if possible to teach a whole Japanese class for students of similar developmental age.

B. Elements of the international school that could be incorporated into the overseas Japanese school: 1) Maintaining use of the Japanese language by establishing integration programs with overseas Japanese school students; 2) Having volunteers in the overseas Japanese school, or use of a maid who is hired by the child's family if the budget is limited; 3) Setting up a special education center in the overseas Japanese school; and 4) Considering providing education to students up to the age of 21.

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