

Support for Hearing Impaired High School Students Intending to Go to College

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Introduction

The percentage of enrolling in universities/colleges of deaf and hard of hearing students who graduated deaf schools is 17%, while that of non-handicapped students is 51 %. (*Gakko Kihon Chosa*, Research on schools, Ministry of Education, culture, sports, science and technology, 2012.) The percentage of enrolling in universities/colleges of deaf students in mainstream schools seems higher than that in deaf schools, though it can hardly be grasped, (even the number of high schools which have students with hearing impairment is difficult to be grasped); however, there is no doubt that less number of students go to college when compared to hearing students. One of the reasons for this situation is obviously the difference in educational environments, including the lack of communication and information in elementary and secondary schools, deaf schools, and colleges and universities.

Under the influence of UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, however, access service for hearing impaired students in educational settings is becoming a common practice worldwide. More and more universities/colleges in Japan are preparing for access service for hearing impaired students. Some universities/colleges have sign language interpreters or note/PC takers. But unfortunately students of deaf schools and their parents do not even know what access services is like, since elementary and secondary schools provide so little access service.

This thesis discusses the disadvantages of hearing impaired high school students intending to go to college and proposes some ways to support these students. In chapter I, we discuss the rights of deaf and hard of hearing referring the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which shows there is still a long way to realize the Convention in Japanese educational settings.

In chapter II, the reasons why the percentage of enrolling in universities/colleges of deaf and hard of hearing students is small are explored. The reasons are: the curriculum of deaf schools does not assume the entrance exam, the lack of access service in mainstream schools, inappropriate teaching methods in both deaf and mainstream schools, and the limited support systems outside/after school.

Finally in chapter III, we discuss how to improve the situation and propose the support for students with hearing impairment, through introducing our practices: after-school lessons in sign language or with access service, on-line support system, and the special manual for students with hearing impairment.

(In this thesis, “Deaf” with capitalized “D” means deaf people whose native language is JSL, that is,

Japanese Sign Language.)

I. Rights to Learn of Hearing Impaired

Japan has just decided to ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on Dec.4th, 2013. (It will be ratified in Feb.2014.) Preamble V declares as follows. (Hereafter important words or expressions are underlined and italicized by the authors.)

Recognizing the importance of accessibility to the physical, social, economic and cultural environment, to health and education and to information and communication, in enabling persons with disabilities to fully enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

“Article 2, Definitions” also states as follows;

For the purposes of the present Convention: "Communication" includes languages, display of text, Braille, tactile communication, large print, accessible multimedia as well as written, audio, plain-language, human-reader and augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication, including accessible information and communication technology; "Language" includes spoken and signed languages and other forms of non spoken languages;

The above means we should offer the information in all the modes, means, and formats in settings of college education and elementary or secondary schools as well. It clearly defines signed languages as “language”. But in Japanese schools and colleges no sign language is recognized as one of natural languages, and access service provided through sign languages (JSL or Signed Japanese) is not usual. Government Course Guideline of high schools (*Gakusyu Shido Yoryo*) does not include JSL either in the natural language (=Kokugo) or in foreign languages.

The Convention further states in “Articles 21; Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information”,

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities can exercise the right to freedom of expression and opinion, including the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas on an equal basis with others and through all forms of communication of their choice, as defined in article 2 of the present Convention, including by:

- a. Providing information intended for the general public to persons with disabilities in accessible formats and technologies appropriate to different kinds of disabilities in a timely manner and without additional cost;
- b. Accepting and facilitating the use of sign languages, Braille, augmentative and alternative communication, and all other accessible means, modes and formats of communication of their choice

by persons with disabilities in official interactions;

c. Urging private entities that provide services to the general public, including through the Internet, to provide information and services in accessible and usable formats for persons with disabilities;

d. Encouraging the mass media, including providers of information through the Internet, to make their services accessible to persons with disabilities;

e. Recognizing and promoting the use of sign languages.

Japanese high schools seem to be far away from the state expressed in the Convention. There is no high schools in Japan that officially regard signed languages as educational languages, though there is one elementary and junior high school that educates deaf students in JSL. That is, *Meisei Gakuen* a private school for special needs education. *Meisei Gakuen* is the first Deaf school in Japan where only Deaf teachers teach Deaf children in JSL. It was established in 2008, and about 60 Deaf children between ages 3 to 15 study there as of 2013. The children always *communicate in JSL* in classes *with reading and writing in Japanese*. However there are no such schools for children in the age group of high school students. It is difficult to establish such a high school, because there are not so many deaf signers who have high school teachers' certificate.

The Clause 4, "Article 24 – Education" in the Convention states;

4. In order to help ensure the realization of this right, States Parties shall take appropriate measures to employ teachers, including teachers with disabilities, who are qualified in sign language and/or Braille, and to train professionals and staff who work at all levels of education. Such training shall incorporate disability awareness and the use of appropriate augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication, educational techniques and materials to support persons with disabilities.

Thus training of Deaf teachers is a pressing need.

On the other hand, there is another way to realizes Article 2 and Article 21. That is to secure access service in inclusive educational settings. The Clause 1, Article 24 expresses;

1. States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and life long learning directed to:

a. The full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity;

b. The development by persons with disabilities of their personality, talents and creativity, as well as their mental and physical abilities, to their fullest potential;

c. Enabling persons with disabilities to participate effectively in a free society.

It continues to the Clause 2;

2. In realizing this right, States Parties shall ensure that:

- a. Persons with disabilities *are not excluded from the general education system* on the basis of disability, and that children with disabilities are *not excluded from free and compulsory primary education*, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability;
- b. Persons with disabilities can access *an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education* on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live;
- c. Reasonable accommodation of the individual's requirements is provided;
- d. Persons with disabilities *receive the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education*;
- e. Effective individualized support measures are provided in environments that maximize academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion.

For the inclusive education for deaf and hard of hearing, training of PC/note takers or sign interpreters is urgent. This is also necessary for the universities/ colleges education as the Clause 5 states;

5. States Parties shall ensure that persons with disabilities are able to access general tertiary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning without discrimination and on an equal basis with others. To this end, States Parties shall ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided to persons with disabilities.

Thus the Convention regards the inclusive education as one of the rights of persons with disabilities. However, hearing impaired students have a unique problem. Inclusive education, even with in-class access service, would "excludes" them, because they are shut out of the communication space of other children. In addition, Deaf schools have played a unique role in passing down the Deaf culture, the center being their own traditional language, JSL. Deaf schools have been the center of Deaf community of each district. The promotion of inclusive education means decline or even extinction of Deaf culture. There were same problems in the countries which promoted the inclusive education, such as USA and number of European countries. The plan of abolition of deaf schools have faced strong opposition from Deaf people in many countries. Hence the Clause 3, Article 24 of the Convention states as follows;

3. States Parties shall enable persons with disabilities to learn life and social development skills to facilitate their full and equal participation in education and *as members of the community*. To this end, States Parties shall take appropriate measures, including:

- a. Facilitating the learning of Braille, alternative script, augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication and orientation and mobility skills, and facilitating peer support and mentoring;
- b. *Facilitating the learning of sign language and the promotion of the linguistic identity of the deaf community*;

c. Ensuring that the education of persons, and in particular children, who are blind, deaf or deafblind, is delivered in the most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication for the individual, and *in environments which maximize academic and social development*.

Ironically, while Japanese deaf schools have been the centers of the deaf communities, they have not promoted to (in fact, once even prohibited to) use JSL in class, and have ignored Japanese Deaf culture, with the exception of afore mentioned *Meisei Gakuen*. The students have used JSL, obscurely outside class or after school. The students of deaf schools have been forced to learn Japanese articulation and lip-reading, and to take classes in phonetic Japanese. Though most Deaf parents have their children go to deaf schools, most hearing parents of children with deaf or hard of hearing prefer inclusive education and they do not put their children in deaf schools until they end up dropping out. They do not know the existence of Deaf culture either, although their children have the rights to learn sign language and Deaf culture, as we will see in the following Article 30. The children encounter Deaf culture and JSL after entering high school or college. Even Deaf parents of Deaf children sometimes prefer inclusive education for a different reason from that of hearing parents. For example, because they dislike Oralism in Japanese deaf schools (which implies the prohibition of signing), they send their children to institutes that facilitates inclusive education so as to pass down Deaf culture to the children outside of deaf schools.

The Convention mentions “Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport” in Article 30, with special consideration for Deaf culture;

1. States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life, and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities:
 - a. Enjoy access to cultural materials in accessible formats;
 - b. Enjoy access to television programs, films, theatre and other cultural activities, in accessible formats;
 - c. Enjoy access to places for cultural performances or services, such as theatres, museums, cinemas, libraries and tourism services, and, as far as possible, enjoy access to monuments and sites of national cultural importance.
 2. States Parties shall take appropriate measures to enable persons with disabilities to have the opportunity to develop and utilize their creative, artistic and intellectual potential, not only for their own benefit, but also for the enrichment of society.
 3. States Parties shall take all appropriate steps, in accordance with international law, to ensure that laws protecting intellectual property rights do not constitute an unreasonable or discriminatory barrier to access by persons with disabilities to cultural materials.
 4. Persons with disabilities shall be entitled, on an equal basis with others, to recognition and support of their specific cultural and linguistic identity, including sign languages and deaf culture.
- (5 is omitted.)

The above article means Deaf people have rights to participate in the cultural activities in general

with access service, and in their own cultural activities such as Deaf arts, Deaf theatres/Signed drama, and *Deaflympic* as well. Though it is certain that Japanese Deaf culture has been established, it is not respected in educational settings, except in the case of *Meisei Gakuen*.

Thus the rights of hearing impaired children both in inclusive education and in deaf schools are not protected in Japan. There is still a long way ahead to realize the Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities compared to other developed countries. Japan was slow to ratify the Convention. The Revised Basic Act for Person with Disabilities and Act on the Elimination of Disability Discrimination were the preparation for the ratification of the Convention. The former passed the Diet in 2004 and the latter in 2013. The environmental conditions will be improved and public consciousness will be raised. The rights to receive the tertiary education for hearing impaired children will be and should be protected. In the next chapter, we discuss how the problems above affects the enrollment of universities/colleges.

II. The Difficulty of High Schools Students with Hearing Impairment in Going to College

Academic ability of most Japanese students with hearing impairment, especially those in deaf schools, is not up to the standard of the college entrance examinations, because (1) curriculum of deaf schools does not assume the entrance exam, (2) teaching methods are not appropriate, and (3) there are few support systems outside/after school.

The curriculum of deaf schools above (1) is set two or three years (two or three grades) behind the students of mainstream schools. (eg. Fourth year students use the textbooks which are used by second year students in mainstream schools). The reasons for this are as follows. First, Japanese deaf schools spend long time to train speech and lip-reading. Students of “hard of hearing” also spend additional time to maintain or improve residual auditory sense. Unfortunately, such trainings are not effective for most of the students, and they very often turn out to be a waste of time. They experience repeated setbacks, which causes inferiority complex. Second, deaf schools usually assume that the students would start working after graduation, and therefore support them to get employed. The schools have less information on universities/colleges than mainstream schools have. In some deaf schools they separate the students who try to enter universities/colleges from other students and offer them guidance to take entrance examinations. The Tokyo Metropolitan District designated to one deaf school to put more importance on academic education rather than career education, which made a gap between the school and other schools. Third, Deaf students (with capitalized D) are always educated in a foreign language, that is, Japanese. Because Japanese Sign Language has a totally different structure (different grammar) from Japanese, they always have disadvantage in reading Japanese text books or writing answers in Japanese during examinations.

Teaching methods above (2) entail most serious and controversial problems. Children with hearing impairments vary in auditory sense and in linguistic environments. On the medical viewpoint, some can hear with hearing aids or with cochlear implant to some extent and others are profound deaf. In the former cases, parents and teachers are enthusiastic to improve the children’s auditory sense, which they do not necessarily succeed in. On the social and cultural viewpoint, some are from deaf families who are

very proud of their Deaf culture and Japanese Sign Language. They usually dislike lip-reading and speech trainings. Others have hearing parents and brothers/sisters. They are not in the Deaf community and their hearing parents regard the auditory language is worth learning. It is difficult for teachers to decide which method is to be applied: whether it should be visual oriented or auditory oriented, and how speech, gesture, writing and sign should be combined.

More seriously, few teachers can even “choose” teaching methods, because they are not trained to teach in sign language. Most teachers are poor at sign language or do not sign at all. It takes five or six years to master sign language. Since 2007, the government started the system of *School for Special Needs Education (Tokubetsu Shien Gakko)*, which replaced and abolished deaf schools, blind schools, and schools for mentally and physically handicapped children. Deaf schools are now legally included in schools for special needs education. This revision led to change the system of teacher training. Although some local governments keep conventional deaf schools, they are all legally called “School for Special Needs Education.” Training courses for deaf schools are abolished and all the trainees of special needs education should learn all areas, without specializing at any kind of disabilities. While sign languages are recognized as natural languages all over the world, and the world-wide status of them is improved, Japanese teachers’ ability to communicate with deaf students is possibly declining. Teachers of schools for special needs education are required to learn sign language in some prefectures, but the number of such local governments is still small.

The controversy over the teaching methods for children with hearing impairments has a long history, starting out as at the dispute between Abbé De L’Épée (1712-1789) and Samuel Heinicke (1712-1790). Oralism (which included *prohibition of signing*) gained power in the 19th century. The infamous Second International Congress on Deaf Education, which took place in Milan in 1880, is the symbol of oppression on deaf signers. Regret and rejection of the oralists’ decision at Milan were issued on July 19th 2010, at the 21st International Congress on Deaf Education at Vancouver. However, Japanese society still supports oralism. Although deaf schools allow the students to sign and there is no corporal punishment to the sign users any more, the language of the deaf school is still phonetic Japanese. There is only one deaf school where they teach in Japanese Sign Language, that is, the afore mentioned *Meisei Gakuen*, (former *Tatsunoko Gakuen*), which used to be a weekend free school for deaf students of various schools, both mainstream and deaf schools. Tokyo Metropolitan district, (not Ministry of Education) exceptionally admitted *Meisei Gakuen* as a ‘school’. The teachers of *Meisei Gakuen* are all native signers. *Meisei Gakuen* has an elementary school and a junior high school, but it has not been able to establish a high school, because there are many requirements including the numbers of qualified teachers. There are few qualified deaf high school teachers. The school needs native signers of JSL by definition.

As to students in mainstream high schools, there are no problems pertaining to the curriculum as above (1), but they do not have teachers’ special considerations about teaching methods. The students with hearing impairment are sitting all day, not understanding what teachers and classmates say, but the parents are reluctant to send their children to deaf schools, because academic level of deaf schools is low as mentioned above. The students do not learn much from the teachers, but they study by themselves or with the support from their parents. Some students, after failing to keep up with school works, move to

deaf schools with despair and a feeling of frustration. Some students finally and successfully try to go to college. But some colleges decline to accept hearing impaired students because they cannot afford to offer enough access service. Other colleges accept them, but do not offer enough access services to keep the students studying or participating in college activities. This results in some of the students leaving colleges after one or two years.

Support system above (3), is another serious problem for students with hearing impairments. The entrance exam industry does not assume minorities like handicapped or foreign children, because it does not pay. Not many universities and colleges assume that students with hearing impairment take the entrance examination. Not many of them reach out for deaf schools and other schools for special needs education.

The support project for the students with hearing impairment of Japan College of Social Work, Tokyo is challenging the situation as described in the next chapter.

III. Support Programs and Support Manuals for High School Students with Hearing Impairment

Since there are very few support programs outside/after school for high school students with hearing impairment, one of the authors started the support programs called *Nihon Shuwa niyoru Rousya no Koukou Kotohajime* (=the First Step of High School in Sign Language). It was launched as a session lasting for a short period of time in which two deaf college students teach mathematics, English and Japanese to hearing impaired students *in sign language*. When “the Support Project for the College Students with Hearing Impairments” started by subsidy of *Nippon Foundation*, we established regular classes called *Daigaku e Ikou* (=Let’s Go to College) in 2010. In the program, classes have been taught by deaf college students and by hearing teachers of high schools or preparatory schools on Friday evenings. The classes by hearing teachers are for mainstreamed students and they have sign interpreters and PC takers. It was reported on newspapers and TV as the pioneering and epoch-making project (eg. *Nihonkeizaishinbun*, 2010). About 20 high school students attended in 2013 both from mainstream high schools and deaf schools. Most students whom participated during the year 2010-2012 entered universities/colleges. The program proved that students with hearing impairment could learn and pass the entrance examinations of universities/college if they have classes in sign language or have access service. The class formations are always difficult, because the students vary in levels from that of the first year of junior high school to that of average third-year students of mainstream high schools. Some students need JSL, some students need signed Japanese and some do not understand sign language at all. It is difficult to gather interpreters and PC takers on weekend evenings. Skilled interpreters and PC takers are necessary, because the classes consist of special terminology for mathematics and English, while classes also make use of charts, figures and diagrams. But we have managed to maintain this evening school. It turned out that quite a few students had psychological problems trying to adopt to the hearing society, therefore we decided to have one deaf staff member with the certificates of counsellor and social worker.

Deaf staff members such as teachers and counsellors are especially important as role models for deaf high school students. They have very few role models and they grope in the dark to decide what to do

after graduating high schools.

In addition to this, another support project for high school students with hearing impairment using the Internet was launched by subsidy of Mitsubishi Foundation in 2011(eg. *Nihonkeizaishinbun*, 2012). It is an online support system using e-portfolio, which connects high school students, their teachers and parents, college professors, student supporters, preparatory school instructors and a counsellor. We established the Internet site with information and lessons of moving image by native signers. Students all over Japan can ask questions to the teachers or take counselling by e-mail. There are 98 images of lessons of English, Japanese, mathematics, essay writing and interview taking at present (Dec.2013). It has a popular name, “*Ouchide Yobiko*” (=Preparatory School to College at Home) (<http://www.ouchide-yobikou.net/>). It costs less but students prefer face to face lessons, therefore the number of students of “Let’s Go to College” did not decrease. The evening school is now simply called *Rou Nancho Kokosei no Gakushujyuku* (= Lessons for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students), because not only the third-year students but also the first- and second-year students and junior high school students attend it. It is certain that the similar support is necessary for junior high school students.

Online support is not the best way for students with hearing impairment, especially for JSL signers, because facial expressions and postures are part of JSL grammars. But the information gap between metropolitan area and local areas is large and online support is efficient for students in local areas.

The most serious academic problem of students with hearing impairment is Japanese reading and writing. It tends to be thought that hearing impairment is not a hindrance of reading and writing. But this is not the case. The languages in hearing world such as Japanese and English are originally phonetic languages. It is nearly impossible to develop the proficiency of those languages without sound. The special consideration is necessary to have students with hearing impairment read and write correctly. It takes much longer for them to acquire Japanese grammar than for hearing children. But Japanese deaf education takes huge amount of time to train the students to articulate and to read lips, which are not necessarily possible nor useful. In college education, reading and writing are essential. Moreover, in this age of IT, hearing impairment itself is not a serious hindrance if they can read and write properly. It is absolutely necessary for them to read and write correct Japanese and hopefully correct English as well.

According to error analysis of writing by students with hearing impairment, they share the same kind of errors (Saito, 2013). For example, they made errors very often in passive sentences. It is probably because there are no morphemes which mark passive voice in JSL. If the signers move the same hand shape of the active voice to the addresser, it indicates passive voice. Also they often use compound nouns as verbs (eg. *ginkoufurikomi masu.*), which is not acceptable in standard Japanese. Articles of case markers are difficult for JSL signers. However this kind of errors are seen not only in signers sentences but also in the sentences of non-signing hard of hearing. Though the reason for this kind of error is not clear, such errors can be prevented by using a special text book for the students with hearing impairment. Thus the special manuals or text books for hearing impaired students are effective. We made the manual “Communication Skill-up Manual” which has explanations of grammatical items which are difficult to master for hearing impaired and social skills and manners which they should be careful at as well (*Chokaku Shogaisha no Skill-up, Step up Kenkyukai*, 2013). It explains what are difficult for hearing impaired

students: what is onomatopoeia, how to greet, how to walk without noise in college interview.

These are the supports we have practiced. But there can be more room to improve the curriculum of deaf schools and teaching methods in deaf schools. There should be more support also in mainstream schools.

Conclusion

We have discussed the disadvantages of high school students with hearing impairment intending to go to college, consulting UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities and proposed some ways to support the students.

In chapter I, we discussed the rights of students with hearing impairment referring the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities which are hardly protected in Japan. In chapter II, the reasons why the percentage of enrolling in universities/ colleges of students with hearing impairment is small were explored. It was because of the curriculum, teaching methods and the lack of support systems after/out of school. In chapter III, we discussed how to improve the situation and proposed the support for students with hearing impairment introducing support systems we have practiced and a special manual we made.

We could make even more effort for hearing impaired students in educational settings. We should enlighten the public to recognize the rights of Deaf and other hearing impaired persons and to recognize sign language as “Language”.

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