

Case Study on the Employment of a Person with Intellectual Disability in Childcare Work in Japan

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Abstract: *Background:* In recent years, it has become necessary to promote the employment of persons with intellectual disabilities in new occupations.

Objective: This study aimed to analyze the case of a person with an intellectual disability employed in childcare work and examine it from the perspective of issues in securing employment for the disabled.

Method: As a case study, an in-depth interview was conducted to survey a director of the Center for Early Childhood Education and Care, which had been hiring persons with intellectual disabilities and organizing the employment process for about four years.

Results: The person with intellectual disability was assigned to perform direct support work, mainly childcare work, and was aided by staff members responsible for guidance and the verbalization of job instructions. In addition, the staff provided specific guidance for solving problems that occurred in daily life. The work could be carried out smoothly.

Conclusion: While many people with intellectual disabilities are engaged in indirect support work, participating in direct support work, mainly childcare work, may positively affect their career development. Additionally, in focusing on the workplace, it is important to reconsider daily life issues from the viewpoint of long-term stability in the workplace and improve the methods used for transition support. The data were collected from a single case, which may limit the generalisability of the findings.

Keywords: Intellectual disability, employment, transition support, career education, special education, vocational rehabilitation.

INTRODUCTION

Special needs education must play an important role in supporting the transition of people with intellectual disabilities to employment [1, 2]. Looking at the transition from special needs education to employment in Japan, the percentage of high school graduates of special needs schools for children with intellectual disabilities who transitioned to employment was 34.9% in March 2019 [3]. This ratio is increasing yearly, albeit slightly. In particular, in recent years, special needs education in Japan has been strengthening career education and enhancing vocational education, based on the report 'Career education and vocational education in future schools' [4]. The Course of Study for Special Needs Schools, which is one of the curriculum guidelines set by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, was revised in April 2017. In this special school curriculum guideline, the enhancement of career education was clearly analyzed and highlighted [3]. In this way, even in special needs education that supports the transition of many students with intellectual disabilities to general employment every year, education that guarantees employment after graduation

and the strengthening of support for these efforts is required.

Persons with intellectual disabilities are incapacitated, characterized by apparent limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior, represented by conceptual, social, and practical adaptive skills [5]. As a result of this incapacity, persons with intellectual disabilities encounter a wide range of barriers in various social participation situations. Thus, in persons with intellectual disabilities, both individual as well as social efforts, are necessary for individuals to access employment [6]. According to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, in 'Aggregation of Employment Status of Persons with Disabilities, while the percentage of persons with intellectual disabilities working in the 'manufacturing industry is the highest, their ratio of employment in 'wholesale/retail' and 'medical care and welfare continues to increase [7].

The employment of persons with intellectual disabilities in childcare is classified as 'medical care and welfare. In Japan, there is a great shortage of research on the employment of persons with disabilities in childcare. The Japan Organization for Employment of the Elderly, Disabled, and Job Seekers (JEED) operates a database called 'Reference Service for Employment of Persons with Disabilities

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(<https://www.ref.jeed.go.jp/index.html>), which collects model cases to promote the employment of persons with disabilities. On February 1, 2021, using this database, I searched for 'industry: medical/welfare industry and education/learning support', 'disability: intellectual disability, and 'free text: childcare'. The search results comprised only eight cases, out of a total of 2,657 cases, that were engaged in the relevant childcare work. In seven cases, persons with intellectual disabilities were engaged in indirect support work such as environment maintenance and cleaning, and only one case was engaged in direct support work for childcare assistance. In addition, the reason for the employment of persons with intellectual disabilities in these cases was the desire to 'become a childcare worker and 'engage with children.

Currently, there are issues in Japan, such as the shortage of childcare personnel [8] and the securing and quality improvement of kindergarten teachers [9]. As in the case of the 'Reference Service for Employment of Persons with Disabilities' mentioned earlier, there are persons who wish to do childcare work even though they have intellectual disabilities. Therefore, from the viewpoint of expanding the occupational area, research on the employment of persons with intellectual disabilities in childcare is necessary.

I conducted a case study to highlight the real-world conditions of the employment of persons with intellectual disabilities in childcare from a practical point of view. This study aimed to clarify the ideal way and identify support issues for the employment of persons with intellectual disabilities in childcare. In particular, this case study is important in supporting persons with intellectual disabilities in making employment choices of their own will [10].

METHODS

Study Setting and Informant

A qualitative study was done using an in-depth interview technique with one director of Children's Garden, a Center for Early Childhood Education and Care that employs a person with an intellectual disability. This Children's Garden was a high-profile location for one of the companies promoting inclusive initiatives for people with intellectual disabilities. Based on this reputation, the researcher contacted the director of this Children's Garden and was used as an informant.

Data Collection

I visited Children's Garden and conducted a 120-minute interview survey with the director. In the interviews, the researcher asked questions as needed to listen deeply to the job descriptions of the employed person with intellectual disability, employment history, challenges and support that arose during the employment, perception of employment, requests to support organizations, and thoughts on continued employment in the future. In addition, the data on Children's Garden and materials used in the continuation of employment were also collected.

The contents of this interview and the materials on the progress with the employment of a person with a disability in Children's Garden provided at this time were used as raw data, and the efforts to employ a person with a disability at Children's Garden were organized and analyzed as a case study.

Qualitative Data Analysis

This study will conduct an ethnography focusing on the content of support for the continued employment of a person with intellectual disability employed in Children's Garden. The raw data was analyzed using the following procedures: order and organize the data as a case study, describe the themes of the organized materials, and interpret their meaning.

Ethical Approval

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Review Committee for People in the Tegata District of Akita University (No. 2-13, dated October 22, 2020). At the time of the survey, consent for research cooperation was obtained in writing from the surveyed company. Informed consent was also provided in the case of an employed person with an intellectual disability.

RESULTS

Background to the Employment of a Person with a Disability

The philosophy of Children's Garden is the spirit of helping each other. It has been actively engaged in caring for children with disabilities. One day, a teacher at a special needs school in the area where the company is located requested workplace training for a student planning to graduate. Against this background,

the director of Children's Garden has always wanted to consider accepting employment for persons with disabilities when the timing is right.

Four years ago, in October, a case underwent workplace training at the Children's Garden. The case was diagnosed with mild intellectual disability. Based on the results of the workplace training, the director understood the magnitude of the case's interest in childcare. Three years ago, in April, she hired the case.

When the case was hired, the director of the Children's Garden, the teacher of the special needs school, the staff of the Employment and Living Support Center for Persons with Disabilities, and the staff of the Public Employment Security Office gathered to finalize and confirm the employment. Before the case's employment, the director gave a lecture on disability understanding and reasonable accommodation at staff meetings. After that, the director regularly held staff meetings aimed at increasing awareness regarding disabilities.

The director of Children's Garden did not regard the case's intellectual disability as having a negative impact on their childcare work. She thought, 'There are various staff members in Children's Garden, and the case is just one of the diverse staff members.' In particular, the director did not widely explain the case's disability to parents.

Working Hours and Job Description

Working hours

The case initially worked from 8:30 to 14:00 and, after having completed child-rearing supporter training, started working full-time and with increased pay from 8:30 to 17:30.

Job description

The work schedule in Table 1 sets out the case's duties.

After the extension of working hours last April, the case performed duties such as watching over children after 14:00. As can be seen from Table 1, the case's duties were not limited to indirect support work (for example, cleaning the nursery room and toilet) that accompanies the childcare work at Children's Garden. Rather, the case was engaged in childcare work from the beginning, including direct support work mainly related to children. The reason for this was the judgment based on the recognition of the director that 'engaging in childcare work, which is the core job of Children's Garden, is important for the job satisfaction of the case, who is a staff member. The director said that this decision was taken in recognition of the fact that the case's job is the same as that of other staff and that she will recognize her capabilities and talents in childcare work eventually, despite her disability, instead of having to engage in another job because of the case's disability.

Table 1: Daily Work Schedule

Time	Job description	
	When assigned to children under 3 years old	When assigned to children over 3 years old
8:30	Commute Morning greetings	Commute Morning greetings
8:40	Distribute disinfectant to each department	Distribute disinfectant to each department
9:00	Prepare snacks Assist in eating snacks Clean up	Play with children Respond to children in need and help them
9:30	Play with children Guide children to the toilet	
10:40	Lunch preparation	
11:00	Serve lunch Assist children with changing clothes Clean up the room	
12:00	Lunch with children	
13:00	Break	
13:30	Clean up	
14:00	Leave work	

The colleagues provided the support described below so that the case could carry out the childcare work smoothly.

Support

The first employment assistance the director provided was with the election of the leadership staff. The chief staff member was put in charge of guiding the case in terms of the case's childcare work and support. The instructor provided the case with support for good job performance (e.g., time management, mastery of cleaning work, understanding the need for reports and work confirmation, clothing at work, interacting with children, and communicating with colleagues) and provided guidance on daily life.

The second type of support provided by the director at the time of employment was a reasonable accommodation to indicate to the case verbally what the details of the case's duties are. Table 2 shows an example of reasonable accommodation by the instructor telling the case about lunch preparation, providing assistance with changing clothes, and cleaning up the room from 11:00.

The director related the following episode as of last April with regards as to support for the smooth execution of childcare work. One day, one of the parents noticed that the case did not greet them. In fact, at that time, the case had not yet been trained well enough to greet parents in the correct manner. When the case received the attention from the parent, a colleague immediately apologized to the parent and got nothing.

After receiving the report about the incident, the director did not blame the case but told her colleagues at the staff meeting as follows: 'This time, the case's attitude was pointed out, but let us take this opportunity to review our attitude again. We are busy with work and have not had a bad attitude toward children and parents. I wonder whether the case reflects your

attitude, like holding up a mirror to you. Let us take this point as an opportunity to see how we work'. The staff understood what the director meant.

As this example illustrates, the director thought that the presence of the case at Children's Garden was an opportunity for colleagues to reconsider their childcare work. The director thought that the case's employment led to an improvement in the quality of childcare at Children's Garden. In addition, the director thought that working as a colleague of the case would improve the skills of the staff to care not only for children with disabilities but also for various other types of people, such as being accepting of foreign children.

Employment Issues and Efforts to Resolve them

At the final confirmation before employment, the director learned about problems in the case's life when the case was in a special needs school. When the case was in school, the case had the opportunity to register for support at the Employment and Living Support Center for Persons with Disabilities and receive support in terms of daily life. While working, the case had the following life issues.

One of the issues was preparing for the case's living alone. The case was used for commuting by public transport. The case lived in a rural area with low levels of public transport. Since the case could not commute by driving the case's car, extending the working hours would have had a big impact on the case's life because the commuting time would have been longer. Therefore, considering the case's future work-life balance, it was necessary to consider the option of the case living in residence near Children's Garden. However, the case could not live alone, such as the necessary self-catering skills. The instructor, who understood this shortcoming, gave the case cooking instructions once a week after work at the workplace.

There were also other issues related to the case's relationship with her mother, which could lead to

Table 2: Examples of Reasonable Accommodation by Verbalizing Task Details

Time	Job description	Detail
11 : 00	Serve lunch Assistance in changing clothes Clean up the room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a fun atmosphere by making children say 'I like the taste'. • If the table or floor becomes dirty, wipe it clean. Care should be taken so that children can eat comfortably through assistance. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay attention to dirty clothes • Clean up the table and chairs • Start with cleaning at the east entrance, then the lunchroom, and then the hall.

mental instability. The director and the instructor at Children's Garden made efforts to solve these problems. The director wished to work toward solving the case's problems because it was the company's duty as an employer.

Currently, the case is in the fourth year of employment. The director sees the case getting used to childcare work compared to when the case first joined the company. The director said that the case was actively involved with the children. In response to this behavior, the director said the case saw an increasing number of children asking for involvement with the case. Above all, the director said that the case was seen smiling often and that the case was able to do the case duties confidently.

DISCUSSION

The following attributes are required to carry out childcare work [11]. 'Happily engaging with children, 'being able to look after and take care of multiple children at the same time, 'being able to predict danger to avoid injuries', 'being physically fit to play with children, 'having communication skills to maintain good relationships with parents and others, and 'being able to deal with the difficulty of setting up an individual schedule for taking care of children. When a person with intellectual disabilities engages in childcare work, there are issues related to understanding the flow of childcare, avoiding dangers to the children, and communicating with children and their parents. Therefore, childcare work is considered to be one of the more difficult tasks for persons with intellectual disabilities.

In conventional employment support, first, support for job creation is provided, and then jobs are created that can be done by persons with intellectual disabilities. In fact, in the practice report of employment of persons with intellectual disabilities, there are more cases of engaging in indirect support work such as facility cleaning than cases of engaging in direct support work for users. There have been no studies related to childcare work by persons with intellectual disabilities. However, in the long-term care business, which is the same job as that of interpersonal support, most of the research is engaged in peripheral work centered on indirect long-term care [12]. Fukui and Hashimoto report that the type of business and work content affect whether people resign. However, they point out that devising a more welcoming employment system and work environment may promote stability in

the workplace [13]. In addition, Nemoto reports that a real shock caused by realizing that the work is different from the expected work could be one of the possible reasons for leaving a job [14]. Thus, it is possible that there has not been sufficient consideration for the continuation of employment regarding the engagement of persons with intellectual disabilities in childcare work.

Yamada points out that to maintain work motivation for people with intellectual disabilities, it is necessary to devise ways to develop a career, such as creating an environment that increases the number of jobs that can be done and raising salaries in stages. In particular, it should be remembered that persons with intellectual disabilities desire to 'get involved with the children' [15]. Students with intellectual disabilities have few opportunities to be involved in their own career choices [16, 17]. For a student with an intellectual disability to be self-determining, it is necessary to consider their career development when they were in special needs school. In addition to this, This research is reported on the support provided by employees within the company regarding issues related to living. Previous studies [18-21] have reported that companies need support from homes and special needs schools to prevent the above-mentioned problems in life [22, 23]. In fact, in this case, as well, the director of the Center for Early Childhood Education and Care pointed out the lack of information sharing at special needs schools and the importance of education to solve problems in daily life at the educational stage. Therefore, to deal with life-related issues and continued employment, it is necessary to enhance education for the transition from the special needs education stage to the local community from a long-term perspective. This transition support refers to social participation through measures such as employment from the perspective of school needs education [24]. If you understand this only with the word 'transition', you will get the image of a baton being handed over in a relay race, similar to moving to the next stage. However, transition support is not simply a change of state. Rather, it has the characteristic of a dynamic process [25]. In other words, we need to think of transition support as a 'process' [26] that includes various activities. In addition, it is necessary to regard transition support as supporting lifelong development and not just as a fixed period of transition from education to society [27]. First, we need to change our perception of this transitional support. Next, in practice, problems can be divided into three categories: 'solving problems at the educational

stage', 'acquiring preventive measures', and 'solving problems while living in the community with support'.

It is important to provide support for career development from the stage when the student is a special needs student [28-30]. The transition support from school to work would be improved if such support could be provided while the student is still in school. Utsumi pointed out the problems of transition support from special education in Japan. The problems are 'promotion of student participation in the formulation of the transition support plan' and 'improvement of the mechanism and environment for implementing the transition support plan' [31]. As he pointed out, it is necessary for vocational rehabilitation support organizations, including special needs education organizations, to make efforts to make transition support useful.

IMPLICATIONS

It is probable that one of the reasons for the case's employment continuation was the fact that the case could work directly with children. This will require assistance in finding the best jobs for people with intellectual disabilities and customizing jobs for people with intellectual disabilities [32, 33]. Iwasa points out the importance of examining the content of duties. She insists on using a variety of considerations in addition to the 'cut-out/reconstruction model', which is often used when hiring people with intellectual disabilities. In this model, a part of the work is cut out from other employees and collected to create one job (for example, only the cleaning work that nursery teachers A to C perform constantly is taken out and made into the work of D with a disability). She says that it is necessary to use a variety of job content review methods, such as a 'build-up model' that gradually builds up work toward goals and a 'specialized model' that sets jobs by taking advantage of the person's strengths [34].

In this case study, it is probable that the 'build-up model' was used. It has been pointed out that this cumulative model may contribute to gradual career development [34]. In this case, the case was directly engaged in support work from the beginning of employment, and the case's duties were gradually expanded. It is thought that the accumulation of such step-by-step job contents contributed to the case's career development. In this way, to expand the work area of persons with intellectual disabilities in interpersonal support work, such as childcare workers,

it is necessary to respect their occupational interests and support their career development.

However, as mentioned earlier, considering the nature of intellectual disabilities, it is difficult to perform direct support work perfectly. In this case, support was provided, such as appointing a person in charge of job guidance, gradual job expansion, attending training for acquiring qualifications, individual support for issues, and promoting a common understanding of the support content at staff meetings. When hiring for direct support work with an awareness of career development, it is necessary that support be appropriately implemented, as in this case.

Natural support is the voluntary or systematic provision of various types of support that ordinary employees need to continue working in the workplace. The importance of the 'formation of natural support' has been pointed out with regard to job coaching support [35]. In this case, the appointment of instructors and the promotion of common awareness at regular staff meetings are considered to be planned systematic natural support. In addition, the guidance from the instructor is considered to be voluntary natural support. When hiring for direct support work, it is also important to provide business establishments with support to create a work environment that provides this natural support.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

I was able to discuss the viewpoints for expanding the work area of a person with an intellectual disability, but it was derived from one case, and I could not fully discuss the conditions for this to be established.

Expanding the work of persons with intellectual disabilities is very important, not only for promoting their employment but also for supporting the wishes of individual persons with intellectual disabilities. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify these conditions further. With the accumulation of further cases, it is necessary to conduct a broad survey on the actual conditions and employment issues of persons with disabilities in childcare work. I would like to address these issues in future research.

CONCLUSIONS

The significant contribution of this study is that it provides a practical perspective. Few studies have examined the employment of people with intellectual disabilities in childcare work in Japan. Under these

circumstances, this study conducted a case study of a person with an intellectual disability employed in childcare work and presented the actual situation of her employment and support. As a result, the viewpoints and issues of support when hiring people with intellectual disabilities in childcare work became clearer.

This study contributes to the future expansion of occupations for persons with intellectual disabilities. In addition, this study provides ideas on how to support people with intellectual disabilities from the educational stage to career development.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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