Awareness of Importance and Related Factors for Designing Individual Teaching Plans at Regular Elementary Schools in Japan

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The objectives of this study were to make clear the awareness of Individual Teaching Plans (ITPs) of teachers in regular class, to extract the factors affecting awareness of ITPs of teachers in regular class, and to investigate these factors using causal models. This study focused on the environmental and individual factors. The former were organizational climate and organization structure of schools, both of which affect composition of ITPs, and the latter were years of teaching experience, teaching experience on special needs education, and experience on designing ITPs. A total of 384 regular class teachers in Japan were the subjects of this study. The results show that regulating degree of appropriateness reduces the burden teachers of regular classes feel surrounding their ITP, gives them confidence, and results in them perceiving it to a greater degree as one of their own work duties. Furthermore, the results of the examination showed that collegial atmosphere at the school and experience preparing ITPs increased their confidence and acceptance as their own work duties. It is important to provide them with training and establish effective collaboration system between coordinators and special school teachers.

Key Words: individual teaching plans, awareness among regular class teachers, path analysis

Introduction

An Individual Teaching Plan (ITP), designed by teachers, determines teaching objectives, teaching contents, teaching methods and consideration points for a special needs student. ITPs are based on educational needs of individual children with disabilities, and was enacted in the 1999 Course of Study for both elementary and middle schools of children with visual impairment, hearing impairment, and other physical disabilities (Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology [MEXT], 1999). In this document, ITPs are prescribed to be designed for Jiritsu-Katsudo of children with disability and for instructions of children with multiple disabilities. Since then, ITPs have been developed for children with physical disability in special schools. The Course of Study for both regular elementary and regular middle schools (MEXT, 2008) provided that ITPs must be designed for children with disabilities studying in regular schools as well. ITPs which used to be provided only in special schools are now to be provided in regular schools and play a major role in education for children with disabilities.

On the other hand, the Individualized Education Program (IEP) has been used at regular schools in USA as a reliable tool for children with disabilities to receive appropriate education. IEP, mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), is an essential component; providing a free, appropriate, public education to individuals with disabilities (Gartin & Murdick, 2005). The difference between ITP and IEP is the way they are created. ITP is designed by teachers and explained to parents. On the other hand, IEP is designed collaboratively by the teachers and parents. Members involved in developing IEP are the principal of the school or institution, teachers for special education, counselors, teachers who prepare training programs, the teacher of the student with disabilities, the teacher of each course and the parents. The children with disabilities are
also included if it is appropriate (Coskun, 2010). In short, an IEP is designed by a team. However, an ITP is created by individual teachers who are primarily in charge of the children with disabilities.

According to the report on the current situation for special needs education (MEXT, 2014), only 20.0% of elementary schools designed ITPs in 2004. This ratio increased drastically to 91.2% in 2013. This result shows that development of ITP is now widely accepted in regular schools. As each ITP should be designed by a suitable person, they may be designed in different procedures and may differ in content. Class teachers have mainly designed ITPs for the students with disabilities in special schools (Yanagimoto, Fujita, Nishikawa, Yamamoto, & Kawai, 1991). As in special schools, teachers play a big role in creating ITPs in regular schools. Designing ITPs, however, is additional work in regular schools. This could be a big load for teachers who already have a long list of duties in regular classes. In addition, with less experience in designing an ITP, most teachers in regular class may feel unsure how to develop an ITP (Ando, 2000). This kind of negative feeling may have a negative impact on both creating and implementing an ITP for each student. Many reports pointed out that clarifying teachers’ awareness of special needs education is essential to enhance quality of education in near future. (Akiyama, 2004; Forlin, Hattie, & Douglas, 1996; Lee, 2006). Studying the awareness regarding the importance of ITPs of teachers in regular class and investigating factors that affect the awareness are very important to improve ITPs in regular classes.

The purposes of this study are, 1) to investigate teachers’ awareness of importance of ITPs in regular class, 2) to extract the factors which affect awareness of importance of ITPs of teachers in regular class, 3) to investigate these factors using causal models as shown in Fig. 1.

In this article, authors studied the essential factors which affect teachers’ awareness of the importance regarding both designing ITPs and implementing ITPs to each student with physical disability in regular class. The results should give us insights to enhance education in special schools as well. We focused on environmental and individual factors affecting attitude of teachers developing ITPs.

Method

Questionnaire

A questionnaire was used to investigate awareness of the importance of ITP with teachers in regular schools. A request form was sent to school principals through the school board of each city, and the questionnaire was delivered via mail to schools which gave consent.

Respondents

A total of 384 regular class teachers at 64 elementary schools in five cities in the metropolitan areas in Japan responded to this study. For each school, only one teacher is selected in each grade, a maximum of six teachers per school. The selection of teachers to answer the questionnaire was made by the school principal.

Factors Discussed in This Study

Environmental factors included organizational climate and organization structure of schools, both of which affect composition of ITPs. It was reported that organizational climate of schools, including organizational structure and atmosphere, have effects on execution level of duties and on perception of executing duties of teachers (Cooper, Cooper, & Eaker, 1988). Nishiyama, Fuchigami, and Sakoda (2009) pointed out that organizational climate consists of two factors: collaborative climate and synchronous climate, and that the former gives positive impacts on establishment of school initiatives. Three factors, isolation, control, and collegiality, are pointed out as major

![Fig. 1 The Causal Model](image)

Note. ITPs: Individual Teaching Programs
components of determining tendencies of school organization (Sako, 2006). Sako (2006) mentioned that collegiality eases teachers to execute their duties and enhances their morale to improve the schools. Moreover, it affects positively on teachers’ sense of self-worth (Sako, 2006). It is also pointed out that cooperation with outside parties has an important role for generating ITPs (MEXT, 2009). Ikeda and Ando (2012a) mentioned that the level of schools’ organizational structure affects teachers’ awareness of importance of designing ITPs and that maturity of the structure is important to enhance awareness of teachers. Ikeda and Ando (2012a) also suggested that in many regular schools, the person who should design the ITP is not stated clearly. That kind of immaturity of organizational structure increases teachers’ anxiety (Ikeda & Ando 2012a).

Based on these previous studies, we hypothesized a path model that affects teachers’ awareness of importance for designing ITPs in regular class, while considering the maturity of organization structure of schools. Individual factors are set considering the following points, 1) years of teaching experience, 2) teaching experience in special needs education, 3) experience in designing ITPs. Figure 1 shows a model reflecting the individual factors.

Contents

Individual profiling. The questionnaire includes 1) age, 2) gender, 3) years of teaching experience, 4) teaching experience in special needs education (experience in charge of classes containing children with disabilities), and 5) experience designing ITPs.

Awareness of importance of ITP. A total of 18 items related to teachers’ awareness of importance of ITPs were selected from items in previous studies of ITPs (Hoshikawa, 2002; Ikeda & Isaka, 2001; Kosaka & Anezaki, 2011; Kuribara & Shimoda, 2011).

Organizational climate of schools. A total of 16 items were selected from the questionnaire provided in previous reports (Ikeda & Ando, 2012a; Nishiyama et al., 2009; Sako, 2006).

Degree of appropriateness of school organizational system for ITPs design. Six items, related to maturity of school’s organizational structure for ITPs, were extracted from previous studies (e.g., Chikurinji & Higo, 2003; Okajima & Fujita, 2002; Onuma, 2009; Sato & Yahata, 2006).

After the items to include in the questionnaire were finalized, some duplicated or similar items were eliminated or modified to suit this survey. The modifications and changes were conducted with a teacher in a special school who has abundant experience in designing ITPs.

Scoring and Analysis

Some of the questions asked the respondents to select a number from a scale of one to five with one (1) meaning strongly disagree and five (5) strongly agree. The others were open ended questions. In order to clarify the factors that affect awareness of importance regarding ITP design, the items from the questionnaire were evaluated utilizing Exploratory Factor Analysis. These factors were investigated using causal model, shown in Fig. 1, and analyzed by structural equation modeling method to clarify the causal model. Furthermore, all items asked in this study were reversed before analysis and the reversed items were also used in the structural equation model to examine causal model.

Results

A total of 378 out of 384 teachers in 64 schools responded (response rate: 98.4%). Some of the answers were excluded because respondents did not satisfy the criteria of experience in ITP design and some answered incorrectly. 354 respondents were included in the analyses (effective response rate: 93.7%).

Profile of Respondents and Examination of Structures for Each Factor

Profile of respondents. There were 115 (32.5%) male respondents and 239 (67.5%) female respondents. Average number of years of teaching experience was 19.43 (SD=12.7). Respondents with experience in special needs education were 305 (86.2%), respondents with no experience were 49 (13.8%). There were 272 (76.8%) respondents with experience in designing ITPs and 82 respondents (23.2%) without experience. Years of teaching experience were used as subscale scores for the analysis. Whether a teacher had experience in special needs education and in designing an ITP were also used as subscale scores as binary data.

Awareness of the importance of ITPs design. 18 factors, related to respondents’ awareness of the
importance of ITPs design were analyzed by maximum likelihood method and promax rotation method. As a result, five factors did not reach 0.45 in absolute value and were eliminated from the study. 13 factors were re-analyzed. The results are shown in Table 1.

Factor I showed heavy loading on the following four items: “I feel burdened from designing the ITP”, “I feel designing the ITP bothersome”, “I don’t have time to design the ITP”, and “I feel pressure of obligation when I design the ITP”. Since all of the factors in this study were analyzed by reverse-scored method, items related to feeling of burden for ITPs are recognized as non-feeling of burden (and lower scores indicated higher burden).

Factor II showed heavy loading on the following five items: “I don’t know how to design or utilize ITPs”, “I feel anxiety about designing ITPs”, “I don’t know what ITPs are”, “Even if I developed the ITP, I would be anxious whether it is suitable”, and “I am not sure who should design ITPs.” Since this study reverse-scored questionnaire items, those that display anxiety toward ITPs were considered to show confidence.

Factor III showed heavy loading on the following four items: “I don’t think ITPs are necessary”, “I have an interest in ITPs (reversed item)”, “I think ITPs should be designed (reversed item)”, and “I doubt that ITPs are useful”. Since this study analyzed all questionnaire items by reverse scoring them, such items that display awareness of ITPs as not being a part of one’s work duties, are named as accepting as their own duties.

Cronbach’s alpha were calculated on the factors used in this study to examine internal consistency. The results were $\alpha=.79$ for factor I, $\alpha=.77$ for factor II, and $\alpha=.75$ for factor III. These results show that these factors are acceptable and could be used for subscale scores for analysis.

School organizational characteristics factor. Similar to awareness of the importance of ITPs design, factors used in this study were analyzed by maximum likelihood estimation and promax rotation. One of the factors showed the ceiling effect and five of the factors had lower than 0.45 absolute value, and were eliminated from this study. As a result, a total of 10 items were suitable for this study. The factor analysis was re-done for these 10 items and the results are shown in Table 2.

Factor I consisted of seven items: “The school has

| Table 1 The Results of Factor Analysis: Perceptions of the Design of ITP |
|-----------------|---|---|---|
|                | I  | II | III |
| I Non-feeling of burden ($\alpha=.79$) |  |  |  |
| I find designing plans to be a burden | .882 | −.007 | .060 |
| I find designing plans to be bothersome | .708 | −.01 | .057 |
| I don’t have time to design plans | .616 | .029 | .043 |
| I feel pressure when I have to design plans | .582 | .036 | −.071 |
| II Confidence ($\alpha=.77$) |  |  |  |
| I don’t know how to design or utilize plans | .048 | .771 | −.016 |
| I feel anxiety about designing plans | .037 | .664 | −.018 |
| I don’t know what individual teaching plans are | −.059 | .641 | .152 |
| Even if I developed one, I would be anxious as to whether it was suitable | .099 | .575 | −.339 |
| I am not sure who should be designing the plans | −.121 | .543 | .298 |
| III Accepting as their own duties ($\alpha=.75$) |  |  |  |
| I don’t think plans are necessary | .005 | −.056 | .819 |
| I have an interest in individual teaching plans (reversed item) | .043 | −.168 | .636 |
| I think it is natural that such plans are designed (reversed item) | −.016 | .083 | .616 |
| I doubt that the plans are useful | .094 | .136 | .479 |

Factor correlation matrix

|    | I   | II  |
|----|-----|-----|
| I  | .387|     |
| II | .354| .436|
an atmosphere that teachers could discuss frankly and exchange various opinions on educational practices, duty allocations and others. The school accepts opinions from teachers, “Since all teachers have the same goal for creating highly qualified education systems for children, I can have strong will for my duties”, “In case of a problem, I can have support from my colleagues”, “The school is well organized on its command and supervision, teaching and supervision are suitably organized”, “A relationship of trust is established with children’s guardians”, “A system of command and supervision is established within the school, teaching and supervision are provided in accordance with it”, “A relationship of trust is established with children’s guardians”, “Staff meetings frequently conclude in accordance with the opinions of a particular few (reversed item)”, “It is a workplace where it is hard to make my opinions and statements heard due to the importance given to harmony among teachers as a group (reversed item)”.

Factor II consisted of three items: “The school leaves it up to individual teachers how specifically to deal with educational objectives and tasks”, “Teaching methods and improvements to them are mainly determined and carried out individually by the teachers”, “When difficult problems occur in a class, the teacher tries to solve them as much as possible through his or her own abilities, rather than obtaining other teachers’ help”. Since these items related to factor II pertain to isolation at school, was named isolation (Sako, 2006).

Cronbach’s alpha analysis showed $\alpha=.74$ for Factor I and $\alpha=.68$ for Factor II. As sufficient reliability could not be obtained for Factor II, it was excluded from the subsequent analyses. The factor scores for each subscale were used as the score for the analysis for that subscale.

### Factor correlation matrix

| II |   |
|----|---|
| II | −.424 |

### Table 2: The Results of Factor Analysis: School Organizational Characteristics Factor

| Factor | Description                                                                 | I      | II   |
|--------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|------|
| I      | Collegiality ($\alpha=.74$)                                                 |        |      |
|        | The school has an atmosphere that facilitates frank discussion and various  | .774   | .046 |
|        | opinions related to educational practices, and allocating duties are heard  |        |      |
|        | and accepted                                                                  |        |      |
|        | Since everyone cooperates and aims to provide the students with a good      | .654   | .000 |
|        | education, I too have a strong sense of duty about my work                   |        |      |
|        | When I have a problem, I receive support and help from my colleagues         | .649   | .092 |
|        | A system of command and supervision is established within the school,        | .611   | −.04 |
|        | teaching and supervision are provided in accordance with it                  |        |      |
|        | A relationship of trust is established with children’s guardians             | .487   | .046 |
|        | Staff meetings frequently conclude in accordance with the opinions of a      | −.487  | .067 |
|        | particular few (reversed item)                                              |        |      |
|        | It is a workplace where it is hard to make my opinions and statements heard  | −.483  | .12  |
|        | due to the importance given to harmony among teachers as a group (reversed   |        |      |
|        | item)                                                                         |        |      |
| II     | Isolation ($\alpha=.68$)                                                     |        |      |
|        | The school leaves it up to individual teachers how specifically to deal with | .024   | .731 |
|        | educational objectives and tasks                                             |        |      |
|        | Teaching methods and improvements to them are mainly determined and carried  | .099   | .637 |
|        | out individually by the teachers                                             |        |      |
|        | When difficult problems occur in a class, the teacher tries to solve them    | −.166  | .557 |
|        | as much as possible through his or her own abilities, rather than obtaining  |        |      |
|        | other teachers’ help                                                          |        |      |

Degree of appropriateness of school organizational structures for development of ITPs. As same as in awareness of the importance of ITPs design, maximum likelihood estimation and promax rotation were used for factor analysis. Two items of questionnaire with absolute value of factor lower than 0.45 were eliminated from the data. Four items were left and re-analyzed for further study. The results are shown in Table 3.

One factor was obtained. This factor consisted of four items: “Our school seems to have no specialty in designing ITPs”, “We do not have enough chances to get advice from specialists about ITPs”, “Resource is limited in designing ITPs”, and “Discussion on ITPs does not seem to be enough”. This factor was named
degree of appropriateness of school organizational system. Reliability coefficient was 0.70 to verify internal consistency. This score was used for the analysis thereafter.

**Examination of the Structural Model**

Factors that affect perceptions of respondents on designing ITPs were examined using Amos 17 for path analysis. Then, modified indexes and various goodness-of-fit indexes were extracted from the original model. These indexes were applied on the original model and the final model was derived. Figure 2 shows the significant path in the final model. Each goodness-of-fit index was high ($\chi^2(4)=5.877, p=.209, \text{CFI}=0.995, \text{AIC}=39.877, \text{RMSEA}=0.036$); thus, the model showed a good fit on data.

Degree of appropriateness of school organizational system, one of the environmental factors, was shown to have a significantly positive path for non-feeling of burden related to ITPs. Collegiality and degree of appropriateness of school organizational system are both environmental factors, and experience of designing an ITP is an individual factor. These three factors were observed as significant positive paths for confidence and acceptance as their own duties. Years of teaching experience and experience of special needs education, which are individual factors, were not observed as significant paths.

**Discussion**

**Structure of Each Scale**

Following the exploration of awareness of ITPs design of regular class teachers, three influential factors—non-feeling of burden, confidence, and acceptance as their own duties—were obtained. Ikeda and Ando (2012a), listed sense of being busy/burdened, sense of anxiety, sense of peripherality of work/duties, and sense of resistance as main items affecting teachers’ awareness of importance regarding ITPs in regular class. The naming of factors is oppositional in this study because it used reversed items. The results obtained in this study strongly support the previous study (Ikeda & Ando, 2012a).

Two factors, collegiality and isolation, were extracted to represent organizational climates, same as in prior studies (Sako, 2006). The reliability coefficient of isolation was low in this study. One of the reasons of this difference may be spread and strengthening of collegiality in schools. In recent years, problems in schools are getting more complicated, like bullying and class disintegration, and individual teachers can not solve the problems by themselves (Fuchigami, 2005). As a result, a lot of attention has been paid to collegiality, both inside and outside schools. Collegiality has also been attracting attention in terms of teacher specialty (Imazu, 2000). This spread and strengthening of collegiality in schools may have caused low score of reliability coefficient extracted from “isolation”.

**Factors that Affect Perceptions of ITPs Design**

A total of five factors were extracted in this study, which affect awareness of respondents. “Collegiality”

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**Table 3 The Results of Factor Analysis: School Organizational Structures**

| Degree of appropriateness of school organizational system ($\alpha=0.70$) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Our school seems to have no specialty on designing ITPs             | .729 |
| We do not have enough chances to get advices from specialists about ITPs | .582 |
| Resource is limited on designing ITPs                           | .577 |
| Discussion on the form of ITPs does not seems to be enough       | .559 |
and “Degree of appropriateness of school organizational system” are environmental factors. The three others, “Years of teaching experience,” “Experience of special needs education,” and “Experience of designing an ITP” are individual factors. One of the outstanding results shown in this study is that “Degree of appropriateness of school organizational system” has a strong impact on teachers’ awareness of importance regarding ITPs design in regular class. Environment of appropriate degree reduces burdens of teachers on designing ITPs, gives confidence to teachers, and moreover, leads teachers to take the tasks as their own job and this result to encourage them to perceive the task positively.

**Future Study**

It is shown in this study that collegial atmosphere at a school increases teacher’s confidence and acceptance of creating ITPs as their own duties. The collegial atmosphere, however, does not ease the burden of designing the plan for teachers in regular class. Developing ITPs may inevitably be a burden for teachers. As Imazu mentioned in 2000, collegiality is recognized as a useful system supporting teachers who are stressed. Thus, it is desirable for a school to have an atmosphere that allows teachers to seek advice easily when they are in trouble. This atmosphere is a great support for teachers designing ITPs. Furthermore, this study also suggests that creating well-organized systems in schools is essential for designing and implementing ITPs. The design of ITPs has been mandated in the Course of Study for both regular elementary and regular middle schools (MEXT, 2008) and the number of schools designing ITPs increased year by year (MEXT, 2014). Many individual teachers, however, still have no experience in designing ITPs (Ikeda & Ando, 2012b). In most cases, teachers design ITPs on demand. It is very stressful and difficult for teachers to develop ITPs for the first time because of lack of both knowledge and experience. Instead of forcing teachers to develop ITPs, it is important to train them prior to designing ITPs by, for example, utilizing offsite training courses. Regular schools may have Supporting Educational Coordinators; their roles are enhancing special needs education and they know well about children with disabilities and would advise regular class teachers. On the other hand, teachers in special schools have special knowledge on ITPs and have a role to support local regular schools. The Course of Study for both regular elementary and regular middle schools in 2008 also defines that teachers in regular class should be advised and supported by teachers in special schools when they provide and implement an ITP. Reflecting these results, this study proposes that teachers in regular class should not only take suggestions from supporting education coordinators, but work together with teachers in special schools when designing ITPs. This collaboration would make the plan more effective and design much easier. The collaboration between coordinators and special school teachers, however, is not established yet as a working system. It is important to establish an effective system to support regular class teachers.

In this study, two of the environmental factors, “Collegiality” and “Degree of appropriateness of school organizational system” were investigated carefully, and it was newly found that they are correlated with each other. These factors have high compliance for the structure model, and were taken into account in the investigation. Correlation of two factors, however, includes a problem of Multi-co-linearity. This problem should be discussed and solved in further studies.

**Endnote**

1) Jiritsu-Katsudo is a specialized subject area in the national curriculum for special schools that has the objective of helping the pupils with disabilities to be respected of basic human rights.

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