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Contents

Closing Gaps in Inclusive Support in Japanese Tertiary Education[1]

Ayako Ooiwa
Keiwa College

Michael Y. Yap
Keiwa College

Clare Kaneko
Niigata University

Abstract
As the number and variety of students with Special Learning Differences (SpLD) is increasing in tertiary education in Japan, the need for inclusion and accommodation becomes more apparent and necessary, especially in classes that require learners to interact, collaborate and communicate with each other. In this paper, the authors explore the theoretical background of government policies related to inclusive education, existing research on SpLD, and point out the gaps in the literature as the first part of their joint-research on students with SpLD and their support systems in the tertiary EFL classrooms in Japan.

学習の特性（SpLD、Special Learning Differences) を持つ生徒・学生が高等教育の現場でも増加し、大学でも包括性と配慮の必要性はより重要になりつつある。特に必修科目でありながら共同学習やコミュニケーションが必要である言語の科目では SpLD の特性を持つ学生がより目立ってしまったり困難を抱えてしまったりする傾向にある。この論文ではインクルーシブ教育を目指すという政府の方針を探り、SpLD に関する先行研究と研究が不足している部分を探る。この論文は、SpLD の特性を持つ学生を対象とし、大学教育における外国語のクラスの支援システムの構築に関する共同研究報告となる前半の部分に当たる。

Keywords: Special Learning Differences (SpLD), Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Differentiated Instruction

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As numbers of students with disabilities, including Special Learning Differences (SpLD) is increasing in Japan in all levels of education (Center for Diversity Accessibility and Career Development, University of Tsukuba, 2017; Tsukuba Accessibility Department, 2017), teachers need to be aware of different teaching techniques, such as differentiated instruction, to help learners communicate and collaborate. This paper gives insight into the history of SpLD in Japan, current practices being employed, and discussion on how change is possible in the classroom through Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and differentiated instruction.

In most parts of the world as recently as the 20th century, children showing any major atypical physical or mental development were not allowed to attend schools and were excluded from society (LePole, n.d.). In Japan, there were many children with disabilities who were refused the right to attend regular or special schools until special schools were made mandatory (Watanabe, Suzuki, & Takahashi, 2017). Perhaps following the lead of its European counterparts (Department of Education and Science, 2007) or the UN mandates in 1975 to assure the equal rights of people with any disability (United Nations, 2003), the Japanese government made it mandatory in 1979 to provide integrated education to children with special needs (Yamaguchi, 2005), these classes were established within mainstream schools. Takahashi (2017) explained that the idea behind the development of such options came with the concept of normalization of people with handicaps, meaning that those with special needs have to be given opportunities to live in normal living conditions.

The Ordinance for Enforcement of the School Education Act in 1993 stipulated the *tsuukyu* (commute between two classes) scheme. This scheme allows children requiring special attention to spend most of their time in regular classes but also have several hours of additional personal or small-group lessons a week to cater to individual needs (Isogai, 2017). At this time of educational reform, the concept of normalization was skewed and executed so as to make the special educational needs children to fit into the mainstream, and to be as "normal" as possible (Takahashi, 2017). Since the 2011 revisions to the Basic Act for Persons with Disabilities, the Japanese government has been enforcing equal educational opportunities, ensuring an inclusive educational environment for all children (Matamura, 2013). The ideology of inclusive education does not dichotomize any individual into either a mainstream or a special education class, but looks at the learner's differences on a spectrum and recognizes that all children are unique and diverse.

In this paper, the authors focus on identifying available support, and its insufficiency for those who show any differences or difficulties with particular aspects of learning in tertiary education. The term "Specific Learning Differences" (SpLD) will be used throughout this document. The most common SpLD stem from identified learning disorders or developmental conditions as presented in Table 1.

All SpLD exist on a continuum from mild to moderate to severe. Common patterns of behavior and experience do exist but there is a range of different effect patterns for each individual. SpLD are independent of intellectual ability, socio-economic or language background.

While diagnosed SpLD students are identifiable, there are many that fall into what is called "*gurei zo-n*", or hereafter "gray zone". The gray zone in Japanese as described by Himeno (2018) is a person who sits between the black and white extremes of an ability spectrum, and has some degree of learning difficulty. Those with an official diagnosis on any of the aforementioned learning disorders, are considered "tested positive" and often referred to in Japan as "marked black". Persons with typical development and without any challenges are "tested negative" and

referred to as "marked white". Those who belong to the gray zone may or may not be aware of their own learning difficulties. Himeno also states the population of people in the gray zone is thought to be larger than the population of people with an official diagnosis.

Table 1
Learning Disorders and Developmental Conditions

	Type	**Name**
Learning Disorders	reading	dyslexia
	writing	dysgraphia
	arithmetic	dyscalculia
Developmental Conditions	coordination	dyspraxia
	sensory input/ perception	autistic spectrum disorder
	focus and self-control	attention deficit hyperactivity disorder

Note. Adapted from Lewisham Virtual School (2019)

From Policy to Practice: Gaps in Japanese Education
The Ministry of Education and Sports, Science and Technology's (MEXT) ideology of ensuring inclusive education for all seems feasible, but its implementation may not be as impressive. According to a 2016 MEXT report, as of 2014 May, out of the 10.19 million students enrolled in compulsory education, about 69,000 students (0.67%) belong to schools for special needs education, about 187,000 learners (1.84%) attend classes for special needs education of public elementary and junior high schools, and 84,000 students (0.82%) go to special support services in resource rooms. The same report also highlights plans and suggested systems to improve the support provided for learners with physical and developmental disabilities. The 2019 MEXT report for learner needs appears to prompt institutions to radically transform towards the recognition of general diversity, but it appears to be a written policy with no actual enforcement power. The 2019 MEXT report states in Article 24 on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, an inclusive education system does not exclude persons with disabilities from the general education system. (Section 1.1, point 2). Furthermore, it explains the necessity of providing various types of schools and classes to accommodate students with different abilities as connecting diverse environments of learning. (Section 1.1 point 4)

However, Mithout (2016) questions whether the creation of these new systems to cater to learner needs really prompts institutions to radically transform towards the recognition of general diversity or is it merely words and no action. Takahashi (2017) concurs with Mithout that while the inclusive education ideologies proposed by MEXT are sound on the surface, in reality, the institutions and their practices have not yet changed from the integrational educational practices.

In addition to this, recent MEXT reports (Isogai, 2017; MEXT, 2016) only focus on plans and efforts directed for learners in primary and secondary schools, showing a lack of discussion or concern for learners with SpLD in tertiary education. For those students who want to pursue

higher education, an earlier MEXT report on Higher Education (2012) provides ample guidelines and support systems on the tertiary entrance process, in accordance with constitutional rights that "shall be entitled to equal opportunities to receive education in accordance with concerned laws and according to his or her ability" (p. 2). Despite this, there is no discussion on considerations for students with SpLD once they have entered tertiary education, nor guidelines for institutions that receive these students. Perhaps there is an assumption that after completing their high school education, students with SpLD will get trained at vocational schools or start working immediately, rather than pursuing their studies in the mainstream tertiary system. However, the percentage of Japanese high school students with diagnosed SpLD proceeding to higher education (81.5%) marked the highest in history in the year 2018 (MEXT, 2018). This increase of tertiary enrollees with SpLD corroborates the authors' personal observations working within the Japanese private tertiary system over the last five years. The Student Support Center at their institution reports that 68 out of 633 registered students in 2018 are either officially diagnosed with disability, undiagnosed but with SpLD with accommodation requests, or "gray zone" learners (Seino, I. personal communication, May 21, 2019). If these students' educational experience prior to college and university did not include full integration or inclusion within mainstream education, transitioning from a closed environment into mainstream university classes, where self-management, independent learning, and adequate academic skills are expected, can be quite challenging for both the student and the teacher.

College Education and Learners with SpLD
The JASSO 2018 report describes the rapid increase of student numbers with invisible disabilities, such as developmental disabilities, mental issues, and physical weakness and sickness. It states that 1.05% of students enrolled in higher education are classified as disabled students. Compared to a smaller difference of .26% over a 7-year period from 2006 (0.16%) to 2013 (0.42%), the following five years, 2013 to 2018, saw a bigger increase of .63%. With the implementation of the Act for Eliminating Discrimination Against People with Disabilities, by law, all public schools have to provide "reasonable accommodation" if requested by students, and all private schools have to "try" to provide accommodations if requested by students (Japan Cabinet Office, 2016). Students with Learning Differences with or without an official diagnosis may request "reasonable accommodation" from the institution they are registered in.

Prominent Issues Emerging in Language Classrooms and with Language Teachers
As the number of students who require special support is increasing at the tertiary education level, the variety of student needs and accommodations being requested is also rising. This surge is significantly felt in core curriculum English classes at the authors' institution, where first year students are required to complete mandatory subjects.

The challenges experienced by the authors of this paper are not necessarily with how to provide for individual accommodation requests, but the uncertainty of how to assist students who are in the gray zone. These students, seemingly coping, may have difficulties related to undiagnosed SpLD. As these students have not been diagnosed nor given training to handle their specific needs, they often have difficulties in; managing time, following coordinated classes taught by different teachers, multi-tasking, asking for help or talking to people in general. Having been accustomed to set educational structures, procedures, and available support systems in middle and high school, the new status quo of tertiary education can be quite jarring for learners with SpLD. As such, these learners have no choice but to learn how to navigate and

survive mainstream education, even if their learnt skills are not sufficient in the new, less-sheltered university environment where independence and learner initiative are encouraged.

Tertiary teachers are not only responsible for the content of their classes, but also the learning environment, including providing accommodations to learners with SpLD. However, the lack of training to instruct and accommodate these types of learners makes the expectation less feasible. This is especially challenging in language classrooms where there are many foreign instructors who may or may not have sufficient ability to comprehend or communicate in Japanese. Examples of instructor difficulties include understanding some or all of the following: institutional policies, the teacher's guidebook if available, or even specific accommodation requests sent directly to the individual teacher. A clear example of limited foreign language support is the Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO, 2019); who provide extensive guidelines on supporting students with disabilities for faculty and staff, but only in Japanese. Although there is little institutional help from MEXT for teaching students with SpLD, there is literature support for students (Ishii, Ikeshima, & Takahashi, 2017; Takaishi & Iwata, 2012; Takahashi, 2012; Sasaki & Umenaga, 2010). Unfortunately, these again are only in Japanese. With limited Japanese language proficiency on the teacher's side, gathering information and communication with the students, their advisors and parents, and the counselor's/ school social workers are difficult to manage.

Apart from these difficulties that foreign language teachers experience, language classes often require students to actively communicate with peers and with the teacher in charge. These classrooms can exacerbate some students' SpLD, as they are unable to remove themselves from various situations that trigger stress points.

For students with or without any type of learning difficulties to study in the same foreign language classroom, the first step of creating an inclusive learning environment is to ensure that social barriers, in other words difficulties that students with any disabilities would consider as obstacles, are eliminated. The next step is to provide any reasonable accommodations requested by the students and to cater to students' individual needs and differences (Nagasawa, 2018). Theoretically, by providing both a barrier-free environment and requested accommodation, all students can learn equally. Two possibilities for this are discussed in the following section.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Differentiated Instruction for Accessible Learning
One possible tool to aid learning in classrooms with SpLD students is Universal Design for Learning (UDL). As described in their more recent publication (Meyer, Rose & Gordon, 2014), Universal Design for Learning is a term coined by Rose and Meyer in the 1990s as an approach to curriculum that minimizes barriers and encourages maximum learning for all. Meyer et al. (2014) highlight the need for education to reshape the way teaching and learning take place. This educational innovation can occur by emphasizing flexibility and individuality. UDL's three principles can help meet the challenges and take advantage of the opportunities inherent in students ' great variability, offering paths for those currently disenfranchised and developing everyone's talents by providing equal learning opportunities through ongoing monitoring, feedback, and course corrections.

While UDL has been at the forefront of providing the framework for lowering barriers and increasing access for learners, most studies focus on its application to learners in primary and lower-secondary education. Hazmi and Ahmad (2018), Rao, Smith, and Lowrey (2017), and Coyne, Pisham, Dalton, Zeph, and Cook Smith (2012) have highlighted how the adoption of

UDL in P-12 grade-level classrooms has provided greater language learning for those with SpLD. Application of UDL has also increased especially in Japanese elementary and junior high school instruction (Tanaka, 2017), and primary level of English instruction using universal design fonts and phonetic instruction (Ito & Kobayashi, 2011; Murakami, 2018; Murakami, 2019; Tejima, 2019; Tada, 2017). In these contexts, UDL is not utilized to reduce class expectations or to adopt instruction at the lowest common baseline. Instead, it is employed to improve accessibility and provide embedded support for all (Bracken & Novak, 2019; Torres, & Rao, 2019; Doran, 2015). Unfortunately, despite the success of UDL in pre-university education there is currently no research available on its use and application in Japanese tertiary institutions.

A second related approach useful for SpLD classrooms is differentiated instruction. Here, teachers are encouraged to find ways to address differences in students' learning according to their different needs, while still teaching the class as a whole. Examples of this include providing reading books of various levels, or providing subsets of issues so that students have the opportunity to research something of their own interest (Tomlinson, 2000). Several researchers have looked at differentiated instruction and how this approach impacts language learners in tertiary education. Despite difficulties in utilizing differentiated instruction in an introductory graduate education course, a study by Sanagelo and Tomlinson (2009), and later work by Dosh and Zidon (2014), found that differentiated instruction gave students the opportunity to acquire knowledge and understanding of course content and activities based upon their individual readiness, interests, and learning profiles. In Malaysia, Kamarulzaman, Azman, and Zahidi (2016) were able to integrate differentiated instruction strategies into EFL classes allowing students to access material through varied modes of context and processes. McCarty, Crow, Mims, Potthoff, and Harvey (2016) highlight the benefits of differentiated instruction strategies as they allow teachers to increase instructor response to learner needs. To accommodate and integrate learners with learning disabilities to multiple aspects of a lesson, Gibson (2017) suggests that teachers should adapt or modify differentiated instruction strategies in their classes. Unfortunately, despite these various accounts of how differentiated instruction can benefit learners, this is yet to be adapted in Japanese tertiary education classes.

Moving forward

The understanding and application of inclusive learning in Japan needs more attention than it currently receives. While educational institutions around the world are already acting on supporting learner differences based on their progressive policies, Japan is not able to put into practice what is recommended in their policies. In the process of seeking solutions to address these issues, closing gaps in existing research come to the forefront. Current research does not provide many solutions for all learners to adhere to the needs of Japanese tertiary education, especially in foreign language classes. More research is needed to find practical solutions for teachers of students with SpLD not only in foreign language classrooms, but in any classroom, especially in higher education.

Promoting students' independence and self-support, while exploring possibilities of UDL and differentiated instruction in tertiary EFL classrooms are tall tasks to undertake. However, if all stakeholders are made aware of their roles and the tools available to help remove barriers that prevent learning, facilitation towards a change of mindset, collaboration and cooperation are possible endeavors. At the tertiary level, for students with either diagnosed disabilities or those who belong to the gray zone, more work is needed to facilitate a smooth transition from high school, so that greater learning can occur.

Biodata
Ayako Ooiwa is designated as an Instructor with Special Appointment at Keiwa College. Her research areas include sociolinguistics, critical pedagogy, identities, critical discourse analysis, and Montessori education.

Michael Y. Yap is a visiting instructor at Keiwa College. His research interests include developing autonomous learning, new applications for extensive reading and extensive listening, as well as alternative evaluations/ assessments.

Clare Kaneko is an instructor at Niigata University. Her research interests are technology in the language classroom, diversity in media, and reading skills development.

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