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A National Survey on Effective Teaching Methods and Issues of Moral Education in Special Needs Schools for Students with Intellectual Disabilities

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Abstract

This study examined measures for improving moral education at special needs schools for students with intellectual disabilities in the future and clarified effective teaching methods and issues in moral education at special needs schools for such students throughout Japan.

Of the 57.3% of teachers who had experience teaching moral education, 28.3% had experience teaching moral education only at special needs schools. Among the items related to effective teaching methods, "devising ways to present reading materials" and "handling content in relation to other subjects and areas" were considered to be highly versatile teaching methods in special needs schools for the Intellectual disabilities. Of the items related to issues in moral education, "effectiveness of teaching as a moral education course" had the highest mean value, with many teachers perceiving that it is more effective to teach through the entire educational activity than to teach as a moral education course.

1. Introduction

The "special subject of morality" ("moral education") was fully implemented in elementary and junior high schools in 2018 and 2019, respectively. Similarly, moral education was fully implemented in special needs schools as follows: elementary, junior high, and high schools in 2018, 2019, and 2020 (only special needs schools for students with intellectual disabilities), respectively. In special needs schools for students with intellectual disabilities, each school's policy covers whether to position moral education in the timetable, in accordance with Article 130, Paragraph 2 of the School Education Law Enforcement Regulations. According to a survey (Imaeda et al., 2021) conducted prior to the introduction of moral education as a school subject, the implementation rate of moral education time in special needs schools for students with intellectual disabilities was 12.5%, 11.5%, and 19.2% for elementary, junior high, and senior high schools, respectively. On the other hand, in a survey conducted after the introduction of the subject (Saito, 2023), the implementation rate of moral education was 18.3%, 20.9%, and 30.1% for elementary, junior high, and senior high schools, respectively, indicating that the implementation rate increased after the introduction of the subject. In other words, the impact of the curriculum change in special needs schools for students with intellectual disabilities took the form of an increase in the implementation rate of moral education.

In 2021, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) released

a "Survey on the State of Implementation of Moral Education" (MEXT, 2022) for elementary and junior high schools and boards of education nationwide. The survey included 16 items (4 items) asking about the changes that have resulted from the introduction of moral education as a school subject. Overall, 97.0% of the elementary and junior high schools responded "agree," which included "strongly agree" and "somewhat agree" to the statement of "teachers' awareness of moral education has increased," while 92.5% responded "agree" to "teachers are now able to spend a sufficient number of class hours on moral education," and 90.8% responded "agree" to "teachers are now more aware of the image of students that the school is trying to nurture." Furthermore, 90.5%, which exceeded 90%, responded "agree" to "The tendency that moral education is neglected in comparison to other subjects has disappeared." The results of the survey revealed that, although there were some issues related to lesson planning and evaluation, positive changes were generally evident in the moral education classes that used textbooks.

Furthermore, what kind of changes have been brought about in special needs schools for students with intellectual disabilities by the increase in the number of schools that have placed moral education on their time schedules after the subject has been made part of the curriculum? Saito (2021) conducted a survey on the current status and issues of moral education at Affiliated Schools for Special Needs Education nationwide. The results revealed that the positioning of and moral education in the curriculum, the difficulties in creating classes owing to the characteristics of moral education as a subject, and the disability characteristics of intellectual disabilities are issues unique to special needs schools for students with intellectual disabilities. In Japan, a nationwide survey has been conducted on teachers regarding difficulties in teaching art (Ikeda, 2019) and physical education (Suda and Kanno, 2015) in special needs schools, providing important suggestions for actual lesson planning and training in the school setting.

Therefore, this study examined measures for improving moral education at special needs schools for students with intellectual disabilities in the future and clarified effective teaching methods and issues in moral education at special needs schools for such students throughout Japan.

2. Method

This study reports a part of the research conducted as the "Survey on the Current Status and Issues of Moral Education in Special Needs Schools for Students with Intellectual Disabilities." The survey consisted of Survey 1 (Saito, 2023) to grasp the state of implementation of moral education at each school, and Survey 2 (Saito, 2023) to grasp effective teaching methods and issues in moral education.

2.1 Survey procedures and implementation period

The survey covered 782 special needs schools nationwide that primarily serve students with intellectual disabilities. The 42 Affiliated Schools for Special Needs Education were excluded because they were covered in the preliminary survey (Saito, 2021) as in Survey 1. One copy of the survey request form, one copy of the Survey 1 questionnaire, two copies of the Survey 2 questionnaire, and one return envelope were mailed to each school. Two teachers, other than those who responded to the questionnaire in Survey 1, who were affiliated with either the elementary, middle, or high school departments were asked to respond to the survey, but the selection of respondents was left up to the individual schools. Respondents were asked to indicate their status as of October 1, 2020. The survey was conducted between October and December 2020.

2.2 Survey Contents

The questions covered the respondents' attributes (faculty affiliation, age, teaching experience, and school division), their experience in teaching moral education, effective methods of teaching moral education, and moral issues. Regarding the experience of teaching moral education, the respondents were asked whether they had this and, if so, the type of school.

The effective teaching methods for moral education are based on the nine items of the "Research on Methods of Teaching Moral Education" (MEXT, 2012) and the eight items of the "Teaching Methods and Learning Activities Most Commonly Used" in Nagata and Fujisawa (2012), and are composed of 15 items with additions and deletions, taking the curricula of education for intellectual disabilities and the disability characteristics of such disabilities into consideration. The question was, "If you were teaching moral education in your faculty, what teaching methods would you consider effective?". The responses were based on a 5-point scale (1: very valid to 5: not valid at all).

In addition to the five items listed in the "Survey on the State of Implementation of Moral Education" (MEXT, 2012), nine new items were created based on the issues in the implementation of moral education at special needs schools for students with intellectual disabilities identified in a preliminary survey (Saito, 2021), for a total of 14 items. The responses were rated on a 5-point scale (1: agree to 5: disagree).

2.3 Method of analysis

Simple totals were used for the demographics of the respondents and their experience in teaching moral education. The χ^2 test was conducted to examine whether there is a difference in teaching experience depending on whether the student belongs to a moral education promotion teacher or a school division related to moral education.

The scores of the five-case method were reversed and analyzed for effective teaching methods and moral issues in moral education. A one-sample t-test was conducted using the theoretical midpoint of 3 ("undecided") as the criterion value to examine whether there was a difference in the mean values of each item. A one-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA) without correspondence was also conducted to examine differences between faculties. Multiple comparisons were then made for items for which main effects were observed. IBM SPSS Statistics 28 was used for statistical analysis.

2.4 Ethical considerations

The purpose of the survey, the fact that survey responses were voluntary, and that information about individuals and individual schools would not be disclosed and would be processed statistically were explained in writing. By responding to the questionnaire, the respondents agreed to the purpose of the study and the protection of their personal and other information. This study was conducted with the approval of the Ethics Review Committee for Research on Human Subjects at Utsunomiya University (Registration No. H20-0040).

3. Results

3.1 Basic information about the respondent

Of the 782 schools to which the questionnaire was distributed, 297 responded (38.0%). Of the 1,564 questionnaires distributed, 581 were collected (37.1%). Of these, 19 with missing values were excluded, and 562 were used in the analysis. According to Table 1, 30.4%, 30.8%, and 38.8% of the respondents belonged to elementary, middle, and high schools, respectively, showing roughly the

Table 1 Basic information on the subject

	attributes	the number of people	persentage
faculty	elementary	171	(30. 4)
	middle	173	(30. 8)
	high	218	(38. 8)
age	20～29years	55	(9. 8)
	30～39years	131	(23. 3)
	40～49years	187	(33. 3)
	50～59years	177	(31. 5)
	60years～	12	(2. 1)
teaching career in special needs school	less than 4years	63	(11. 2)
	4 ～10years	148	(26. 3)
	11～20years	180	(32. 0)
	21～30years	122	(21. 7)
	more than 31years	49	(8. 7)
moral education promotion teacher/school division related to moral education	Yes	310	(55. 2)
	No	252	(44. 8)

same percentage. Respondents aged 40–49 years accounted for the largest percentage (33.3%), followed by those aged 50–59 years (31.5%). The highest percentage of special needs school teachers (32.0%) had been teaching for 11 to 20 years, followed by 26.3% who had been teaching for 4 to 10 years. These results were not significantly different from those of the "2019 Statistical Survey of School Teachers," suggesting that the respondents were highly representative of the population.

3.2 Experience in teaching moral education

According to Table 2, 57.3% of all teachers had experience teaching moral education. In addition, 28.3% had experience teaching only in special needs schools. Teaching experience in elementary and middle schools was comparable, with 8.7% and 10.5% having only elementary and only middle school experience, respectively. In addition, 8.8% of the teachers had teaching experience in both special needs and elementary and junior high schools. A χ^2 test was conducted to examine whether there was a difference in teaching experience depending on whether the students belonged to a moral education promotion teacher or a school division related to moral education, and the results were unbiased (χ^2 (1) = 3.171, *n.s.*).

3.3 Effective teaching methods for moral education

According to Table 3, overall, Item 3 had the highest mean value of 4.28 as an effective method of teaching moral education, while Item 7 had the lowest of 2.83. The results of the one-sample t-test revealed a significant difference between the reference score of 3 for all items except Items 5 and 13. The magnitude of effect size was judged based on Mizumoto and Takeuchi (2008), and the effect sizes of Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 9, 14, and 15 were large.

A between-participants (unpaired) one-factor ANOVA with department as the independent variable and each item as the dependent variable revealed that the main effect of department was

Table 2 Experience in teaching moral education

experience in teaching moral education			
Yes	322 (57.3)	SNS	159 (28.3)
		ES	49 (8.7)
		MS	59 (10.5)
		SNS, ES	29 (5.2)
		SNS, MS	18 (3.2)
		SNS, ES, MS	2 (0.4)
		ES, MS	5 (0.9)
		other	1 (0.2)
No	240 (42.7)		
total	562		

unit：persons, percentage in parentheses.
SNS：Special Needs Schools, ES：Elementary School, MS：Middle School.

significant in Item 1 (F (2,562) =27.12, p<.001), Item 3 (F (2,562) =3.52, p<.05), Item 4 (F (2,562) =19.48, p<.001)), Item 5 (F (2,562) =85.13, p<.001), Item 6 (F (2,562) =3.58, p<.05), Item 7 (F (2,562) =73.23, p<.001), Item 8 (F (2,562) =21.28, p<.001), Item 9 (F (2,562=2.98, p<.05), Item 10 (F (2,562) =16.84, p<.001), Item 11 (F(2,562)=25.59, p<.001), Item 12 (F(2,562)=9.11, p<.001), Item 13 (F(2,562) =26.19, p<.001), and Item 15 (F (2,562) =4.54, p<.01). Results of multiple comparisons using the Tukey method indicated that Item 1 had higher means in the order of elementary, middle, and high school. On the other hand, Items 4, 5, 7, 8, and 11 had higher means in the order of high, middle, and elementary school. Items 3, 6, 9, 12, and 15 had significantly higher means in upper school compared to elementary school. Items 10 and 13 had significantly higher means in upper school compared to elementary and middle school.

3.4　Issues of implementation in moral education

According to Table 4, as moral issues in special needs schools for students with intellectual disabilities, overall, the mean value for Item 10 was 4.08, which was the highest, followed by Item 9 and Item 12 with a mean value of 3.81. On the other hand, Item 3 had a mean of 2.58, the only item with a mean below 3. The results of the one-sample t-test documented a significant difference between the reference value of 3 points for all items except Item 5. Referring to Mizumoto and Takeuchi（2008）, the effect sizes of Items 10 and 12 were large.

A between-participants（unpaired）one-factor ANOVA was conducted with department as the independent variable and each item as the dependent variable, and the main effect of department was significant in Item 7 (F (2,562) =7.45, p<.001), Item 8 (F (2,562)=10.74, p<.001), Item 9 (F (2,562) =30.56, p<.001), Item 10 (F (2,562) =13.80, p<.001), and Item 11 (F (2,562) =13.48, p<.001). The results of multiple comparisons using the Tukey method showed that the high school students had significantly lower means than the elementary and middle school students for Items 7-11.

4.　Discussion

This study sought to identify effective teaching methods and issues in moral education in special needs schools for students with intellectual disabilities. We now discuss this from the perspective of specific measures to enhance future moral education class creation.

Table 3 Effective teaching methods for moral education

	Elementary (n=171) M	SD	Middle (n=173) M	SD	High (n=218) M	SD	Total (n=562) M	SD	analysis of variance multiple comparisons F	p	MC	one-sample t-test t	p	r
1 present textbooks as a play utilizing storyboards, puppets, or a paper theater	4.12	0.67	3.84	0.84	3.49	0.97	3.79	0.89	27.12	<.001	E>M>H	21.17	<.001	0.89
2 present textbooks in video with sound and music effects	4.06	0.75	4.00	0.81	3.91	0.85	3.98	0.81	1.61	0.20	E<H	28.85	<.001	1.22
3 use of images or real-life situations	4.20	0.68	4.25	0.76	4.38	0.63	4.28	0.69	3.52	0.03	E<M<H	44.17	<.001	1.86
4 questioning by teachers	3.58	0.85	3.83	0.82	4.09	0.72	3.85	0.82	19.48	<.001	E<M<H	24.80	<.001	1.05
5 discussion activities (in small groups or pairs)	2.42	0.86	2.87	1.05	3.64	0.92	3.03	1.07	85.13	<.001	E<H	0.67	0.50	0.03
6 Utilization of ICT	3.93	0.73	4.01	0.79	4.13	0.70	4.03	0.74	3.58	0.03	E<M<H	33.05	<.001	1.39
7 writing activities using study notes and study printouts	2.25	0.82	2.77	0.91	3.33	0.89	2.83	0.98	73.23	<.001	E<M<H	-4.12	<.001	-0.17
8 Programs and group games such as encounters and social skills	3.32	0.94	3.61	0.83	3.88	0.76	3.62	0.87	21.28	<.001	E<H	17.00	<.001	0.72
9 Handling of content related to school events	3.78	0.70	3.88	0.68	3.96	0.78	3.88	0.73	2.98	0.05	E<H	28.60	<.001	1.21
10 Role-playing and operationalization	3.51	0.90	3.58	0.89	3.99	0.86	3.72	0.91	16.84	<.001	M<H	18.78	<.001	0.79
11 Activities with lecturers and guests	2.99	0.85	3.27	0.82	3.60	0.84	3.31	0.87	25.59	<.001	E<M<H	8.40	<.001	0.35
12 Activities utilizing experiments and observations	3.11	0.89	3.29	0.79	3.47	0.79	3.31	0.83	9.11	<.001	E<H	8.73	<.001	0.37
13 Teachers' innovations in writing on the board	2.82	0.98	2.87	0.99	3.44	0.87	3.07	0.99	26.19	<.001	E<H	1.80	0.07	0.08
14 Handling of content related to other subjects/areas, etc.	3.94	0.73	3.90	0.73	3.96	0.69	3.93	0.71	0.39	0.68	M<H	31.09	<.001	1.31
15 experience activities, volunteer experiences, and other experiences	3.72	0.90	3.83	0.77	3.97	0.78	3.85	0.82	4.54	0.01	E<H	24.51	<.001	1.03

E : Elementary, M : Middle, H : High, MC : Multiple Comparisons.

Table 4 Issues of implementation in moral education

	Elementary (n=171)		Middle (n=173)		High (n=218)		Total (n=562)		analysis of variance multiple comparisons			one-sample t-test		
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F	p	MC	t	p	r
1 difficulty in obtaining appropriate teaching materials	3.73	0.95	3.87	1.03	3.68	1.05	3.75	1.02	1.83	0.16	–	17.55	<.001	0.74
2 hard to know how to teach effectively	3.54	0.99	3.57	1.04	3.41	1.03	3.50	1.02	1.36	0.26	–	11.53	<.001	0.49
3 difficult to obtain cooperation from the community and parents	2.44	0.94	2.63	0.96	2.64	0.91	2.58	0.94	2.46	0.09	–	-10.73	<.001	-0.45
4 difficulty in evaluation (understanding the effectiveness of instruction)	3.70	1.03	3.68	1.09	3.58	0.94	3.65	1.02	0.74	0.48	–	15.10	<.001	0.64
5 insufficient instructional time	2.90	1.00	3.14	1.10	3.11	1.09	3.06	1.07	2.75	0.07	–	1.30	0.01	0.06
6 difficult to position in the curriculumdue to many aspects related to Jiritsu Katsudo, career education, etc.	3.43	0.98	3.37	1.06	3.23	0.99	3.33	1.01	2.1	0.12	–	7.85	<.001	0.33
7 difficulty in setting up learning content according to disability status and characteristics	3.69	1.05	3.69	1.09	3.34	1.03	3.56	1.07	7.45	<.001	E>H M>H	12.33	<.001	0.52
8 difficult for students to understand feeling and emotions	3.90	0.94	3.73	1.01	3.44	1.02	3.67	1.01	10.74	<.001	E>H M>H	15.70	<.001	0.66
9 difficult for students to understand abstract words such as "honesty" and "compassion"	4.17	0.88	3.94	0.95	3.42	1.06	3.81	1.02	30.56	<.001	E>H M>H	18.75	<.001	0.79
10 It is more effective to teach throughout the entire educational activity than to teach it as a lesson	4.35	0.88	4.14	1.04	3.83	1.02	4.08	1.01	13.80	<.001	E>H M>H	25.44	<.001	1.07
11 difficulty in structuring learning groups according to disability status and characteristics	3.71	1.01	3.52	1.07	3.17	1.05	3.44	1.07	13.48	<.001	E>H M>H	9.82	<.001	0.41
12 few precedents for moral education in special needs schools for students with intellectual disabilities	3.88	0.84	3.79	0.95	3.77	0.85	3.81	0.88	0.81	0.45	–	21.84	<.001	0.92
13 few training opportunities on moral education in special needs schools	3.71	0.97	3.76	0.92	3.70	0.88	3.72	0.92	0.23	0.80	–	18.67	<.001	0.79
14 teachers do not fully understand the goals and significance of moral education	3.33	1.02	3.42	0.97	3.36	0.90	3.37	0.96	0.39	0.68	–	9.22	<.001	0.39

E : Elementary, M : Middle, H : High, MC : Multiple Comparisons.

4.1　Experience in teaching moral education

According to Table 2, 57.3% of the teachers have experience teaching moral education in special needs schools for students with intellectual disabilities, indicating that more than half have teaching experience. Among these, 28.3% have experience teaching only in special needs schools. These teachers will require extensive support, such as training in specific lesson planning, based on the basic and theoretical content acquired in teaching courses related to morality and the foundation of practical leadership skills. On the other hand, 8.8% had experience teaching moral education in both special needs and elementary and junior high schools. Their experience in teaching moral education in elementary and junior high schools is considered to precede that in special needs schools, and they may be flexible in developing their knowledge of moral education in the former in a way that is appropriate to the disability characteristics of intellectual disabilities. Therefore, it is expected that they will greatly exert their abilities in promoting moral education throughout the school by appointing teachers to promote moral education.

We asked about the attributes of teachers as to whether they are in the role of a moral education promotion teacher or belong to a school division that is primarily responsible for moral education. The most common type of teacher was one who promoted moral education or who belonged to a related school division and had experience in teaching such education. However, the results of the χ^2 test showed no meaningful difference compared to the others. In other words, in special needs schools for students with intellectual disabilities, teachers with extensive experience in teaching moral education do not necessarily serve as moral education promotion teachers or belong to school divisions related to such education. In light of this current situation, to promote moral education in special needs schools for students with intellectual disabilities, it is necessary to first assign moral education promotion teachers a role that is not dependent on the quantity or quality of their experience and knowledge, such as preparing moral education teaching plans and enhancing training, which may contribute to the promotion of moral education. Katayama and Yaginuma (2022), who examined the job descriptions of teachers promoting moral education by career, identified "the role of creating an environment that facilitates the implementation of moral education time" and "the role of providing information on moral education" as roles required of early career promotion teachers. Nagata and Shima (2010) also highlight that "the maintenance, enhancement, and promotion of the use of moral education materials" is a major key to the promotion of moral education, and in special support schools for students with intellectual disabilities, the first priority should be given to creating an environment that facilitates access to moral education materials, with promotion teachers playing a central role.

4.2　Effective teaching methods for moral education

The results regarding effective teaching methods are reported in Table 3. The item with the highest average value overall was "Use of images of real-life situations" (Item 3). Moral education textbooks were also distributed in special needs schools for students with intellectual disabilities, and reading materials became the most readily available teaching materials. However, it is often difficult to utilize reading materials as they are in the classroom, and it may be effective to cut out scenes from daily life themselves and use them as teaching materials (Sekine, 2022). On the other hand, the items with the lowest average values were "discussion activities (in small groups or pairs)" (Item 5) and "writing activities using study notes and study printouts" (Item 7). Of the two, discussion activities that promote multilateral and multifaceted thinking, which are indispensable for moral development, need to be effectively incorporated into learning activities at special needs schools for

students with intellectual disabilities. Regarding writing activities, although they cannot be essential according to the actual conditions of the students, expressing opinions and reflecting on oneself through alternative activities to writing are essential for the development of moral character.

An ANOVA was conducted to determine differences among the faculties, but no main effects were observed for "present textbooks in video with sound and music effects" (Item 2) and "Handling of content related to other subjects/areas, etc." (Item 14). Since these two items had an overall average value close to 4, the content is considered effective in all faculties. Specifically, the presentation of reading materials and the handling of content in relation to other subjects and areas, and so on, are highly versatile instructional innovations at special needs schools for students with intellectual disabilities, regardless of the department.

4.3　Issues of implementation in moral education

The results for moral issues are reported in Table 4; the most noteworthy item is "It is more effective to teach throughout the entire educational activity than to teach it as a lesson" (Item 10). Item 10 is a challenge because special needs schools for students with intellectual disabilities are guaranteed flexibility regarding the establishment of moral education and is deeply related to the state of moral education in such schools. Even in the Hanzawa's (2023) survey research on moral education at such special needs schools throughout Japan, which is similar to this study, the most frequently cited issue for moral education classes was "the ability to conduct moral education through life unit studies, other subject instruction, etc." The results revealed that more teachers viewed teaching throughout the entire educational activity as more effective than teaching as a moral education course, and this number was higher in elementary and middle schools than in senior high schools. These results may be due to the challenges in moral education resulting from the disability characteristics of intellectual disability, as described in "difficult for students to understand feelings and emotions" (Item 8) and "difficult for students to understand abstract words such as "honesty" and "compassion"" (Item 9).

4.4　Limitations of this study

There are two issues to be addressed in this study.

The first is the timing of the survey. The survey was conducted immediately after Japan was forced to close for a long period of time due to the coronavirus outbreak, and it is possible that the situation was different from normal, not only in moral education but in other subjects as well.

The second point concerns effective teaching methods. In this study, we asked about teachers' ideas of effective teaching methods. Therefore, there is room for further investigation as to whether or not the teaching methods considered effective in this study are effective for students in actual classes.

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