Collaborative Support for Students With Disabilities

Davey Young
Rikkyo University

Matthew Y. Schaefer
Rikkyo University

The Act on the Elimination of Disability Discrimination, which took effect in 2016, stipulates that institutes of higher education in Japan should provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities (SWDs). Foreign language programs are no exception; however, language teaching professionals commonly lack the background, knowledge, or training to best serve SWDs. As the number of SWDs enrolled in higher education in Japan continues to rise, there is an ever-growing need for collaboration between program administrators, disability specialists, and teachers in order to meet a diversity of student needs. Rikkyo University's Center for English Discussion Class employs an 8-stage framework modified from Ortiz & Yates (2001) that emphasizes collaboration within Multidisciplinary Teams to provide a continuum of services to SWDs. The nature of this collaboration and results from a questionnaire of the framework's efficacy from the teachers' standpoint are shared and discussed.

　障害者差別解消法は2016年に施行され、日本の高等教育機関が障害学生（SWDs）に対し合理的配慮をすることを義務づけている。語学機関も例外ではない。しかし、語学教員は、SWDsに対応するための知識や訓練等を欠くことが多い。日本の高等教育機関のSWDsの入学率が上昇し続ける中、語学教育機関の管理職、障害のスペシャリスト、そして教員が協力し、学生の多様なニーズに答える必要性は高まりつつある。立教大学英語ディスカッション教育センターは、SWDsに途切れのないサービスを提供するために、学際的チーム内のコラボレーションを強調したOrtiz & Yates（2001）の８段階のフレームワークを修正し、用いた。このコラボレーションの特徴と教員の立場からのフレームワークの有効性に関するアンケートの結果を共有し、考察する。

On June 19, 2013, the Japanese Diet ratified the Act on the Elimination of Disability Discrimination (the Act). Put into effect on April 1, 2016, the Act included provisions that all public and national institutes of higher education (IHEs) in Japan should provide "reasonable accommodations" for students with disabilities (SWDs), and that these institutions establish a complaint procedure for students who feel their needs are not being reasonably met (Boeltzig-Brown, 2017). One significant shortcoming of the Act is that it encourages, but does not mandate, that private IHEs also provide accommodations for SWDs. Arguably more troubling is the lack of specificity around the term "reasonable accommodations," as the Act includes no guidelines or standards with regard to what qualifies accommodations as reasonable or not (Kondo, Takahashi, & Shirasawa, 2015). Since the Act took effect in 2016, it has been up to the discretion of individual IHEs or departments therein to determine what constitutes reasonable accommodations and the means by which they are provided.

Before the Act was set to take effect, the Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO), which is charged with monitoring the extent to which IHEs across Japan provide accommodations, reported that only 10.1% of all IHEs in Japan had a department, office, or center dedicated to providing support and accommodations for SWDs, and only 18.5% went so far as to create a policy or procedure to ensure the Act's educational provision was being addressed (JASSO, 2015). At the end of the 2015 academic year, after which the Act was to take effect, 80% of Japanese IHEs were assigning disability support responsibilities to preexisting generic administrative offices, student services, or health centers (Boeltzig-Brown, 2017).

SWDs can face challenges in language learning that are exacerbated by their disabilities, and language teachers too often fail to help students overcome these challenges. Such failures can stem from language teachers' general lack of training on special education or specific learning disabilities (Kormos & Smith, 2012) or from discrimination, conscious or unconscious, against SWDs in the classrooms (Gallego & Busch, 2015). Accepting a social justice education framework, in which the priority "is

to affirm, model, and sustain socially just learning environments for all participants" (Adams, 2016, p. 27), language teachers must ensure that all students, including those with disabilities, have an equal opportunity to achieve learning outcomes. This means creating equity in curricular policies, procedures, and pedagogies, as well as collaborating to help to practice meaningful and inclusive teaching (Adams, 2016).

The number of SWDs enrolled in higher education in Japan more than doubled from 14,127 (or 0.44% of all students enrolled in Japanese IHEs) in 2014 (JASSO, 2015) to 31,204 (or 0.98% of all students) in 2017 (JASSO, 2018). The definition of SWDs here and throughout the present paper includes all six categories utilized by JASSO: poor health, physical disabilities, mental health disabilities, developmental disabilities (which includes learning disabilities such as ADHD and dyslexia), hearing and speech impairments, and visual impairments. It should be noted that the number of students with disabilities in Japanese higher education reported by JASSO is based only on SWDs who self-identify, and that the actual number is certainly higher. As these numbers continue to rise, language teachers and program administrators will experience a growing need to provide reasonable accommodations for SWDs, and collaboration between stakeholders will be increasingly important. Any such efforts should be systemized and continuous to ensure SWDs are able to meet learning objectives at the same rate as their peers (Hamayan, Marler, Sánchez-López, & Damico, 2013).

The Context

Rikkyo University's Center for English Discussion Class (EDC) employs a strongly unified syllabus delivered to between 4,500 and 4,700 students annually. Four program managers (PMs) and 42 full-time instructors use the same textbook, teaching methodology, and assessment rubrics to teach discussion skills to classes of seven to nine students divided into four proficiency levels. The course uses a communicative approach over two semesters with three standardized and criterion-referenced speaking tests to teach and assess the use of target language in the form of preselected communicative behaviors. Each semester lasts 14 weeks, with each group of students meeting once per week. The speaking tests occur in Weeks 5, 9, and 13 of each semester.

PMs support teachers so that they can effectively deliver the syllabus in a unified and inclusive manner and ensure that the diverse body of students enrolled in the course are able to achieve course aims. These responsibilities are upheld in part through extensive faculty development and individualized support for instructors. Teachers are also encouraged to collaborate when planning lessons and overcoming various challenges that surface during the course.
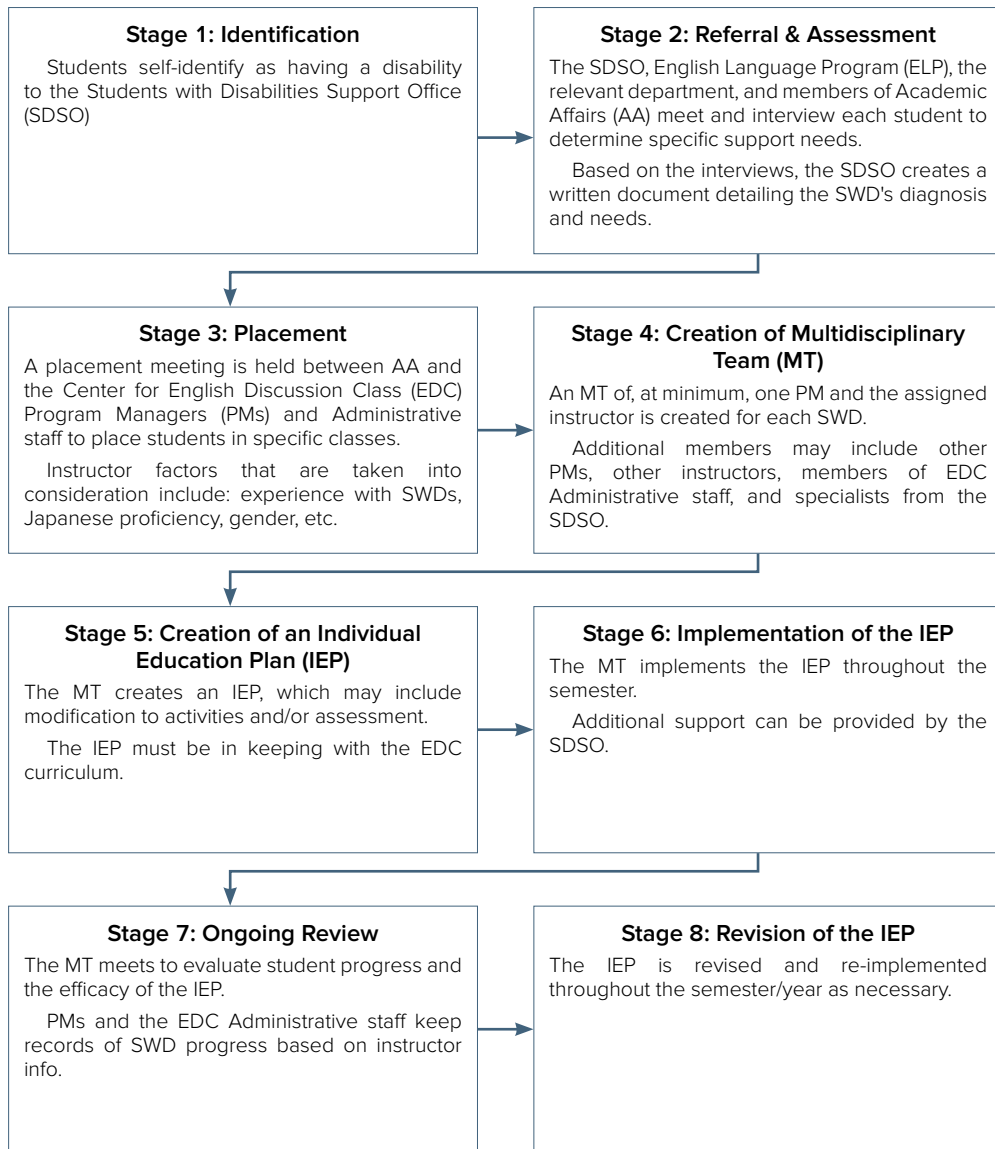
The Framework

In order to meet the Act's educational provisions at the start of the 2016 academic year, an eight-stage framework modified from Ortiz and Yates (2001) was created by PMs specifically for EDC. This was folded into preexisting faculty development to help prepare teachers of SWDs at the commencement of each semester. This framework is outlined in Figure 1.

At Rikkyo University, SWDs can self-identify at the Students with Disabilities Support Office (SDSO) upon enrollment to the university. After self-reporting, an SWD meets with representatives of the SDSO and the university's Academic Affairs division to determine specific support needs. The SDSO then prepares a written document outlining the SWD's support needs, which Academic Affairs distributes to each of the student's teachers. This university-wide procedure is captured in the first two stages of the framework described in Figure 1.

Before classes commence each semester, PMs and members of the EDC administrative staff meet with representatives of Academic Affairs to place students in a particular class, which is the third step in the framework. The large number of instructors teaching EDC allows SWDs to be placed with teachers best suited to meeting their needs. In principle, SWDs are always placed with teachers who have at least one full year of experience teaching the course. Additional considerations based on information gathered during the referral and assessment stage may also play a part in a student's placement. These include a teacher's prior experience teaching SWDs, Japanese proficiency, gender, or other factors depending on particular needs or requests from the student. Once a particular instructor is selected to teach an SWD, collaborative support for that student begins to take shape. As such, the fourth step, creation of a multidisciplinary team (MT), is the formal specification of the members of the team that will be responsible for implementing the necessary accommodations for the student.

As the current framework was modified from Ortiz and Yates (2001) and these authors use the term MT, the same term is used here. However, these teams are similar in scope and nature to the ECOS (ensuring a continuum of services) teams described in Hamayan et al. (2013). MTs are comprised of, at a minimum, the assigned instructor and a PM. MTs may also include other instructors or PMs, administrative staff or SDSO counselors, or even students themselves. Decisions to add members to an MT beyond the minimum assigned instructor and program manager are made ad hoc based on the information provided in the referral and assessment stage. In other words, additional members with the specific expertise or abilities to help meet particular needs are added to MTs in certain cases.

Stage 1: Identification

Students self-identify as having a disability to the Students with Disabilities Support Office (SDSO)

Stage 2: Referral & Assessment

The SDSO, English Language Program (ELP), the relevant department, and members of Academic Affairs (AA) meet and interview each student to determine specific support needs.

Based on the interviews, the SDSO creates a written document detailing the SWD's diagnosis and needs.

Stage 3: Placement

A placement meeting is held between AA and the Center for English Discussion Class (EDC) Program Managers (PMs) and Administrative staff to place students in specific classes.

Instructor factors that are taken into consideration include: experience with SWDs, Japanese proficiency, gender, etc.

Stage 4: Creation of Multidisciplinary Team (MT)

An MT of, at minimum, one PM and the assigned instructor is created for each SWD.

Additional members may include other PMs, other instructors, members of EDC Administrative staff, and specialists from the SDSO.

Stage 5: Creation of an Individual Education Plan (IEP)

The MT creates an IEP, which may include modification to activities and/or assessment.

The IEP must be in keeping with the EDC curriculum.

Stage 6: Implementation of the IEP

The MT implements the IEP throughout the semester.

Additional support can be provided by the SDSO.

Stage 7: Ongoing Review

The MT meets to evaluate student progress and the efficacy of the IEP.

PMs and the EDC Administrative staff keep records of SWD progress based on instructor info.

Stage 8: Revision of the IEP

The IEP is revised and re-implemented throughout the semester/year as necessary.

Figure 1. A framework for accommodating students with disabilities in EDC.

MTs are the heart of collaboration in the current context. They are responsible for ensuring that a continuum of services is delivered to each SWD in a timely, responsive, and inclusive manner. Because these teams are by definition multidisciplinary, it is important that each MT has clear and congruent principles, a shared language (e.g., mutual understanding of terminology), and delineated professional boundaries that allow for respectful questioning and rapid delivery of services if they are to function effectively (Hamayan et al., 2013). Before classes commence, each MT meets so that instructors can receive information collected during the referral and assessment stage and begin planning lessons with this information in mind.

MT member	Roles and responsibilities
Instructor	Makes accommodations in the classroom in accordance with the student's IEPs during lesson planning and delivery
	Gathers information by observing the student's performance and behavior in class
	Reports relevant information (i.e., as pertains to the student's ability to meet lesson and course aims) to the rest of the MT
	Delivers inclusive lessons
	Advocates for the student
PM	Coordinates MT meetings
	Adds minutes from each MT meeting to the student's record
	Counsels the teacher on how to best meet the student's needs in the classroom and deliver inclusive lessons
SDSO representative	Meets with the student outside of class to counsel the student and gather information
	Reports relevant information (i.e., nonconfidential information) to other MT members
	Advises the teacher on how to meet the student's needs in the classroom
	Advocates for the student

MT member	Roles and responsibilities
Administrative staff member	Liaises with the SDSO representative on behalf of the teacher when language barriers prevent the teacher from communicating with the SDSO representative directly
	Adds relevant information provided by the SDSO (in Japanese) to the student's records (in English)
	Liaises with Academic Affairs in certain cases (e.g., when reasonable accommodations require particular classroom bookings)
Other instructors/ PMs	Advises the teacher on how to meet the student's needs in the classroom as needed (based on previous experience or specialized knowledge)
Student	Provides feedback on the efficacy of specific interventions and accommodations
	Self-advocates

Figure 2. Roles and responsibilities of potential MT members.

Figure 2 details the roles and responsibilities of team members. It is important (a) that each MT member understands their roles in providing services to the student and (b) to proactively maintain lines of communication and voice additional needs or concerns to other team members who can address those specific concerns. For example, if a teacher observes that an SWD has suddenly stopped interacting with other students in the class and initial interventions fail to resolve the problem, that teacher should report to the MT so that an SDSO counselor can approach the student outside of class to further assess the student's needs. Similarly, if an SWD reports to a counselor from the SDSO that they are having difficulty in class, the SDSO counselor should report to the rest of the MT so that the instructor can modify their lesson delivery accordingly. As the Act clearly states that institutes of higher education should include a complaint procedure for SWDs to report if their needs are not being reasonably met, advocacy by and for SWDs is an important part of ensuring that a continuum of accommodations are provided in their learning experiences. Although all MT members should advocate for their student, this responsibility falls more fully on those members who have regular and direct contact with the student, namely the instructors, SDSO representatives, and the students themselves.

In Step 5, each MT creates an individual education plan for their respective SWD. The amount of support captured in an individual education plan (IEP) and additional interventions can best be understood along a spectrum from low to high, influenced by contextual factors related to the specific nature of a given disability, other learner variables, and preparedness of the teacher. Minutes are kept from every MT meeting and recorded in a secure database by PMs, a procedure that helps ensure team accountability in delivering a continuum of services to SWDs enrolled in the course. Additional information provided by the SDSO representative is also recorded here.

MT meeting records also capture how an IEP may be modified and reimplemented over the course of the semester, which helps inform future practice. In addition, the unified nature of EDC allows a cover system in which, if an instructor is unable to teach a lesson, one of three stand-by instructors is able to teach in their place. For classes with SWDs, a particular stand-by instructor may be preselected at the beginning of the semester, depending on the student's particular needs. Keeping a clear lesson-to-lesson record of any issues regarding an SWD makes it easy to provide the cover instructor with the context to deliver an optimal lesson plan that meets all students' needs.

Steps 6 through 8 are sequential but iterative and may occur as early as lesson planning before the first class of the semester. Specific accommodations described in an IEP will vary from student to student. At the minimum end of the spectrum of support, MTs meet one time after each of the first two regular lessons, as well as after the first discussion test lesson. No further support is considered necessary in these cases if the instructor reports in all meetings that the IEP is not in need of revision, as it has been shown to suitably meet the student's needs and provide an equitable learning environment.

However, a typical MT will meet additionally so that the instructor can report on what accommodations were made and how the SWD responded to them. MTs will meet as often as is required based on the support needs of individual students or teachers, and any team member can call a meeting at any time. Because teachers generally interact with the student more often than other MT members, they are encouraged to approach PMs and call a meeting whenever they feel additional intervention or a modification to the student's IEP is needed.

Further along the spectrum of support, other members of the MT may be called on to contribute throughout the semester. This most typically occurs at the request of either the instructor or the student. In some cases, the instructor may feel that they need support additional to what a PM is able to provide, or a PM will recognize the limits

of their ability to give advice related to a specific disability, and so a meeting with a representative of the SDSO and/or the EDC admin staff will be requested. Alternatively, the student may alert Academic Affairs, their own department, or the SDSO if they wish to voice a concern. This will also result in a meeting attended by the relevant and appropriate members of the MT, which may or may not include the instructor. Such meetings may also result in IEP revision.

At the maximum end of the spectrum of support, high levels of collaboration are needed to ensure that the student can meet course aims. An extreme example is when an SWD has received one-to-one lessons, as opposed to participating in a standard eight-student class. In one such case, the instructor was given information regarding the type of cognitive tasks the student would be capable of. This led to the instructor and a PM collaborating each week to design activities and feedback methods that would accommodate these special educational needs in one-to-one lessons that still satisfied the course aims.

Assessment of the Framework and Questionnaire Results

At the conclusion of each semester, PMs administer a questionnaire to instructors of students with disabilities to gather feedback on the efficacy of the framework described above as well as to identify and improve any weak points in the procedure for ensuring a continuum of services. The results of each questionnaire provide valuable insight for PMs from teachers' perspectives. PMs can use this feedback to determine how well discrete stages of the framework are carried out and thus refine the framework as a whole. Furthermore, administering the survey each semester is essential for maintaining healthy and functional lines of communication between MT members, which in turn helps ensure that each student's needs are reasonably met.

The results of this questionnaire have been generally positive since the framework was first implemented in 2016. Results from the questionnaire administered after the spring semester of 2018, for which there were seven respondents and which are representative of previous survey results, are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Instructors of SWDs in EDC Questionnaire Results, Spring 2018

Questionnaire item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. I received adequate information regarding my special needs student(s) at the beginning of the semester.	0	2	1	4
2. I received adequate support at the beginning of the semester regarding how to accommodate my special needs student(s) in my lessons.	0	1	4	2
3. I received adequate support throughout the semester regarding how to accommodate my special needs student(s) in my lessons.	0	0	3	4
4. I felt that I could approach PMs with questions or concerns regarding my special needs student(s) throughout the semester.	0	0	0	7
5. I felt that my questions/concerns regarding my special needs student(s) were heard and understood by PMs.	0	1	2	4
6. I felt that my questions/concerns regarding my special needs student(s) were adequately acted upon by PMs.	0	1	2	4
7. I did everything I could to accommodate my special needs student(s) throughout the semester.	0	0	4	3
8. I felt that my special needs student(s) was/were able to achieve EDC course goals.	0	0	3	4

The results of Items 3 and 4 in particular suggest that implementation of the framework was broadly successful in facilitating collaboration among MT members. Perhaps most importantly, the result of Item 8 indicates that few students are left behind in terms of reaching the course's target learning outcomes (although it is by no means certain that this is a result of the framework). However, a longitudinal course grade and attendance analysis conducted pre- and postframework implementation suggests that the process generally achieves its goal of ensuring SWDs complete the course to a standard commensurate with their peers (Young, Schaefer, & Lesley, in press).

The results of Items 5 and 6, on the other hand, demonstrate that the level of collaboration among MT members is not always satisfactory. In such cases, program managers can speak directly with the instructor(s) who may have felt inadequately supported in order to improve communication and resulting intervention. Negative results can also be addressed at a more macro level. For example, the results of Items 1 and 2 suggest a need for PMs to put more focus on providing clear information and strong support when preparing for the creation of the IEP.

Questionnaire results, therefore, are a vital part of the assessment of the system put in place to help provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities. For the ongoing development of the framework, PMs also keep up-to-date with relevant literature and engage in regular and frequent discussion with one another and other members of the MTs, in an attempt to optimize its implementation. One example of a change to the procedure as a result of collaboration at the evaluation stage was a standardization and simplification of how student records were kept in the 2018 academic year. This was based on informal feedback from the administrative staff and resulted in a more efficient process for PMs and more accessible information for the instructors.

Ongoing Collaboration & Development

It often falls to language program administrators to raise awareness of the presence of SWDs and train teachers to accommodate them (Gallego & Busch, 2015), as has been the case with EDC program managers. Beyond the types of collaboration that occur among MT members as part of IEP implementation, further collaborative efforts are made both within and outside the university. At the inter-departmental level, the Center for EDC has invited speakers from the university's Department of Comparative Psychology and the SDSO to give presentations to all instructors regarding best practices for accommodating SWDs. At the external level, in the fall 2016 semester, PMs met with a specialist on education for the sight- and hearing-impaired from Tsukuba University of Technology with the aims of getting information on how to best support such students. In the future, PMs hope to meet with other experts in fields related to special educational needs.

Additionally, sharing current practice in the form of conference presentations and articles has put EDC program managers in touch with managers, coordinators, and teachers from other universities who are not specialists in the field of special education, but who are also taking steps to provide accommodation for SWDs. It is hoped that collaboration at the inter-institutional level will lead to an overall improvement in the quality of accommodation for SWDs in the field of language education more generally, thereby safeguarding inclusive and socially just learning environments for a greater diversity of students across a variety of contexts.

Conclusion

The framework described in this paper appears to have been broadly successful at helping EDC instructors provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities for the purpose of meeting course aims. It is therefore hoped that it contains some transferability to other educational contexts, although further applications within the current context, involving a greater number of students and instructors, would be needed to fully justify this claim. In addition, just as this particular framework was adapted from Ortiz and Yates (2001), any other implementation of it would also have to be customized for its specific institution. This process should begin with determining what resources are available, chiefly with respects to personnel, time, and access to expertise, and always include a postimplementation evaluation in order to continually develop the framework.

Beyond a focus on achieving target learning outcomes, it is also hoped that using such a system might change general attitudes towards the inclusion and accommodation of SWDs in the language learning classroom. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some instructors still view teaching an SWD as an additional burden rather than a fundamental duty as a teacher when the need arises. Creating and implementing a formal framework ideally sends a message that the mission of educators is to take into account the needs of all students, regardless of the amount of support they need, and therefore avoid the type of discriminatory practice that a social justice model of education (Adams, 2016) seeks to eliminate. Emphasizing the role that collaboration plays in this support hopefully raises awareness among all stakeholders of the need to be proactive and just when providing appropriate accommodation.

Bio Data

Davey Young is a program manager at Rikkyo University's Center for English Discussion Class. Prior to joining the Center in 2012, Davey worked in a variety of ESL and EFL contexts in the United States and China. His current research interests include materials development, teacher training, and special education needs in language learning. <dcyoung@rikkyo.ac.jp>

Matthew Y. Schaefer has taught in France, Italy, and Spain, and worked as a director of studies in the UK and an academic program manager in Japan. His teaching contexts have included public high schools, private language schools, and universities. His current research interests are program evaluation, teacher education, and reflective professional development.

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