

**Teacher Strategy for Inclusion in Japan: How Teachers Try to Bridge
Students with and without Special Needs and Its Result**

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I. Research Overview (50 words)

This study examines how Japanese junior high school teachers promote inclusion. Data was collected through participant observation and semi-structured interviews with special needs education teachers. Teachers employed inclusive strategies on the surface, by integrating special needs students into mainstream classrooms, while separating them from the major classroom activities.

II. Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore how teachers engage in actions for inclusion in a Japanese junior high school. In Japan, the educational track is segregated according to whether students have special needs or not, even within the same school. However, many schools and teachers are now aware of the value of inclusion. Some schools therefore introduce "exchange learning", in which students with and without special needs occasionally study together in the same classroom. In other words, some schools try to bridge two educational tracks: general education track and special education track. Today, "exchange learning" seems to be the major mechanism for inclusion under the segregation-based education in Japan. Even though previous

research suggests that teachers' attitude is key to promoting inclusion (Berry, 2008, Hettiarachchi and Das, 2014, Jordan et al., 2009, Tiwari et al., 2015), some Japanese teachers are under pressure to implement "exchange learning" regardless of their attitude in inclusion. This study, therefore, aims to understand better how special education teachers strategically respond to such pressure in their engagement in "exchange learning". This proposed research, therefore, aims to unpack the following question: How do teachers in Japan conduct teacher strategies for inclusion? This research question can be divided into three parts:

1. What kind of strategies do teachers use in exchange learning?
2. When and why do teachers carry out such strategies?
3. What are the consequences of such strategies?

III. Research Methods

Data collection: semi-structured interviews and participant observation

Two-hour semi-structured interviews were conducted with three teachers who worked in a special needs class at a junior high school in August 2025. Interview included the following questions: (1) basic characteristics, (2) teacher preparation experiences, (3) views toward teachers and the teaching profession, (4) motivation for inclusion, and (5) specific endeavors to include students with special needs.

Participant observation was also carried out from October 2024 to September 2025 in the same school. The author visited the special education class in this school once a week as an assistant teacher. The school tries to encourage inclusion, so "exchange learning" was practiced on a daily basis. In order to make "exchange learning" happened, special education teachers worked hard to bridge students with

special needs and students without special needs, while teachers who were in charge of general education classrooms did not care about the preparation.

This research went through ethical screening by The University of Tokyo.

Conceptual framework and data analysis: teacher strategy and KJ methods

This research employed “teacher strategy” as a framework to analyze how special needs education teachers strategically respond to the pressure for "exchange learning". Their attitude towards inclusion was not necessarily positive, but at the same time, they also needed to follow the school-level decision to promote inclusion and “exchange learning” daily. The teachers utilized some strategies to balance their attitudes and such school policy.

Data analysis was conducted based on KJ method. The data was firstly coded and secondly categorized into some groups. These groups indicates “teacher strategies” that teachers used on a daily basis. Based on them, this study addressed the three research questions; What kind of strategies do teachers use?, When and why do teachers carry out the strategies?, What is the result of the strategy?

IV. Results and Discussion

By analyzing data, the author found two strategies. The first strategy was to show options, which teachers showed some options when students with special needs had to produce output in a verbal way. Second was a special adjustment, which teachers in special needs education negotiated with other teachers to adjust how “exchange learning” flowed. Teacher strategies made the classroom integrated, but at the same time, students with special needs were segregated due to the strategies. Moreover,

teachers sometimes did not use strategies even though the strategies seemed to be required for inclusion. The absence of teacher strategies suggested that teachers had to prioritize their survival in school rather than promoting inclusion.

Significance of this research could be listed as follows: investigating actions for inclusion in Japan where segregated education still remains and focusing on teacher strategy for inclusion and its unintended consequences.