



Japanese in-service teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education and self-efficacy for inclusive practices



Akie Yada*, Hannu Savolainen

Department of Education, University of Jyväskylä, P.O. Box 35, FI-40014, Jyväskylä, Finland

HIGHLIGHTS

- Examined teachers' attitudes and self-efficacy related to inclusive education (IE).
- Japanese teachers had neutral attitudes toward IE but they had great concern.
- Japanese teachers' self-efficacy was low compared to that in other countries.
- Some dimensions of self-efficacy had relationships to attitudes.

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ABSTRACT

Using a sample of 359 in-service teachers, this study examines Japanese teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education and their self-efficacy for inclusive practices. The results indicate that although teachers' sentiments toward disabilities were generally positive, the teachers had some concerns about implementing inclusive education in their classroom. The overall level of self-efficacy was relatively low in the Japanese sample compared to that of other countries, particularly in relation to managing problematic student behavior. Self-efficacy regarding managing behavior and collaboration was related to overall attitudes toward inclusive education. The findings can enable useful insights in developing pre-service and in-service teacher education.

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1. Introduction

Since the Salamanca Statement on Principles (UNESCO, 1994), inclusive education has become the mainstream in global education policy. As a consequence, including students with diverse educational needs in mainstream schools has become the center of international attention in the planning of educational legislation and policy (Savolainen, Engelbrecht, Nel, & Malinen, 2012; Sharma, Loreman, & Forlin, 2012).

However, the definition of inclusive education is ambiguous and has been vastly debated around the world. According to the definition provided by UNESCO (2005, p.13), inclusive education is “a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education.”

Even though inclusive education can be regarded as aiming at an equity agenda for all students, it is often understood as concerning only students with disabilities and those requiring special needs education (Artiles & Kozleski, 2007; Malinen & Savolainen, 2008; Waitoller & Artiles, 2013). On the basis of Oliver's (1996) writings, Graham and Jahnukainen (2011) simply described the difference between traditional special education and inclusive education in that the former locates the “problem” in an individual with a disability, who must be supported to “fit in” the social institutions pre-designed by others with able bodies, while the latter focuses on barriers that produce the disability, thereby constructing “the disabled” (Oliver, 1996). We understand inclusive education as making an effort to construct school systems that welcome all children (Savolainen, 2009). However, from a Japanese perspective, the term “inclusive education” is generally understood to mean including children with disabilities into mainstream schooling (Forlin, Kawai, & Higuchi, 2015). Therefore, in the current study, inclusive education is perhaps best defined as including children with disabilities into regular classrooms.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: ado.eika@gmail.com (A. Yada), hannu.k.savolainen@jyu.fi (H. Savolainen).

Furthermore, although it has been universally agreed that inclusive education enables equal opportunities and access for all students, educational policies and reform processes are different from country to country for reasons of culture and history (Savolainen et al., 2012). To take Japan as an example, since the government has only recently introduced a new scheme on inclusive education, it is doubtful whether teachers are ready for this new movement (Forlin, 2013). In addition, there are considerable gaps between the concepts of the policies and the actual practices (Miyoshi, 2009), and there are several challenges in implementing inclusive education, such as the lack of physical and personal resources. Comparative analyses conducted within a cultural-historical framework can give us a critical insight into the complex and dynamic local situation in which inclusive education is implemented (Engelbrecht, Savolainen, Nel, & Malinen, 2013). Some studies compare several countries in the context of inclusive education (e.g., Jahnukainen, 2011; Takala, Hausstatter, Ahl, & Head, 2012). However, few international studies focus on Japan. Thus, the present study explores the Japanese context in relation to inclusive education, particularly from the point of view of teachers. More specifically, the focus of this paper is on Japanese teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education and their self-efficacy for inclusive practices and the implications for the practice of inclusive education in Japan.

1.1. Inclusive education in Japan

In recent years, there has been an increasing amount of attention on inclusive education in Japan. This has been influenced by an international campaign supporting inclusion, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), the World Declaration on Education for All and the Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs (UNESCO, 1990), the Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2000), and the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994). The Japanese government called for the partial revision of *Gakko-kyoikuho* (the School Education Law) in April 2007 and promoted educational reform. The government replaced *Tokushukyoiku* (segregated special education), in which education is separately delivered on the basis of the type of disability in special places, with *Tokubetsushienkyoiku* (special needs education), in which appropriate support is given to each child with diverse educational needs (Central Council for Education, 2005). Since then, a new support system has been developed, which includes, for example, an establishment of a school committee and an appointment of special needs education coordinator in regular schools for children with diverse educational needs (Fujii, 2014). Moreover, the Japanese government signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006) in September 2007, and *Sho-gaishakihonho* (the Basic Law for Persons with Disabilities) was amended accordingly in August 2011. In response to this, the Committee of Elementary and Lower Secondary Education (2012) submitted a report about the development of special needs education in order to implement inclusive education. This report indicated the following points: (1) ways of deciding study placement; (2) repletion of reasonable accommodation and basic environmental improvement; (3) cooperation between schools and related organizations; (4) development of exchange studies; and (5) enrichment of teachers' expertise (Fujii, 2014).

Thus far, political change regarding inclusive education has proceeded rapidly in Japan. However, it has not been properly implemented in practice, and there are several challenges involved. First, one of the most crucial barriers to inclusive education in Japan is that even though the government has promoted a special needs education system for inclusive education, Japanese special needs

education is still delivered mainly in a segregated manner. There are 31,507 special classes and 1049 special schools at the primary and secondary level, and the number of special classes and special schools is increasing annually (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2012). This phenomenon—the growing rate of enrollment for special schools and special classes—signals a diversion away from inclusive education (Miyoshi, 2009). Furthermore, Miyoshi (2009) held the view that the operation of special needs education has increased the number of children who are certified as “children with disabilities” and made a distinction between children with disabilities and children without disabilities.

Second, large class sizes are one of the notable challenges in Japan. The average number of students in primary education was 28 per class and 30 per class at the secondary level (OECD, 2011). It is said that about 6.3% of students in regular classes have some kind of developmental disability, such as learning disability (LD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), or high-functioning autism (Committee of Elementary and Lower Secondary Education, 2012). To date, several studies have reported that the support system for children with disabilities in regular classes is underdeveloped (e.g., Hamaya, 2006; Hirose & Tojo, 2002). For instance, Ueno and Nakamura (2011) examined teachers' awareness of inclusive education and concluded that teachers found it difficult to implement inclusive education under the current inadequate support system.

Third, several studies have reported that Japanese teachers' expertise is not sufficient to carry out inclusive practices because they have not received adequate teacher training. According to the Committee of Elementary and Lower Secondary Education (2012), while every teacher is required to have basic knowledge and skills in special needs education, specialized courses in special needs education are not compulsory in current teacher education programs. Furthermore, despite the new policies, there are still few courses regarding inclusive education in Japanese teacher education programs for the regular teacher certificate (Forlin et al., 2015). Even though teachers' interest in inclusive education is relatively high and teachers realize that such education is necessary, their knowledge level is low, and they experience considerable anxiety about including children with disabilities in their classrooms (Ueno & Nakamura, 2011). Fujii (2014) carried out a survey exploring teachers' awareness of keywords relating to special needs education and inclusive education. The findings showed that the awareness level of an “inclusive education system” was lower, suggesting that it was necessary to enrich teacher training in inclusive education inside and outside of school.

Finally, collaboration with other school staff or parents appears to be an effective way of learning from the experience of others and improving teachers' expertise. However, since Japanese teachers have so many duties in addition to teaching, they do not have enough time for collaboration. According to the National Institute for Educational Policy Research (NIER, 2014), although Japanese teachers' working time of 53.9 h per week is the longest among OECD countries, where the average is 38.3 h, teachers spend more time in extracurricular activities and clerical work and less time collaborating with parents. Ogiso and Tsuzuki (2016) suggested that since teachers' time is completely taken up with regular duties, it is difficult to independently include children with disabilities and that the improvement of the consultation and supervision system on a daily basis in each school is indispensable in Japan.

1.2. Teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education

Attitude studies have a long-standing history, and the importance of the concept continues in the area of social psychology. Early on, Allport (1935) maintained that “the concept of attitude is

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