

Reviewing Reasonable Accommodation for Teachers and Teacher-Training Course Students with Visual Impairments

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Abstract With regard to the work situation of visually impaired teachers and the recruitment process for visually impaired teachers, only a few studies have been carried out on the enrolment of visually impaired teachers in the civil service and in teacher training courses, as well as studies that consolidate their life stories. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to conduct a fact-finding study that aims to consolidate and publish our empirical findings on the work, employment and reasonable accommodation of visually impaired teachers and teacher education students from the information gathered at the roundtable. All the participating visually impaired teachers work in schools that are not special schools for the visually impaired at the time of the survey.

Keywords Visual Impairment, School Teachers with Disabilities, Teacher-Training Course Student, Reasonable Accommodation

1. Background and Objectives

1.1. Discrimination against Persons with

Disabilities and Work and Employment

The Basic Law on Persons with Disabilities sets out the basic principles of national policy for persons with disabilities, and in the 2004 amendment, "prohibition of discrimination and violation of rights and interests on the basis of disability" was clearly stated. Based on the Law on the Elimination of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities, which came into force in 2016 to give concrete form to the provision in Article 4 of the Basic Law for Persons with Disabilities that "prohibits discrimination and violation of rights and interests on the basis of disability", from 2024 it will be the duty of local authorities and enterprises, whether public or private, to give reasonable accommodation to persons with disabilities. On the one hand, it is not possible to start working, i.e. to be employed.

On the other hand, there is a law called the Law for the Promotion of Employment of Persons with Disabilities with regard to starting work, i.e. employment. The national and local governments and all employers are obliged to employ people with disabilities.

Affirmative action, i.e. Measures taken for substantial equality of opportunity against disadvantage due to discrimination, leads to the

desire to eliminate discrimination against persons with disabilities through affirmative action. This is a current trend.

1.2. Teaching and Teacher Recruitment of Visually Impaired People

In this study we focus on the visually impaired among the disabled in this situation.

The department to which the members of the researchers belong has a primary school teaching course and many of the students are studying to become primary school teachers. Currently, there are visually impaired students enrolled in the teaching programme. The recruitment of teachers through the teacher recruitment examinations and the reality of working in the teaching profession are of great interest to these students.

The reality of the work of visually impaired teachers and the teacher recruitment examinations were recently investigated by a social welfare organisation in Tokyo, which is also an association for the visually impaired, through a survey of the number of civil servants and education officials registered in all prefectural and government-designated city education offices (The Support Centre for Visual Impaired People, 2016), a study of the life stories of people involved in the process of becoming a teacher in a semi-structured interview (Nakamura, 2016), and a study summarising the narratives of visually impaired

students (Parker & Draves, 2017). In these circumstances, the social barriers that appear to exist for people with disabilities will continue to be an issue, as people in similar situations are unable to see what kind of reasonable accommodation they should request from, for example, the education authority where they are sitting the employment test, and conversely, what kind of response is reasonable and appropriate for employers, such as local authorities. The social barriers that seem to exist for people with disabilities will remain an issue. The fact that this social barrier is a challenge for visually impaired teacher trainees in their transition from university to teaching (Mizokami, 2014; Minemura et al., 2022) cannot be overlooked from the perspective of the basic principles of the Basic Law for Persons with Disabilities. Therefore, the researchers decided that it might be worthwhile to look at teaching and teacher recruitment of visually impaired students from the perspective of the process of visually impaired student teachers overcoming this situation.

1.3. Reasonable Accommodation for Visually Impaired Teachers

Reasonable accommodation for visually impaired teachers is a very important issue to consider. There are few studies that have conducted semi-structured interviews about the working environment of visually impaired teachers (Nakamura, 2014; Obany 2019).

Nakamura investigated work-related difficulties and support systems by interviewing six visually impaired teachers. He divides the difficulties into material support and human support, and discusses in particular the effective system of public human support. According to Nakamura (2014), teachers' duties are both professional in nature, i.e. knowledge and skills as a specialist are required, and communal in nature, i.e. cooperation and collaboration with colleagues is essential. From a community perspective, the question arises of the relationship between the support staff and the support system of the workplace as a whole. The exclusive use of support staff means that the difficulties of visually impaired teachers are kept in the realm of problems between the teacher and the support staff, and are less likely to be shared

as a problem of the whole workplace. It is necessary to guarantee an effective and desirable human support system and to build a support system that includes staff who guarantee expertise in an organisation that guarantees community.

1.4. Objectives of the study

The aim of this study is therefore to carry out a survey that aims to collect and publish empirical findings on the work and employment of visually impaired teachers and teaching students and on reasonable accommodation from the information obtained at the round-table, where opinions are exchanged after receiving information directly from visually impaired teachers.

2. Survey Content and Method

2.1. Subject of the Survey

The research collaborators in this study were visually impaired people who had worked as teachers in schools. The teacher oneself and the head of the school agreed to the offer of cooperation.

At the beginning of the research study, the researchers made a request to people who were known to the members of the researchers or who were introduced to the researchers by the organisations concerned, and recruited the collaborators on a voluntary basis. The research was conducted by following the application process in accordance with the ethical considerations described below, and by obtaining the consent of the applicants to conduct the research.

At the time of writing, the researchers have conducted a survey of a total of four visually impaired teachers in the form of a round-table, in which information is provided to several interested parties, including the researchers, and opinions are exchanged based on this information.

The research collaborators up to the writing of this paper were as follows;

Teacher 1: Male an English teacher at a public senior high school.

Teacher 2: Male, Japanese language teacher at a public junior high school.

Teacher 3: Male, a mathematics teacher at a public senior high school.

Teacher 4: Male, a public primary school teacher,

specialising in music.

All the teachers work at schools that were not schools for the blind or special schools for the visually impaired at the time the survey was conducted.

Teacher 2 became visually impaired after being hired as a teacher with clear vision. Teachers 1, 3 and 4 had been visually impaired since they were teaching students.

2.2. Researchers' Organisation

The research organisation consists of teachers from the Department of Childhood Education and Welfare and a teacher education student with visual impairments, esp., severe low vision and visual field narrowing. The teachers have knowledge in the fields of educational technology, practice teaching, education of people with disabilities and music education.

2.3. Review of Research Content by the Organisation

In December 2021, prior to conducting the survey, the teachers interviewed the visually impaired student about their thoughts on one's studies in the primary education programme, including school experience activities and simulated classes.

As a result, several perspectives on the content of the survey were obtained. Examples are given below.

- There are learning activities and subjects where safety management during activities cannot be ensured.
- It would be good if the submissions and other materials could be converted into data and stored on a terminal before the lesson, so that they could be viewed at hand, for example using the terminal's screen magnification function.
- It would be useful to clarify what kind of things the students need to be able to teach as teachers when they are in a teaching position.

2.4. Research Contents

The results, based on the above considerations and previous studies, are summarised in the "Round-Table Operational Plan [Matters to be Informed]".

1. Current job description

2. How you became visually impaired and your current situation
3. Areas of work where you are not as good as your colleagues
4. Support to make your work more reliable and faster, and ways to improve your difficulties
5. What you value and think about in your work
6. Thoughts and ideas that are particularly important for their own proactive work
7. Reasonable considerations for students in a similar situation to themselves who are taking the teacher recruitment examinations
8. What they think would have been "less difficult" in their work if they had learned more at university

The roundtable was presented to the researchers in advance with this management plan. I then asked them: 'Please give a 10-minute presentation about yourself from this list. Please don't try to talk about everything, the rest can be discussed during the exchange of opinions. The exchanges lasted for about 60 minutes each, with the exchange of views continuing throughout the meeting.

The round-tables were usually held using a videoconferencing system, which allowed discussions to take place in front of the camera. The round-tables were held at a time and date when the staff and at least some of the researchers, including the visually impaired student, could be present. In exceptional cases, when the researchers invited them to the school, a teacher of the research organisation visited the school with the student.

2.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were taken into account in the conduct of this research. In addition, the research methods were subjected to a research ethics review by the Research Ethics Review Committee of the Humanities and Social Sciences at the researchers' organisation, and the research was conducted after receiving approval.

In conducting the survey, research collaborators were informed in advance and on the day of the survey about the research objectives and methods, voluntary participation, time and considerations for administration, psychological burden and considerations, and data handling and protection,

and the survey was conducted after obtaining the consent of each collaborator.

3. Empirical Findings on Work and Employment in Teaching and Reasonable Accommodation

In the following sections of this paper, the researchers will describe the empirical findings of their research collaborators, visually impaired teachers, on teaching obtained through the roundtables, using their protocols.

3.1. The Value of Having Visually Impaired Teachers

The research collaborators referred to the value of their own work as visually impaired teachers themselves. Typical protocols were as follows.

Teacher 2 mentioned that it was helpful for the pupils to have the visually impaired teacher present in the school and interacting with the pupils.

T2: In my opinion, the younger the children are exposed to teachers with disabilities, the better. The reason is that they can cope. Children are more adaptable. It is very useful for the future development of children if they are exposed to teachers with disabilities in primary school rather than secondary school.

Teacher 1 mentioned that he sometimes gives lectures as a disabled person.

T1: I am also a person with disabilities, so when I give human rights lectures in schools, I am in charge of them, and I also go out to neighbouring schools to talk about visual impairment. I am also sometimes invited by high schools that have welfare departments. There are also universities, primary schools, junior high schools. There are also secondary schools. (snip) If the school needs me, I go out and talk to them.

3.2. Thoughts and ideas that are particularly important for their own proactive works

The research collaborators were aware of the significance of being able to proactive work in the workplace, even in the context of various situations arising from visual impairment, and had opinions on what they valued for this.

Typical protocols were as follows.

Teacher 1 pointed out the significance of having areas of expertise, citing examples from other teachers.

T1: I also think it's good to have a speciality. I don't have much in that area either, but (snip) I've seen examples of visually impaired teachers in other schools who are good at teaching choral singing or English speech. There are also people who find a job they can do and create a position within the school because of their knowledge of the Hyakunin-issu (Hundred poems in the Heian period) or something like that.

Teacher 4 said as follows and talked about the extracurricular and volunteering activities he had done with his students and how he had looked for ways to make them happen while keeping safety in mind. He also shared a story of being thanked for his volunteer work.

T4: Think of different ways. If there is something you want to do, I think it is important to think of ways to make it happen.

3.3. Human and Material Support as a Reasonable Accommodation

All of the research collaborators mentioned the indispensability of human support as a reasonable accommodation. Teacher 2, who was aware that his own efforts to return to work after vision loss were made at a time before the so-called reasonable accommodation concept was introduced into the workplace, stated the following, and then referred to the existence of human support for realising lessons, including volunteer textbook translators whom he had never met, other teachers and local volunteer human resources, etc. There was a reference to the human support for realising the classes.

T2: There was the fact that everyone thought seriously about how to accept blind people before accepting them. It was 10 years before or 10 years before 2010 when reasonable accommodation was available, so XXX (name of the school where the teacher works) entered in 20xx. I think society is finally catching up.

Regarding material support, it was mentioned that Braille displays and PC software, such as

voice screen readers, have been introduced as municipal equipment and can be brought to the classroom.

3.4. The Need for Learning about the Learning Process of the Clear-sighted

The research collaborators recognised that they should have had more opportunities to learn about the learning processes of people with clear vision when they were studying teaching at university.

Teacher 3 mentioned that he had a clear perspective that he needed to understand the learning process of people with clear vision when he was teaching, after he was employed and started working.

T3: I don't mean at university or in the classroom but how other (clear-sighted) people learn and I think I mentioned before that I was visually impaired and I had been in a school for the blind for a long time so the environment was different but what kind of processes do they learn, do they understand the formulas, do they have the opportunity to see the actual high school classes etc.? If I had had more opportunities to see actual high school classes, (snip) I think I would have been able to see this a little earlier.

He then went on to explain that the study of mathematics in high school with problem books and the amount of homework he had to do was very different from his own learning process.

4. Future Perspectives

This paper is only a preliminary report of the results of research conducted by researchers. In the light of the principle of inclusive education as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the way in which opportunities for pupils to learn, the way in which the right to education as well as employment and work opportunities for persons with disabilities should naturally be discussed. The researchers believe that, together with social barriers, teacher training as one of the outcomes of education for disabled people can be promoted by organising how visually impaired teacher training students, who are the people with disabilities, should aim to construct their own identity in the future.

Appendix

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