An Effort to Reinstatement Support for Truant Students

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According to a report by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology—Japan (MEXT), the number of students who did not attend school in Japan in the fiscal year 2018 was 164,528, and the percentage of students who did not attend school was 1.7%. This is the highest number of students ever. MEXT has been providing various measures to support students’ return to school, such as setting up adaptation classes and reviewing the school structure, intending to reduce the number of students who do not attend school. However, it is not always easy to help students return to school, since the problems they face may not be simply academic or psychological in nature. Besides, many students have returned to school, but who have not returned to school in the past. In this paper, we introduce a special needs classroom for truant students. Next, the results of a survey of teachers and assistants in this classroom are discussed. Finally, we will report on our current efforts.

Keywords: truant student, reinstatement support, address a student

Introduction

In Japan, various problems, such as bullying and corporal punishment, are occurring in the field of education. One of these problems is “truancy”. To support the return to school for truant children, MEXT has taken some measures to support the return to school of truant children, such as “establishing special schools for truancy”, “reviewing the development of schools”, “cooperating with schools, families, and communities”, and distributing various pamphlets.

However, the number of truant students in elementary and junior high schools in the fiscal year 2018 was 164,528, the highest number ever. This is a 14.2% increase from the previous year and has been increasing for six consecutive years (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology [MEXT], 2019a). Besides, MEXT defines truant students as follows:

Those who are absent more than 30 days a year because of some psychological or emotional factor, physical or social factor or background that prevents them from attending school or even if they wanted to, excluding those who are absent due to illness or financial reasons.

Taking into account Japan’s declining birth rate, this situation is not an optimistic one. Some additional allowance is essential.
Current Status and Issues of Truancy

Figure 1 shows the change in the percentage of students who did not attend school in Japan’s elementary and junior high schools between the fiscal year 1991 and the fiscal year 2018. Although the upward trend settled down at the beginning of the 21st century, it is now showing a renewed upward trend. However, according to a survey conducted by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, the percentage of students who did not return to school in elementary and junior high schools was 25.6% in elementary school and 20.1% in junior high school in the fiscal year 2018, which was down from 29.2% in elementary school and 23.0% in junior high school in the previous year (MEXT, 2019b). This suggests that the number of people in the rural areas is increasing.

The causes of truancy include school relationships, family circumstances, apathy, and lack of schoolwork. Some children do not want to go to school again, depending on the reason, but some children want to go to school again.

However, the desire to go to school is not enough to make them go to school again.

![Figure 1. Percentage of students not attending school in elementary and junior high schools in Japan.](image)

It is not an easy task for a student who has been out of school for a long time to regain normal school habits. Therefore, MEXT has established a special school for those students who have been out of school for a long time to support them. As of 2021, there are seventeen special schools (three schools with elementary and junior high schools, eleven junior high schools, and three high schools). However, most of these schools are located in Tokyo, which is not yet sufficient (Senior High School Education Guidance Division, Guidance Department, Tokyo Metropolitan Government, 2018).

One of these special schools for non-attendance is Takaosan School (n.d.). This school has an adaptation classroom called “the Yamayuri Classroom”. It is a classroom where students who have been absent from school first attend to learn the habit of going to school.

In this classroom, once the students have acquired some study habits, they are officially admitted to the special school for truancy. Because the students from the fourth grade to the third grade attend the same classrooms, they are not taught together. Instead, they work on their workbooks during study time. However, many of the students find it difficult to continue their studies, and often leave their seats or fall asleep.
Because of these situations, we think it is urgent to create a system that encourages students to try their best.

A Survey on the Response to Students in the Adaptive Classroom

To investigate how the students in the Yamayuri Classroom are treated, a survey was conducted on seven teachers who work at the Hachioji City Takaoyama School. These subjects consisted of full-time teachers, one male and one female, and supporters, three males, and two females, who have been working with students in the Yamayuri Classroom for more than one year.

Survey Results

When we surveyed the respondents about what they found particularly difficult about teaching in the Yamayuri Classroom, the most common response was “students who are bored with learning start talking with other students and pupils”, with four respondents. In the other three, “drawing or reading (which the pupils like) rather than learning”, “walk around”, and “dawdling” were also noted, although expressed in different ways, indicating that it is difficult for them to concentrate and continue learning. When we surveyed what kinds of actions they take when these situations arise, the most common response was “talking to them”, which was answered by all respondents.

The second most common response was to “let the students play games to relax”, with three respondents saying that they would take a break from learning. Two respondents said they would “listen to the students”, and one each said they would “solve problems together” and wait until they are motivated.

Besides, since there are a small number of students who do not “continue learning” but are unable to even start in the first place, we also surveyed the responses to such students but found no difference in the responses.

Then, we interviewed them about what they pay special attention to when dealing with their students. Many of the teachers stated that it was important not to coerce them. First, they pointed out that it is important to “come to school”, then to “spend time at your desk”, and then to talk to them, encourage them to learn, and solve problems together. This implies the importance of very careful instruction tailored to each student. Therefore, it is also necessary to appreciate the fact that they can come to school and that they are willing to continue studying during study hours. It is necessary to communicate with students daily and build a trusting relationship with them to learn about their personalities and deal with them.

However, all the teachers were not so sure whether they could take the best and appropriate action in each case.

Discussion

It was found that many teachers and supporters use “talking to the students” to encourage them to continue their studies. The fact that they are being approached by themselves likely helps to stabilize their minds. Furthermore, communication by address to students is also important to understand their personalities.

However, the number of teachers and supporters is limited, so there is a limit to this kind of response. Therefore, it is necessary to enable students to learn spontaneously. Moreover, the situation where teachers and supporters are not confident in their responses must be improved as soon as possible. There are many possible reasons for their lack of confidence, but I believe that one of them is the fact that students’ responses are more difficult to understand than those of the general public.
There is an urgent need to establish a system that can accurately and quickly detect the reactions of students and provide feedback to teachers and supporters. We also believe that if we can predict the degree of future behavior based on the past behavioral history, we will be able to realize appropriate addresses to students.

**Current Approaches**

Therefore, we have investigated a mechanism to keep these students motivated and developed an application software (Sasaki & Dakeshita, 2019). It is a game in which the more the students concentrate on their learning, the more their scores rise. Concentration is determined using JINS MEME (n.d.) and is based on the direction of the students’ heads (pitch, roll, and yaw) and the frequency and intensity of their eye blinks. However, the preliminary experiment did not produce the effect that we had thought it would.

This result means that other approaches are needed. Teachers and supporters have to say the right words to the students promptly. We need to develop a mechanism to support it.

In this research, we focused on “Bose Frames” (n.d.), a wearable device developed by Bose, as a device to support addressing students. This device is a wearable device, which incorporates a nine-axis head motion sensor and an advanced acoustic system inside a pair of sunglasses. Unlike headphones or earphones, this device does not block the user’s ears and can provide audio and music content by the user’s condition.

The glasses are used to detect the timing of calling out to the pupils by acquiring changes in their posture. If our system finds that the students need to be approached, it plays a message via this glass that is appropriate to the situation of the students. This message is synthesized by using the “ReadSpeaker”. It allows you to select between male and female voices, as well as change the pitch and speed of speech, so even if the message is the same, we believe we can tailor the voice to fit each student's situation. The contents of the messages are based on a survey of teachers and supporters at the Yamayuri Classroom.

Currently, our system identifies two types of states based on the students’ movements. At present, the system uses the movements of the students to identify the two types of conditions and randomly selects one of the five messages to playback based on the results of this identification. We are rushing to build the basic system. At the same time, however, it is necessary to conduct a series of interviews with teachers and supporters to increase the number of messages that the system can handle and to collect basic data to discriminate the various states of the children.

**Conclusions**

This paper reports on the support provided to truant students to help them return to school and the results of a survey of teachers and staff in the field. In addition to students who attend the Yamayuri Classroom, many other students throughout Japan are suffering from truancy. The impact of COVID-19 is also immeasurable. What can be learned at school is not limited to textbook knowledge. A school is a place where children can have many valuable experiences that can only be learned at that time of the year.

Although the causes of truancy vary, some students want to go back to school. We will continue to conduct this research so that we can fulfill the hopes of these students.

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References


