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Examining the Declining Enrollment Rate in Japanese Schools for the Deaf (2007-2021)

An In-depth Analysis of Trends and Contributing Factors

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For my parents,

my Venetian family,

and my Ashinaga family in Japan.

Abstract

The enrollment rate in Japanese schools for the Deaf is declining in line with a global trend of students with disabilities being integrated into mainstream schools and curriculums. As a result, it is becoming increasingly common for d/Deaf and hard of hearing students in Japan to be educated alongside hearing peers. Previous studies have emphasized the critical role Schools for the Deaf play in renegotiating identity and self-belonging for d/Deaf youth. Additionally, political organizations such as the Japanese Federation of the Deaf are expressing concerns for the future of young Deaf students attending mainstream schools. While there is evidence attributing the decline in Deaf schools to technological advancements in the medical field, particularly in cochlear implants, voices from the Japanese Deaf community suggest dissatisfaction with current Deaf education practices may also contribute. By drawing from official records of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), statements by organizations of *tōjisha* (Japanese word for "Stakeholders", in this case, d/Deaf people and their families), and previous research on perspectives from the Japanese Deaf community, this study investigates possible factors contributing to the declining number of students enrolling in Schools or the Deaf and its trend, giving a comprehensive outlook on the current situation of institutions for Deaf Education in Japan. Lastly, this research introduces the bilingual-bicultural curriculum introduced by *Meisei gakuen* in 2008 as a promising model for revitalizing and sustaining public and private Schools for the Deaf.

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要旨

ろう学校（聴覚障害者の教育的なニーズに対応できる学校）は、歴史的にろう者コミュニティにとって重要な拠点であり、知識交換を促進し、手話を通じてろう者の文化的アイデンティティを形成してきた。また、ろう学校はろう者コミュニティの豊かな文化的遺産を守り、日本のマイノリティグループ（言語的・社会的少数派）としての持続的な成長を支える重要な役割を果たしている。しかし、近年、日本におけるろう学校の在籍者数率は、障害のある学生が通常の学校やカリキュラムに一体化されるという世界的なトレンドに沿って減少している。その結果、日本のろうおよび難聴の学生は、より一層聴覚のある生徒と共に教育を受けることが一般化している。この減少傾向は1960年代にまでさかのぼるルーツを持っているが、2007年の「学校教育法等の一部を改正する法律」で導入された変更によって加速されたようである。学校教育法の改正はろう者の生徒が通常の学校に一体化されるための機会を提供し、複数の障害を対象とする特別支援学校を設立することを目的としていた。
既存の研究では、主にろう児が補聴器を使用することや人工内耳手術を受けることが増えていることが、通常教育への一体化を促進する要因として挙げられている。しかし、本研究では、先の見解を認めつつも、通常教育が好まれる要因として、言語教育、カリキュラムガイドライン、教師養成、ろう学校の卒業生の高等教育への限られた進路といったろう教育政策に対する当事者の不満が重要な役割を果たしていると主張する。「当事者」とは、この研究において、ろう教育に関する対策の影響を受けるろう者（聴覚障害者）またはその家族を指す。
ろう学校への在籍数動向を分析するため、本研究では文部科学省（MEXT）の年次「学校基本調査」や「特別支援教育資料」のデータ（平成17年度-令和3年度）を利用する。また、国立特別支援教育総合研究所（NISE）から収集された「特殊教育資料」のデータ （昭和38年度-平成16年度）も利用する。在籍者数の減少傾向の要因を調査するために、本研究では新生児聴覚スクリーニング、先天性聴覚損失の遺伝子検査、および人工内耳手術の影響に焦点を当てた既存の文献を利用する。ろう教育政策に対する当事者の不満は、全日本ろうあ連盟（JFD）による言語教育政策や教師養成に関する請願書、また、通常教育および特別支援教育におけるろう学生の教育体験に関する過去の研究を利用し調査する。これらの分析を通じて、本研究では日本のろう教育の在籍者数動向の減少の複合的な

要因を理解するための追加的な視点を提供することを目的とする。論文の構成は以下の通りである。
第1章：はじめに、日本のろう教育に関する過去の研究の概要を提供し、研究の目的と方法を概説する。
第2章：日本における「ろう」の社会的および文化的含意については、ろう者に関する医学的および社会的側面を掘り下げる。日本のろう者の人口やコミュニティについて検証をし、日本手話について議論した上で、ろう・難聴当事者団体の活動を紹介する。また、ろう者の権利および手話に関する法的枠組みについても評論する。
第3章：日本におけるろう教育の歴史的な発展をたどり、ろう学校の組織構造を概説し、言語教育への様々な取り組みを探求する。最後に明晴学園の独自の取り組みである「バイリンガル・バイカルチュラルろう教育」について検証する。
第4章：MEXT基本学校調査および特別支援教育資料からの特別支援学校対応在籍者数のデータを分析する。また在籍者数の歴史的な概要を提供した上で、ろう学校の在籍者数の変化を検証する。在籍学率の減少要因について言及し、ろう教育に直面する課題について議論する。
第5章：ろう教育政策における課題と教育への取り組みに関する論争を要約し、ろう教育を活性化するためのバイリンガル・バイカルチュラル教育の可能性について議論する。将来の政策形成において当事者の視点を考慮する重要性を強調し、結論とする。

1. Introduction: Navigating Intergration and Minority Preservation in Japanese Deaf Education

Historically, Schools for the Deaf have served as vital hubs for the Deaf community, fostering the transmission of Deaf culture and Sign language. These institutions have played a crucial role in sustaining the Deaf community as one of Japan's cultural and linguistic minorities. However, in recent years, there has been a consistent decline in enrollment rates at Schools for the Deaf. While this downward trend traces its origins back to the 1960s, it appears to have accelerated following alterations introduced by the 2007 Partial Amendment to the *School Education Act*. This amendment aimed to offer additional opportunities for Deaf students to integrate into mainstream schools and established schools catering to students with multiple disabilities.
According to previous research on the topic, the decline in student enrollment trends is driven by two key factors. Firstly, there is a global push for inclusivity, with regular classrooms being made more accessible to d/Deaf students through reasonable accommodations and specialized support. Secondly, advancements in medical technology, such as improved screening methods for hearing loss, advanced hearing aids and cochlear implants, have contributed to this trend.

I initially became aware of the decline in Schools for the Deaf while pursuing my Master's Degree. My interest in Deaf studies and Japanese Sign Language (JSL) grew as I worked on videos about sign language for the JaLea e-learning platform, which was developed by my supervisor, Prof. Marcella Mariotti.
In 2021, I arranged for Prof. Sori Moya, a senior researcher at the JETRO Institute of Developing Economies and part-time lecturer on Sociolinguistics of JSL at Waseda University, to deliver a lecture on the Japanese Deaf community at Ca' Foscari University of Venice. The lecture, titled "Deaf Community and Sign Language in Japan," was conducted over Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and was organized in collaboration with the Gesshin Student Association. The lecture provided valuable insights into the present state of Deaf education in Japan. I was immediately fascinated by Japanese *rōgakkō* (Schools for the Deaf), as this type of school has almost disappeared in Western countries. I had learned about *Istituti per*

sordi, Italian residential schools for the deaf, while attending courses on Deaf culture and Italian Sign Language (LIS) at Ca' Foscari University. Italian *Istituti* are infamous for their strict oral methods, which prohibited the use of Sign Language among students and where teacher even resorted to physical punishments for those found signing in secret. In 1977, Law 517 allowed students with disabilities to enroll in regular classes, and Schools for the Deaf started to disappear. I have interacted with Italian Deaf individuals who attended Schools for the Deaf, and I have researched stories and documentaries presenting the experiences of older generations of Deaf people. It is quite difficult to find someone with a positive recollection of their education in such schools. Based on this, I held a negative preconception that Schools for the Deaf were designed to segregate Deaf children and attempt to "fix" their disability by forcing them to speak. Therefore, I was surprised to learn that members of the Japanese Deaf community, including Prof. Mori, express concern about the potential disappearance of Schools for the Deaf in Japan.

In the landscape of Special Needs Education in Japan, Schools for the Deaf stand out as what I consider a "fortunate anomaly". Typically, students with disabilities are not integrated into mainstream education but are instead strongly encouraged to attend *Schools for Special Needs Education*, whhich target both physical and mental disabilities. As a result, students with and without disabilities often have limited opportunities for social interaction, which may appear to reflect a segregationist policy. Personally, I share this perspective and believe that it is beneficial for children to grow and learn together regardless of their physical or mental abilities. However, I urge the reader to consider not only the disability aspect of *deaf-ness* but also the social and cultural dimensions of *Deaf-hood*.

Deafhood, a term coined by Deaf author Paddy Ladd, refers to the concept of Deaf identity. It emphasizes viewing deafness not as a medical impairment requiring a cure but as a positive attribute shaped by shared culture and experiences. Given that approximately 90% of deaf children are born into hearing families, it becomes challenging for them to cultivate a sense of Deaf identity, engage with Deaf culture, or learn Sign Language. Schools for the Deaf play a crucial role as some of the few places where deaf children can gather, fostering a sense of community among them.

During my time in Japan, I took JSL lessons and attended local *shuwa sākuru*, Sign Language clubs, where I had the chance to interact with many members of the Deaf

community. I was struck by their attachment to Deaf schools and concerns about their decline. Japan's active Deaf community and the growing popularity of Sign Language show that the Japanese Deaf Community has made significant strides in improving its social standing over the years. Many of the Deaf Japanese individuals I interacted with considered themselves members of a linguistic minority, and agreed that their community thrived and grew stronger because they could form tight knit communities attending Schools for the Deaf. However, they also acknowledged the necessity for changes in educational practices within these schools to align with the best interests of Deaf children. Currently, Schools for the Deaf are not seen as ideal solutions, primarily because their educational practices are based on oralism and spoken language, and overall, the quality of education is perceived as inferior to regular schools. This led me to explore whether dissatisfaction with educational methods could contribute to the declining enrollment trend in Schools for the Deaf.
Another aspect that reinforced the significance of this topic for me was my encounter with *Meisei gakuen* School for the Deaf, the first and only institution in Japan employing a Bilingual-Bicultural educational framework. *Meisei gakuen*'s educational philosophy is founded on the principle that Sign Language is the natural language of Deaf children. Consequently, they offer a completely visual, Japanese Sign Language-rich learning environment, where students acquire written Japanese as a secondary language. What is intriguing about *Meisei gakuen* is that, despite the overall downward enrollment trend in Schools for the Deaf, the student population at *Meisei gakuen* continues to grow steadily. This reinforced my belief that the declining number of students is not merely a natural consequence of technological advancements, but it is also linked a need for alternative educational practices. This is the central argument I aim to discuss in my thesis.

This work aims to analyze the development and current situation of Schools for the Deaf in Japan. I will explore potential factors influencing the decrease in student enrollment, with a particular emphasis on aspects related to the dissatisfaction of stakeholders, including d/Deaf individuals and their families. To provide context, the document begins with an overview of the Japanese Deaf community and the history of Deaf education in Japan. The thesis is structured as follows.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the previous studies conducted on the situation of Deaf education in Japan. The chapter then describes the aims and methodology of this work.

Chapter 2 presents the social and cultural implications of being d/Deaf in Japan. The chapter begins by introducing the medical and social dimensions of deafness. Then, it describes the Deaf population and the Deaf community of Japan. The chapter further discusses Japanese Sign Language, and its significance for the Japanese Deaf community, comparing it with other communication modalities. Lastly, this chapter explores the advocacy efforts of Deaf/hard of hearing organizations and provides an overview of the legal framework concerning Deaf individuals and Sign Language in Japan.

Chapter 3 focuses on the evolution and current status of Deaf education in Japan, with a particular emphasis on language education. The chapter traces the historical development of Japanese Deaf education, which was influenced by education movements in Europe and the United States. Then, the chapter explores the evolution of the different approaches to language education in Schools for the Deaf. It concludes with an examination of the unique educational approach of *Meisei gakuen* as the first Bilingual-Bicultural School for the Deaf in Japan.

Chapter 4 analyzes trends in Deaf education, drawing on data from the MEXT *Basic School Survey* and *Special Needs Education Material.* It provides a historical overview of enrollment figures in Special Needs education and examines changes in enrollment at Schools for the Deaf, comparing those catering to students with single and multiple disabilities. The chapter addresses the increasing presence of d/Deaf students in mainstream education and identifies factors contributing to the decline in student enrollment in Schools for the Deaf. It concludes with a discussion of the findings and the challenges facing Deaf education, particularly related to the dissatisfaction of stakeholders with MEXT-endorsed educational policies.

Chapter 5 presents the general conclusions, summarizing challenges within Japanese Deaf education and controversies surrounding language education approaches. Finally, it discusses the emergence of Bilingual-Bicultural education as in Japan, and emphasizes the importance of considering the perspectives of *tōjisha* in shaping future Deaf educational policies.

1.1 Literature Review

According to data contained in the *Special Needs Education Materials* published by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) covering the years 1948 to 2021, there has been a consistent decline in the number of students attending School for the Deaf, as well as a decrease in the number of institutions itself (MEXT, 2022). On the other hand, deaf students attending mainstream schools and classrooms have been increasing continuously over the past two decades (Funakoshi, 2020). This decline is primarily attributed to two main factors. First, there is a global trend towards integrating students with disabilities into mainstream schools, facilitated by the implementation of reasonable accommodations and forms of special needs support to make regular classrooms accessible to deaf students. Second, advancements in the medical field, including screening methods for hearing loss and audiological technology, have become more prevalent (Iwata, 2012). While these factors undeniably contribute to the declining enrollment trend, voices from Deaf organizations, such as the Japanese Federation of the Deaf (JFD) and the Dpro, suggest that dissatisfaction with educational practices at Schools might also affect stakeholders' decision to send their children to mainstream schools instead of Schools for the Deaf. Schools for the Deaf present various challenges, as they frequently adopt outdated and oral-based teaching practices, with many teachers not being adequately trained to meet the needs of d/Deaf students. (Funakoshi, 2020; JFD, 2021). Additionally, Mori et al. (2017) raise concerns about the expertise of teaching professionals, as the creation of unified teaching licenses for Special Needs Education in 2007 allowed teachers without a specific license for Deaf education to teach in Schools for the Deaf. Controversy on educational practices endorsed by MEXT has sparked an ongoing debate on the ideal location for Deaf education and the language of instruction. While the Japan Federation of the Deaf advocates for the introduction of a sign language-based curriculum in public schools, fully bilingual-bicultural education is currently only offered at *Meisei gakuen* (明晴学園）a private School for the Deaf founded in Tokyo in 2008. Additionally, the *Hokkaido Sapporo School for the Deaf* (北海道札幌聾学校) in northern Japan provides education in Sign Language alongside the standard curriculum (Hayashi and Tobin, 2014).

1.2 Aims and Methodology

This study seeks to present an updated analysis of the enrollment trends in Schools for the Deaf, with a specific focus on the period from 2007 to 2021, and to explore the multifaceted factors influencing its decline. Existing research predominantly attributes the declining enrollment trend to the increasing number of deaf children using hearing aids and undergoing cochlear implantation surgeries, which facilitate their integration into mainstream educational settings. While acknowledging this perspective, this study argues that dissatisfaction with Deaf education policies, particularly regarding language education, curriculum guidelines, teacher training, and limited pathways to higher education for School for the Deaf graduates, may also play a significant role in the preference for mainstream educational settings.

To analyze enrollment trends in Schools for the Deaf, this study utilizes data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science, Sports, and Technology (MEXT), including the annual Basic School Survey (学校基本調査) and the Special Needs Education Material (特別支援教育資料) spanning from 2007 to 2021 (MEXT, 2008-2022). Historical data from the Showa Era (1926-1989) and Heisei Era (1989-2019) is examined using data from the National Institute of Special Needs Education (NISE), collected in Special Education Materials (特殊教育資料) from 1948 to 2006 (NISE, 1949-2007). To investigate the factors contributing to the decline in enrollment rates, this study will conduct a comprehensive review of existing literature. This review will explore the impact of Newborn Hearing Screening (NHS), genetic screening for congenital hearing loss, and cochlear implantation surgery. *Tōjisha* dissatisfaction with Deaf educational policies is examined through petitions by the Japanese Federation of the Deaf (JFD) on language education policies and teacher formation, as well as previous research on the educational experiences of d/Deaf students in mainstream and Special Needs Education settings. The future prospects of School for the Deaf graduates are analyzed through the data provided by NISE and MEXT. Through these analysis, this research contributes an additional perspective to understanding the complex causes behind the declining enrollment trends in Japanese Deaf Education.

2. *Rōsha* (Deaf People) and Deaf Community in Japan

In Asian mythology, dragons are believed to lack the ability to hear due to their absence of ears, relying on horns to perceive sound. The character for “deaf” [聾] in both traditional Chinese and Japanese combines the symbols for “dragon” [龍] and “ear” [耳]. Interestingly, in Mandarin Chinese, both "deaf" and "dragon" are pronounced as *lóng* (Liang and Mason, 2013), likely influencing the Japanese pronunciation of the word *rō* (聾), “deaf”.[1] These linguistic and symbolic connections between dragons and deafness create a cultural link with the Deaf community in China and Japan. According to Japanese folklore, the ears of dragons fell into the sea and transformed into seahorses, which are known in Japanese as *Tatsu no otoshigo* (竜の落とし子), translating to "dragon's offspring".[2] With their ear-like shape and captivating appearance, seahorses became the nationwide mascot for the Deaf community in Japan.[3]

In Japanese, various terms are used to describe individuals who are Deaf or hard of hearing (HoH), influenced by medical and social perspectives. Medically, deaf people may be referred to as *chokakshōgaisha* (聴覚障害者), translating to "persons with a hearing disability." Expressions like *mimi ga kikoenai hito* (耳が聞こえない人) and *mimi ga fujiyūna hito* (耳が不自由な人) are also used, meaning "people who cannot hear" and "people with unfree (impaired) ears," respectively. These terms directly associate deafness with disability (*Shōgai*) and concepts of negation or inability (*kikoenai, fujiyū*).[4] Such expressions are commonly found in official contexts, like ministerial regulations, or in signs addressed to customers, contributing to an overall impression of politeness. However, individuals who are Deaf often choose not to identify with these expressions, opting instead for terms like *rōsha* (ろう者), “Deaf

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[1] In modern Japanese, the hiragana writing of *Rō* as [ろう] is more prevalent than its kanji form.
[2] The Japanese Kanji [竜] is an alternative form of the kanji for “dragon” [龍], and it is used in specific words and kanji compounds.
[3] The Seahorse was adopted as the official symbol of the Japanese Federation of the Deaf (JFD).
[4] The term *Kikoenai* represents the negative form of the verb *kikoeru* (聞こえる), meaning "to be heard" or "to sound". Additionally, the prefix *fu* (不) is utilized for negation. Therefore, *fujiyū* can be literally translated as "non" (*fu*) "Free" (*jiyū*).

person”, and *defu* (デフ), deriving from the English "deaf".[5] Those who identify as *rōsha* are typically Sign Language users and active members of the Deaf community. Another popular term is *nanchō* (難聴), “hard of hearing”, which is mostly used by people with mild hearing loss, employing hearing aids or cochlear implants.

As the variety of terms suggests, there are many ways to be d/Deaf. This chapter aims to provide the reader with a foundational understanding of the social and cultural implications of deafness and the population affected by Deaf educational policies. The first paragraph introduces the medical and social implications of deafness, followed by an overview of the Japanese deaf population and the Deaf community. The second section is dedicated to Japanese Sign Language, covering its fundamental features, significance within the community, and a comparison with other communication modalities employed by d/Deaf individuals. The last section highlights Deaf organizations whose advocacy efforts have significantly influenced the rights and endeavors of Deaf individuals in Japan. the chapter concludes with an overview of the current legal framework concerning Deaf people and Sign Language.

2.1 Deafness, Deafhood, and Deaf Population: Notes on Terminology

This paragraph introduces the Japanese Deaf community, exploring the multifaceted implications of being d/Deaf and hard of hearing. The first section discusses deafness as a medical condition and the cultural concept of Deafhood, which recognizes the Deaf community as a linguistic minority. Subsequently, the demographic composition of the d/Deaf population in Japan is outlined, followed by the active participation of Deaf community members in diverse areas. Finally, the section highlights the significance of the *Declaration of Deaf Culture* (1995), which created a shift in the societal perception of Deaf individuals.

2.1.1 Medical and Social Implications of Being d/Deaf

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), about 5% of the people in the world have a disabling hearing loss. Of these, about 7% are children who are born deaf. Depending on the age of onset and severity of hearing loss, deafness can have

[5] The English-derived term *defu* (デフ) is popular among younger generations of Deaf people. Nakamura (2003) suggests that younger people favor the term *Defu* over *rō* (聾) because of the similarity with the word "old", which is also pronounced *rō* (老).

a strong impact on cognitive and linguistic development, often leading to a lack of linguistic competence in oral languages (Capirci et al., 1989; Volpato, 2009; Cardinaletti et al., 2016). As a medical condition, deafness is a sensory impairment that involves various levels of hearing loss. The WHO initiated efforts in 1991 to standardize the definition of hearing loss severity and address global challenges in healthcare (Humes, 2018). This led to the development of the WHO *Grades of hearing impairment* (Table 1).

Table 1

International Classification of Hearing Loss Severity (WHO framework)

Level of hearing loss	Corresponding ISO value	Performance
Slight/Mild	26-40 dB (better ear)	Able to hear and repeat words spoken in a normal voice at 1 meter.
Moderate	41-60 dB (better ear)	Able to hear and repeat words spoken in a raised voice at 1 meter.
Severe	61-80 dB (better ear)	Able to hear some words when shouted into the better ear.
Profound	≥81 dB (better ear)	Unable to hear and understand even a shouted voice.

Source. WHO (2008), *World Health Organisation Grades of Hearing Loss.*
Note. The audiometric International Standardization Organization (ISO) values are based on the average hearing threshold after being tested at values of 500, 1000, 2000, and 4000 Hz.

In Japan, the categorization of the degree of hearing loss relies on the framework established by the *Japan Audiological Society* (日本聴覚医学会). The Japanese framework (Table 2) slightly differs from the one established by WHO. Mild hearing loss is characterized by a hearing threshold ranging from 25 dB to 40 dB, moderate hearing loss falls within the 40 dB to 70 dB range, severe hearing loss falls within the 70-90dB and profound hearing loss occurs at a hearing threshold of ≥90 dB (Wasano et al., 2022).[6]

[6] Although the majority of Japanese laws align with these criteria, the Japanese Health Insurance Act deviates by defining severe hearing loss as a hearing threshold of 60 dB or more.

Table 2

Classification of Hearing Loss Severity in Japan (JAS framework)

Level of hearing loss	Extent of hearing ability	Supplementary information
Mild hearing loss	25-40 dB	Difficulties and misunderstandings in conversations conducted at a low voice or in noisy environments. Using hearing aids is recommended to improve listening in situations such as meetings.
Moderate hearing loss	40-70 dB	Difficulties and misunderstandings arise in conversations conducted at a normal volume. Using hearing aids is recommended
Severe hearing loss	70-90 dB	Can only hear conversations if conducted at a high volume or using hearing aids. Even if hearing is possible, understanding can be limited.
Profound hearing loss	≥90 dB	Despite the use of hearing aids, hearing is limited in many situations. The use of cochlear implants should be considered.

Source. Japan Audiological Society (2014), *Hearing Loss Task Force Report - about the classification of hearing loss (hearing disability)* 【難聴対策委員会報告 -難聴（聴覚障害）の程度分類について】(Free translation)

Several Deaf authors and activists have argued that Deaf people have a shared cultural identity and should be considered part of a culture-linguistic minority rather than being identified solely as persons with a disability (Lane, 1995, 2005; Ladd, 2003; Chatzopoulou, 2014). This is best explained through the concept of Deafhood introduced by the Deaf author Paddy Ladd. In his work *Understanding Deaf Culture – In Search of Deafhood* (2003), Ladd argues that *deafness* refers to the experience of hearing loss as a medical condition, e.g. the elderly who become “hard-of-hearing” with age. The term *Deafhood* refers instead to the collective experience of being Deaf as a consciously practiced and continuously negotiated cultural Identity. Members of the so-called *Deaf community* value their experience as a culture-linguistic minority, taking pride and comfort in their language and values, which they are committed to pass on to the next generations (Ladd, 2003; Chatzopoulou, 2014). It's important to recognize that not all individuals who are deaf

use Sign Language, and not all identify themselves as part of the Deaf community. There is a wide range of communication methods employed by d/Deaf individuals. These methods vary due to factors such as the severity and onset of hearing loss, educational background, family environment, and linguistic exposure. For example, HoH individuals and late-deafened individuals who acquired spoken language as a first language may sign in a way that aligns with spoken language (Simultaneous Communication).[7] Additionally, some deaf individuals who use cochlear implants or hearing aids may rely solely on spoken language. Within the cultural and linguistic context, *Deaf signers* are those who belong to the Deaf community. This distinction between medical and social perspective is made in this work by using the spelling "deaf" with a lowercase "d" when referring to the audiological condition, and "Deaf" with an uppercase "D" when referring to membership in a linguistic and cultural minority. The term "d/Deaf" is utilized when including both aspects.

2.1.2 Deaf Population and Deaf Community in Japan

According to the *Report on Government Measures for Persons with Disabilities* (障害者施策の概況) published by the Cabinet Office in 2012,[8] among the adult population with disabilities, which accounts for approximately 3% (3,483,000 individuals) of the total population, 7,9% (276,000) were Deaf or hard of hearing. For those under the age of 18, the total number of individuals with disabilities accounts for 0,5% (93,100,000) of the total population of minors. Of these, approximately 17% (15,800,000) were identified as Deaf or HoH. Although there are no official accounts regarding the population of Japanese Sign Language (JSL) users, in 1999, approximately 57,000 individuals (0.05% of the entire population) were estimated to use JSL, according to Ichida (2001).

Deaf individuals often meet other d/Deaf people for the first time in special Schools for the Deaf, known as *rōgakkō* in Japanese. As deaf children are often spread out across large geographical areas, these schools are crucial gathering spaces where they encounter fellow d/Deaf peers, forming close-knit groups. These groups then serve as a gateway to the Deaf community (Kimura and Ichida, 1995). Other

[7] The act of signing while speaking in a way that follows spoken language is called Simultaneous communication, cued speech, or manually coded language.
[8] The data after 2012 does not distinguish the specific type of disability, grouping together the total population of individuals with physical disabilities.

gathering places for members of the Deaf community include Sign Language clubs known as *shuwa sākuru* (手話サークル) or *shuwa saron* (手話サロン). These are typically local clubs sponsored by municipal governments and are attended by members of the Deaf community or proficient signers. Most universities also have Sign Language clubs attended by Deaf and signing students. While primarily addressing members of the Deaf community, many local clubs also offer Sign Language classes for hearing individuals, welcoming those interested in learning Sign Language or exploring Deaf culture.

The Deaf community in Japan is highly engaged across different domains, spanning arts, social media, and advocacy. An example is the *Tokyo International Deaf Film Festival* (東京国際ろう映画祭), inaugurated in 2017. The Festival features films chosen by a Deaf jury and ensures accessibility for both hearing and Deaf audiences. Additionally, there is an increasing presence of CODAs (Children of Deaf Adults) and Deaf individuals in the media. One example is the emergence of Deaf and signing anchors presenting daily news in Japanese Sign Language on the Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) channels. The 2020 Tokyo Olympics Opening and closing ceremonies were also aired with Sign Language interpretation.

These activities are made possible thanks to the efforts of organizations supporting the rights and opportunities of Deaf and hard of hearing (HoH) individuals, which facilitate community building and the transmission of Sign Language. Section 1.3.1 introduces the primary Deaf organizations in Japan: the Japanese Federation of the Deaf (JFD), Dpro, and the *Zennanchō*.

2.1.3 The "Declaration of Deaf Culture" and Deaf People as a Linguistic Minority

In the late 20th century, the acknowledgment of the linguistic legitimacy of Sign Language in the United States prompted a change in perspective towards the Deaf Community as a linguistic and cultural minority (Higgins and Lieberman, 2016) The identity of the Deaf Community became shaped by its shared language (Sign Language) and culture (Deaf culture), emphasizing an identity that goes beyond the inability to hear. Deaf individuals themselves began advocating to be recognized by society as linguistic minorities rather than as disabled individuals. Following the wave of Deaf cultural movements spreading from the United States, Harumi Kimura and Yasuhiro Ichida released the *Rōbunka Sengen* (ろう文化宣言), "Declaration of Deaf Culture" in March 1995. The manifesto, which was published in the journal *Gendai*

Shisō (『現代思想』), “Modern Thought”, began with a groundbreaking definition of *rōsha*, "Deaf person", for the time. This left a significant and enduring impact on the field of Deaf studies in Japan.

「ろう者とは、日本手話という、日本語とは異なる言語を話す、言語的少数者である。」
Deaf people are a linguistic minority who speak Japanese Sign Language, a language distinct from Japanese. (Free translation)

Kimura and Ichida (1995)

Kimura and Ichida’s definition of *rōsha* represents a shift away from a medical understanding of Deaf individuals, where they were simply labeled as "people who cannot hear" or "people with disabilities." Instead, it embraces a new perspective where *rōsha* are seen as people who use Japanese Sign Language in their everyday lives, thus acknowledging them as part of linguistic minorities. This shift in perspective grants the term *rōsha* the same significance as *Deaf* with a capital "D." Conversely, commonly used terms and phrases such as *chōkaku shōgaisha* (聴覚障害者), "Individual with a hearing disability", *Mimi ga kikoenai hito* (耳が聞こえない人) and *mimi ga fujiyūna hito* (耳が不自由な人), "person who cannot hear", might be seen as analogous to the term *deaf* with a lowercase "d". The *Rōbunka sengen* can be understood as an affirmation of the significance of Sign Language and Deaf culture, which are integral to the identity of Deaf people. Although it is now widely recognized that Sign Language is the primary mode of communication for Deaf individuals, there is still a misconception that it is a limited substitute for spoken languages, particularly for those who cannot communicate through speech. The following section provides an overview of Sign Languages and JSL to better understand its features and significance.

2.2. Sign Language in Japan: Communication Tool or Minority Language?

This paragraph introduces Japanese Sign Language (JSL) and its role in the Japanese Deaf community. The first section introduces the main characteristics of Sign Languages and JSL as a natural language that has evolved within Deaf communities utilizing visual-gestural modalities. The second section examines the

main linguistic features of JSL and its relationship with other signed communication modalities, such as Signed Japanese. Lastly, the potential decline of JSL and its causes are explored. Efforts to preserve and promote JSL are also discussed, highlighting the ongoing debates and initiatives aimed at safeguarding the linguistic and cultural heritage of the Deaf community in Japan.

2.2.1 An Introduction to Shuwa (Japanese Sign Language) and its Varieties

Sign Languages are natural languages that have evolved within communities primarily consisting of individuals who are Deaf or have communication disabilities (Groce, 2017). Unlike spoken languages, which rely on auditory-vocal modalities, Sign Languages utilize visual-gestural modalities, employing hand movements, facial expressions, and body posture (Merzagora et al., 2011; Branchini et al., 2016).

There is a common misconception among hearing individuals that Sign Language is universal or mutually intelligible, implying that Deaf people from different parts of the world can understand each other through shared signs. However, this is far from the truth. In reality, each country has its own unique Sign Language(s), often with additional regional variations. Japanese Sign Language (JSL), known as *nihon shuwa* (日本手話) or simply *shuwa* (手話) in Japanese, serves as the primary mode of communication for the Japanese Deaf community and plays a crucial role in cultural transmission among its members (Fujita-Round, 2019). Although there are regional and local varieties, JSL typically refers to the standardized variation that has become shared across the country. This variation, which traces its origins to the Kantō region, is also called *Toshigata shuwa* (都市型手話), "urban Sign Language". In addition to JSL, there are two other Sign Languages used in Japan. These are the *Amami Oshima Sign Language*, also known as *Koniya shuwa* (古仁屋手話), a village Sign Language spoken in the Amami Oshima region of Kagoshima Prefecture; and the *Miyakubo Sign Language* (宮久保手話), used in the Oshima island of Ehime prefecture.[9] Both regions have a high incidence of congenital deafness, leading to the emergence of local Sign Languages akin to the situation of *Martha's Vineyard* in the United States.[10] The isolated nature of these areas, along with the predominance

[9] Typically, Sign Languages develop when groups of deaf children are together in educational settings. This led to the development of urban Sign Languages, characterized by their large communities, as well as regional shared/village Sign Languages, which emerge when a significant number of deaf individuals are born into isolated communities.

[10] Martha's Vineyard is an island off the coast of Massachusetts in the United States. Due to a genetic mutation, a large part of the population was deaf. As a result, Sign Language became a natural and

of spoken Japanese in education, has resulted in the development of distinct language systems separate from JSL. The Japanese Sign Language family also includes Taiwan Sign Language and Korean Sign Language, which largely developed in Schools for the Deaf under Japanese rule were introduced (Fischer, 2015).[11] In several countries, including Italy until March 2021[12] and Japan, Sign Languages are not fully recognized as “languages" but rather viewed as a substitute mode of communication for individuals with hearing disabilities. Nevertheless, linguistic research pioneered by William Stokoe (1960) has demonstrated the linguistic validity of Sign Languages and the communities that use them.

2.2.2 Shuwa, Japanese and Signed Japanese: Main Features and Differences

Shuwa is a natural, autonomous language that developed within Deaf communities in Japan. While its precise origins are not well-documented, educational settings such as Schools for the Deaf have played a significant role in the emergence and dissemination of *shuwa*. As in other Sign Languages, the basic unit of *shuwa* is “sign”. Signs are created by different combinations of hand shapes, positions, movements, and palm orientation. Additionally, *shuwa* has linguistic features such as Non-Manual Markers (NMS), which include movements of the head, of the mouth and facial expressions that serve grammatical functions. Another important feature of *shuwa* is Classifiers (CL) which are used to group vocabulary based on common criteria and classify them into categories (Oka and Akahori, 2011). *Shuwa* does not have a written form and is only transmitted visually.

JSL is a language system different from vocal Japanese, with its own grammatical, syntactic, morphological, and lexical rules. However, due to the coexistence of these languages within shared geographic communities, there are numerous instances of incorporated elements from both Japanese and foreign Sign Languages. Examples of Japanese crosslinguistic influence in JSL include fingerspelling based on the

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widely used form of communication among the community, regardless of whether individuals were deaf or hearing. This created an inclusive environment where deaf individuals were fully integrated into society and communication barriers were minimized. The situation on Martha's Vineyard attracted attention from researchers studying deaf culture and language acquisition.

[11] The Japanese began their rule over Korea in 1910, which extended until the conclusion of World War II in 1945. Similarly, Japan governed Taiwan from 1895 to 1945, starting after acquiring Taiwan from the Qing Dynasty of China as stipulated in the Treaty of Shimonoseki after the First Sino-Japanese War.

[12] On May 19, 2021, the Italian Parliament approved a decree article to acknowledge, promote, and protect Italian Sign Language (LIS) and Italian Tactile Sign Language (LIST). Additionally, it formally recognized LIS and LIST interpreters as specialized professionals.

writing systems of *Hiragana* and *Katakana* and signs whose manual configuration directly derives from the visual form of *Kanji*.[13]

There are other forms of communication that are used among d/Deaf people and in Schools for the Deaf (Table 3). One of the most used is *nihongo taiō shuwa* (日本語対応手話), "Sign Language corresponding to Japanese" also called *shūshi nihongo* (手指日本語), "Signed Japanese." As mentioned above, linguistically, Sign Languages are distinct from spoken languages. However, sign systems such as Signed Japanese are artificially made and follow the Japanese language structure. Essentially, they are a visual representation of spoken Japanese. There is ongoing debate about the term used to refer to Signed Japanese. While the term *nihongo taiō shuwa* is more prevalent, its inclusion of the term "shuwa" might erroneously imply a connection to the natural Sign Language. Given its adherence to Japanese grammar, *shūshi nihongo,* "Signed Japanese", is deemed more appropriate by some (Kimura and Ichida, 2011).

In Japan, signed communication modalities are often collectively referred to as *shuwa* without distinguishing between JSL and Signed Japanese. In recent years, *shuwa* has been implemented in Japanese Schools for the Deaf as a recognized effective communication method (Kwak, 2017). However, in this context, *shuwa* typically denotes a form of Simultaneous Communication or Signed Japanese rather than the natural Japanese Sign Language (JSL). Currently, only two Schools for the Deaf provide education in JSL, namely the *Meisei gakuen* (to be discussed in Chapter 2) and the *Sapporo School for the Deaf*. Despite active efforts by *tōjisha* Organizations such as the JFD and Dpro to introduce JSL into Deaf education, progress has been limited. Kwak (2017) contends that the failure to distinguish between JSL (used by Deaf individuals) and Signed Japanese (employed in education) under the umbrella term *shuwa* could perpetuate the marginalization of JSL as an educational medium. Because *shuwa* can be used as an umbrella term in

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[13] Here are some examples of Japanese crosslinguistic influence in JSL: JSL fingerspelling is divided into *mora* like Japanese, and the manual configuration of various fingerspelling mirrors *Katakana* writing. One example is the finger spelling for the mora *Re,* where the thumb and index are stretched in a slightly narrowed [L] shape to reproduce the katakana of the syllable [レ]. Other finger spellings are derived from the initials of Japanese words. For instance, the finger spelling for the syllable *Ki* is formed by connecting the thumb, middle, and ring fingers while extending the index and pinky fingers to create a shape resembling a fox's face, known as *Kitsune* (狐) in Japanese. An example of kanji-derived signs is the sign for "rice field", where the index, middle finger, and ring finger of both hands are stretched and placed one over the other to reproduce the kanji [田].

Japanese, this work employs the English translation "Japanese Sign Language (JSL)" when referring to the natural language used by Deaf people.

Table 3

Characteristics of Japanese, Japanese Sign Language, and Signed Japanese

Communication method	Modality	Code	Written form
Japanese	auditory vocal	Japanese	Yes
JSL	visual manual	Japanese Sign Language	No
Signed Japanese	visual manual	Japanese	Yes

2.2.3 The Potential Decline of Japanese Sign Language (JSL): Challenges and Future Prospects.

Although there is a thriving Deaf community in Japan where JSL plays a significant role in fostering communication and cultural expression, the language is at risk of decline. Contributing factors include a growing number of children who undergo cochlear implantation surgery, more students attending mainstream schools, and the widespread use of Signed Japanese in educational settings (Takashima, 2020).

In recent years, there have been efforts from the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) to promote the *Early Detection and Early Intervention* (早期診断･早期療育) of hearing disabilities. Examples of these efforts include Newborn Hearing Screening (NHS) and genetic screening for congenital hearing loss, which are aimed at recognizing deafness at the earliest stages and intervening with hearing aids, cochlear implantation surgery, and special needs support by 6 months of age (further discussed in section 3.4). As a result, more young children get cochlear implants and are encouraged to enroll in mainstream schools if they have sufficient residual hearing. About 90% of deaf individuals are born to hearing parents, meaning that Sign Language and Deaf culture are not usually transmitted in families or local communities like those of ordinary ethnic groups. Therefore, Schools for the Deaf play a crucial role in enabling young Deaf individuals to come together and foster a

sense of community through shared language and experiences (Kimura and Ichida, 1995). The fact that more children tend to enroll in regular schools implies that they will unlikely have the opportunity to learn Sign Language and interact with deaf peers. At the same time, attending Schools for the Deaf does not guarantee that students can learn Sign Language. MEXT-endorsed curriculum in Schools for the Deaf emphasizes spoken Japanese and employs Signed Japanese as a primary means of communication between students and teachers. Because of this, Deaf organizations such as the Japanese Federation of the Deaf (JFD) and Dpro actively promote the inclusion of Sign Language education in educational settings and advocate for the official recognition of Japanese Sign Language as a language in Japan.

2.3 Deaf Activism and Rights in Japan

This paragraph provides an overview of Deaf rights advocacy and legislation in Japan. Central to the development of Deaf rights are organizations representing Deaf and hard of hearing (HoH) individuals. The first section introduces the main Japanese Deaf organizations, exploring their activities, perspectives, and beliefs. The second section explores the legal framework concerning Deaf individuals and Japanese Sign Language (JSL), highlighting ongoing efforts to officially recognize JSL and integrate it into educational contexts. This paragraph provides an insight into the evolving landscape of Deaf rights in Japan and the challenges that lie ahead.

2.3.1 Deaf and Hard of Hearing (HoH) Organizations: Activities and Contributions to the Deaf Community.

In Japan, Deaf organizations play a vital role in building a sense of community and advocating for the rights of Deaf and HoH individuals. These organizations are commonly known as *tōjisha dantai* (当事者団体), which translates to "organizations of stakeholders." The term *tōjisha* (当事者) in Japanese refers to individuals directly involved or affected by a particular situation, issue, or event. In this context, it specifically encompasses d/Deaf and HoH individuals and their families. This section aims to introduce the main Japanese *tōjisha* organizations, along with their activities and perspectives.

The Japanese Federation of the Deaf (JFD)

One prominent organization is the *Zennihon rōa renmei* (全日本ろうあ連盟), also known as the *Japanese Federation of the Deaf* (JFD) in English.[14] The JFD was established in 1947 in Ikaho, Gunma Prefecture. It held the first national Deaf convention the following year and continues to host such gatherings annually. In 1950, the organization gained official recognition as a Foundation and is now officially named *Zaidan hōjin zennihon rōasha renmei* (財団法人全日本聾唖連盟).[15] Throughout its history, the JFD has played a crucial role in promoting Japanese Sign Language. Notably, in 1969, the organization initiated a significant project by publishing the first book about JSL, titled *Watashitachi no shuwa* (私たちの手話), "Our Sign Language". Subsequently, in 1979, the JFD introduced key programs such as the *Sign Language interpreter training* (手話通訳指導者養成研修事業) and the *Standard Sign Language research* (標準手話研究事業). In 1991, they hosted the 11th World Federation of the Deaf Congress in Tokyo (JFD, n.d.). The JFD is currently engaged in various initiatives, including providing support to Deaf children affected by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, conducting research in Deaf Studies and Sign Language Studies, organizing interpretation training seminars, and hosting annual national conventions and gatherings. Additionally, the JFD is actively involved in fostering international relations with Deaf communities and organizations abroad, including collaborating with the International Committee of Sports for the Deaf (ICSD) to host the 2025 Deaflympics in Tokyo. The JFD plays a significant role in promoting JSL and advocating for a Sign Language legislation in Japan. Regarding Deaf education, the JFD promotes Sign Language education and the presence of Deaf educators in both Schools for the Deaf and regular schools. In recent years, the JFD has expressed concern about the decline of Schools for the Deaf, addressing numerous statements and letters to the Cabinet Office and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), urging changes in Deaf education policies.

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[14] The *Zennihon Rōa Renmei* is also commonly known by the abbreviation *Zennichi Rō Ren* (全日ろう連) or with the acronym JFD from the English name of the organization.

[15] A Zaidan Hōjin (財団法人) under Japanese law refers to a foundation that has been granted legal personality, established with assets contributed by specific individuals or corporations. The foundation operates similarly to companies, using these assets as its main source for operations. Typically, organizations that are recognized as Zaidan Hōjin have public interest purposes.

The Dpro

A new activist movement emerged in the 1990s, led by young Deaf individuals who had studied abroad in the United States and had been exposed to American Deaf culture. The group focused on activities related to Japanese Sign Language and Deaf culture. One of the key figures in this movement was the Deaf interpreter and Sign Language educator Harumi Kimura (1965-). In 1991, Kimura, along with a hearing Sign Language linguist named Yasuhiro Ichida (1962-), launched a newsletter titled "D." The name "D" was derived from the initial of "Deaf" and symbolized the American perception of Deaf people as an ethnic group with its own language and culture. Kimura and Ichida used the newsletter to introduce the Deaf cultural movement in the United States, the differences between Japanese Sign Language and Signed Japanese, and Bilingual education for the Deaf in Japan (Kwak, 2017). In 1993, a group called Dpro (Dプロ）was formed, consisting of Deaf and hearing individuals who shared the ideals of the newsletter "D". Dpro adopted the principles of Bilingualism and Biculturalism as its founding ideology. These include the concept of respecting the linguistic differences of Japanese and JSL, and accepting the culture of the hearing community alongside the unique culture of the Deaf community. In 1994, Dpro organized the first *Deaf Day*, meant to be an event created *by* the Deaf *for* the Deaf. *Deaf Day* featured lectures from Deaf studies experts and discussions on themes such as Deaf culture, bilingualism and biculturalism, as well as issues in the use of Signed Japanese. Dpro's philosophy and activities were popular among the Deaf community and became known among the hearing public as well when Kimura and Ichida published the *Declaration of Deaf Culture* (1995). Dpro has been labeled as "radical" by some due to their stance on JSL as the language of Deaf people. The Declaration of Deaf Culture, particularly among hard of hearing (HoH) individuals, has stirred controversy because it appears to exclude those who are not proficient in JSL from the definition of *rōsha*, leading to concerns about discrimination within the Deaf community (Nakamura, 2006).

The Zennanchō

Another well-known Deaf organization in Japan is the *Zennihon nanchōsha chutō shicchōsha dantai rengōkai* (全日本難聴者・中途失聴者団体連合会), commonly known as *Zennanchō* (全難聴) in Japanese and English. It has its origins in the 1950s when various groups for the hard of hearing were established. The

organization was born In 1978 as the *Zennkoku nanchōsha renraku kyōgikai* (全国難聴者連絡協議会). By 1991, the entire organization had gained legal recognition. The *Zennanchō* activities are aimed at promoting social status and accessibility for deaf and HoH people, as well as the social understanding of hearing disabilities. One example is the summary note-taking volunteer training program initiated under the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare's activities in 1981. Unlike the JFD and Dpro, *Zennanchō* focuses on deafness as a disability and mostly deals with people who are hard of hearing or have late-onset deafness.

2.3.2 Legislative Progress and Challenges in Ensuring the Rights of Deaf Individuals

Japan has a complex history regarding the care of individuals with disabilities, characterized by an emphasis on medical treatment rather than social rehabilitation (Hasegawa et al., 2015). This challenging history includes the enactment of the *Eugenic Protection Law* (優生保護法) from 1948 to 1996, which involved the forced sterilization of people with disabilties. The practice of forced sterilization also affected Deaf individuals, as revealed by a JFD investigation (Mainichi Shinbun, October 16, 2018).

In Japan's history, there has been a misconception of deaf individuals as mentally incapacitated, leading to legal restrictions to limit their independence.[16] Thanks to JFD advocacy movements, the Civil Code was revised in 1979 to grant full legal status to deaf people, allowing them to enjoy benefits such as bank loans and succession. In 1968, a large movement was initiated by the JFD advocating for the right of deaf people to obtain driver's licenses. This led the National Police Agency to allow deaf people to drive under the condition of wearing hearing aids in 1973. Amendments to the Road Traffic Act (道路交通法) in 2008 allowed even completely deaf individuals to obtain licenses (JFD, n.d.).

The current legislation concerning the rights of Deaf people in Japan is included in the provisions for people with disabilities. Japan signed the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD) in 2007 and ratified it in 2014, allowing time for the country to make the required adjustments to implement the Convention's

[16] Per the Old Civil Code, deaf people were legally considered *Junkin Chisansha* (準禁治産者), "quasi incompetent persons", and required permission of a family member for important property transactions.

provisions. In accordance with the "social model" of disability outlined by the CRPD, the 1970 *Basic Act for Persons with Disabilities* (障害者基本法) underwent its most recent amendment in 2011. This model suggests that the obstacles faced by individuals with disabilities in their daily lives stem not only from their physical or mental impairments but also from various social barriers. Japan's current official definition of persons with disabilities aligns with this understanding.

「一　障害者　身体障害、知的障害、精神障害（発達障害を含む。）その他の心身の機能の障害（以下「障害」と総称する。）がある者であつて、障害及び社会的障壁により継続的に日常生活又は社会生活に相当な制限を受ける状態にあるものをいう。」

(i) "Person with a disability" (refers to) a person with a physical disability, an intellectual disability, a mental disability (including developmental disabilities), and other persons with disabilities affecting the functions of the body or mind (hereunder collectively referred to as "disabilities"), and who are in a state of facing continuously facing substantial limitations in their daily life or social life because of a disability or a social barrier. (Free translation)

Basic Act for People with Disabilities, Chap.1, Art. 2

The 2011 Amendment also incorporated the principle of non-discrimination as a fundamental aspect, aligning with the CRPD's objectives. In 2013, the *Act for Eliminating Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities* (障害者差別解消法) was enacted to prohibit discriminatory treatment based on disabilities by public and private entities (Cabinet Office, 2015). The Act also requires that entities provide *Reasonable Accommodations* (合理的な配慮) to enable the elimination of social barriers as long as the burden is not excessive.

The CRPD specifically mentions Deaf people in five articles, stating that governments should encourage Sign Language learning and promote the linguistic identity of the Deaf Community in *Article 21 (Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information), Section b,e*, and *Article 24 (Education), section 3b,c.*
The *Basic Act for Persons with Disabilities* aligns with the CRPD and explicitly mentions *shuwa* as a language. However, there is no specific legislation dedicated solely to JSL. In line with the CRPD's provisions on freedom of expression and access to information, Japanese local governments have established JSL teaching

and certification programs. Moreover, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, both the Prime Minister's and several local governors' news briefings now include JSL interpreter services, reflecting an increasing recognition and integration of JSL in official communications. Although the CRPD encourages the promotion of Sign Language and the implementation of Bilingual education for the Deaf, this is not yet a reality in Japan. The introduction of signing in MEXT-endorsed curricula remained limited to finger spelling and Simcom or Signed Japanese without ever leading to formal instruction in JSL. This has sparked dissatisfaction among Deaf activists and organizations, notably the JFD, advocating for the formal recognition of Sign Language and the enactment of a *Sign Language Act* (手話言語法). This act aims to establish *shuwa* as the recognized language of the Deaf community in Japan and to integrate it into educational settings.

3. Deaf Education in Japan

Schools for the Deaf have traditionally been vital centers for Deaf communities around the world, allowing knowledge exchange and fostering a distinct Deaf cultural identity through Sign Language (Padden, 1996). These institutions play a crucial role in preserving the community's rich heritage and supporting its continued growth as a minority group in Japan (Kimura and Ichida, 1995). In recent years, more d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing (HoH) students in Japan have been being educated alongside hearing peers rather than within the Deaf and HoH community (Iwata, 2012; Funakoshi et al., 2020). This situation has sparked an ongoing debate on the appropriate location and language of Deaf education. While the Japan Federation of the Deaf (JFD) has made efforts to advocate for *shuwa* curriculums in public schools, Bilingual education is only offered at *Meisei gakuen*, a private School for the Deaf. The Japanese Federation of the Deaf (JFD) and other *tōjisha* groups have expressed concerns about the future of young Deaf students attending mainstream schools, as they may not be able to connect with other members of the Deaf community or learn Japanese Sign Language.

This chapter provides an overview of the evolution and current situation of Deaf education in Japan, focusing on language education which is at the heart of Deaf advocacy movements. The aim of this chapter is to lay a foundation for understanding the current declining trends in Japanese Deaf education and the reasons that lay behind it. The first paragraph discusses the historical evolution of Deaf education in the West and in Japan, highlighting the major events that influenced Deaf education worldwide. The paragraph then outlines the current organizational structure of Schools for the Deaf in Japan. The second paragraph focuses on the role of Sign Language in Deaf education and the differences between the main approaches to language education. Lastly, the chapter presents the unique educational approach of *Meisei gakuen* as the first and only Bilingual-Bicultural School for the Deaf in Japan.

3.1 Introduction to *Rōgakkō* (Japanese Schools for the Deaf)

This paragraph introduces Japanese Schools for the Deaf, starting from their historical evolution. An overview of global Deaf education history is provided to contextualize the Japanese Deaf educational landscape, which was influenced by Western practices following the Meiji Restoration (1868). The first section introduces the roots of Deaf education in Europe and the United States in the 16th to 18th Century, as well as language education theories and ideologies that left a lasting impact worldwide. The second section focuses on Deaf education in Japan, tracing its origins from the Edo period (1603 1868) to the formalization of Schools for the Deaf in the 19th to 20th centuries. Finally, the transformative changes that led to the establishment of modern *Schools for Special Needs Education* are examined, concluding with an analysis of the organization of Schools for the Deaf and options available for Deaf and HoH students at mainstream schools.

3.1.1 A Brief History of Deaf Education in the Western World

This section provides an overview of the beginning and evolution of Deaf education in Western countries. It explores the influential policies and trends that had a lasting impact on Deaf education globally.

<u>The 16th to 18th Century</u>

The roots of Deaf education can be traced back to 16th-century Spain, where religious practitioners initiated efforts to educate deaf children. Particularly noteworthy is the Benedictine monk Pedro Ponce de León (1508-1584), renowned for his work with deaf children from Spanish aristocratic families. While specific details of his methods are not well-documented, it is speculated that he primarily used fingerspelling for communication.[17] Ponce de León gained prominence after successfully tutoring deaf pupils from the noble Velasco family, demonstrating their ability to learn reading, writing, and various academic subjects. During the 16th century, a time when Deaf individuals were often considered incapable of being

[17] The first known manual alphabet is found in the writings of Pablo Bonet (1573-1633), particularly in *Reducción de las Letras y Arte para Enseñar a Hablar a los Mudos* ("Summary of the Letters and the Art of Teaching Speech to the Mute") which was published in 1620 and is considered the earliest book on Deaf education. There is evidence suggesting that Ponce de León originally developed the Spanish manual alphabet.

taught due to prevailing misconceptions about their mental abilities, Ponce de León's achievements stood out in Europe.

For centuries, educators guarded their methods for teaching deaf pupils. In the 18th Century, the French educator Charles-Michel de L'Épée (1712-1789) devoted himself to teaching deaf children. It is said that his interest in Deaf education sparked after encountering two deaf sisters who communicated through signs and gestures. The methods of de L'Épée drew from the natural Sign Language used by Deaf people in Paris and from the works on Deaf education by Spanish educator Pablo Bonnet (1573-1633). De L'Épée used the Spanish manual alphabet to expand the Sign Language used in Paris, creating a sort of "signed French" similar to modern spoken language-based sign systems (Moors, 2010). In 1760, de L'Épée founded the first free School for the Deaf, pioneering formalized education for the deaf in Europe.[18] This establishment laid the groundwork for structured pedagogical approaches tailored to the unique needs of deaf students. The teaching method centered on signed communication pioneered by de L'Épée spread across European countries alongside French Enlightenment ideas. However, de L'Épée's approach faced criticism, notably from the Prussian educator Samuel Heinicke (1727-1790). Heinicke regarded spoken language skills as essential for education. He strongly opposed de L'Épée's sign-based teaching methods and advocated for an oral-based approach focused on spoken language. Heinicke laid the foundation for *Oralism*, also known as the "German method", which would later become widespread in the Western world. The disagreements between Heinicke and de L'Épée laid the foundation for the ongoing debate between Sign Language and Oralism in education.

<u>The 19th Century</u>

Deaf education methodologies expanded globally thanks to the efforts of religious missionaries. In the United States, Canada, and South American nations, teaching methods were influenced by de L'Épée's approach, rooted in French Sign Language. In contrast, the Oralism method gained popularity in Britain and regions under the British Empire. A crucial milestone in Deaf education occurred in 1817 with the

[18] The School for the Deaf founded by Charles-Michel de L'Épée still exists to this day, and is known as *L'Institut National de Jeunes Sourds de Paris* ("National Institute for Deaf Children of Paris").

establishment of the *Connecticut Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb,*[19] the first American School for the Deaf, in Hartford, Connecticut. The institution, founded by Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet (1787-1851), enlisted the expertise of Deaf educator Laurent Clerc (1785-1869) from the Paris School for the Deaf.[20] Consequently, American Deaf education was profoundly influenced by the French manual method, promoting the use and development of Sign Language.[21] The introduction of residential Schools for the Deaf brought deaf people together and allowed them to learn shared Sign Language, forming the Deaf Community (Edwards, 2012).

The late 19th century was also a time of tension between advocates of different education methods, namely the French manual method and the German oralist method. In 1878, the *First International Congress on Education of the Deaf* was held in Paris and provided a platform for educators and advocates to exchange ideas and strategies for improving Deaf education. In 1880 *The Second International Congress on Education of the Deaf*, commonly known as the *Milan Congress*, brought about a controversial shift in approach. The *Congress* had an overwhelming majority of hearing advocates of Oralism, who emphasized the superiority of speech and lip-reading over Sign Language. The *Congress* agreed on making the German oralist method the official mode of instruction in Schools for the Deaf. This led to a widespread transition away from Sign Language in Deaf education, with most institutions adopting strictly oralist methods to teach deaf students and implementing bans against Sign Language.

<u>The 20th Century</u>

Over time, there was a gradual transition towards more visual approaches, and research by William Stokoe (1919-2000) on American Sign Language, especially his work *Sign Language Structure* (1960), played a crucial role in acknowledging the

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[19] The term “Dumb” is an outdated expression used to describe people who are mute. The term was used in expressions such as “Deaf and Dumb” to refer to Deaf people, based on the misconception that deaf people are also incapable of speech. Today, the term is widely regarded as derogatory. In this work, the term “dumb” is only used in the context of names, titles, and laws and their official translations from Japanese in accordance with the linguistic norms of the time.

[20] Gallaudet purposefully traveled to Europe where Deaf education methods were known to be more advanced, especially in Paris where the Paris School for the Deaf was founded by Charles-Michel de L'Épée had gained fame with its innovative methods.

[21] Notably, the impact of the French method is observable in American Sign Language (ASL) as well. When the American School for the Deaf was established in 1817, Clerc and Gallaudet integrated American signs into the French Sign Language (LSF) that Clerc initially employed for instruction. While ASL and LSF have evolved to be distinct languages, several signs in present-day ASL trace their origins directly to 19th Century LSF.

linguistic legitimacy of Sign Languages. This recognition helped overturn the previously negative attitudes towards Sign Language in educational settings. At the same time, it introduced a new sociological perspective of Deaf people as opposed to the medical perspective. In 1970, the *Total Communication* Method emerged in the United States, advocating for the use of multiple communication modalities, including Sign Language, speech, and written language, to cater to diverse learning styles among deaf students. By the 1980s, a significant paradigm shift occurred with the introduction of Bilingual Deaf education in the United States. Recognizing the value of both American Sign Language (ASL) and English in deaf students' academic and social development, this approach aimed to foster bilingualism and biculturalism within the Deaf community. During the 20th Century, the Special Education movement expanded and deaf students started to enroll in special classes at regular schools. The number of students attending Schools for the Deaf in the United States dropped dramatically during the 20th Century. Presently, most Deaf students tend to enroll in mainstream schools, attending either Special Classes or regular classes with the aid of an interpreter or special resource teachers.

The history of Deaf education reflects a dynamic interaction among cultural, linguistic, and pedagogical elements influenced by changing societal attitudes and educational philosophies. American Deaf education has played a significant role in shaping Deaf education globally. The trend of declining enrollment in Deaf education has spread across Western nations, leading to the gradual disappearance of Schools for the Deaf. Similar trends in Deaf education are becoming increasingly noticeable in Asian countries as well. The following section introduces the History and evolution of Deaf education in Japan, which has been significantly influenced by Western educational movements.

3.1.2 History of Special (Needs) Education and Deaf education in Japan

The following section presents an overview of the milestones of Japanese Deaf education, including changes in language education policies that were influenced by Deaf education movements in America and Europe.

Before the Meiji Restoration (-1868)

There is a lack of historical records regarding the circumstances of Deaf individuals during the medieval and early modern periods.[22] While some children, referred to as *Fukugo* (福子), "children of fortune",[23] were cherished and nurtured within their families and local communities, the representation of deaf people as homeless and beggars in the *Wakan Sansai Zue* (和漢三才図)[24] and in works such as haiku by Kobayashi Issa (1763–1828)[25] shows that many faced extremely dire situations (Nemoto and Ishihara, 2009).

『しぐるるや 飯椀たたく 唖乞食』

"Autumn rain shower ー Rattling the rice bowl— a deaf beggar's meal" (Free translation)

Kobayashi Issa (1819)

The history of Special Education in Japan can be traced back to the Edo Era (1603-1868). During this period, there is evidence of children with disabilities enrolling in temple schools called *Terakoya*, educational institutions for commoners before the Meiji Restoration (1868).[26] Buddhist temples originally provided education to the pupils of *Samurai* and noble families during the medieval period in Japan but opened to commoners in the 14th-15th Century. Under the Tokugawa Regime in the 18th century, Japan prospered with trade, and arts and literature also flourished. As social and commercial activities intensified, demand for literacy among commoners

[22] The medieval period of Japan is generally considered to stretch from the beginning of the Kamakura Period in 1185 to the beginning of the Tokunaga Shogunate in 1603. Key features of this period include the shift in power from nobility to warlords and the creation of a stratified feudal society. Although the term "medieval" originally related to European history, many historians have adopted it to describe the Feudal period of Japan, seeing similarities with medieval Europe.

[23] In ancient times, children born with disabilities were considered to be symbols of good fortune. It was believed that these children possessed exceptionally pure souls that had intentionally chosen a disabled body for reincarnation, signifying a close connection to the divine. In areas with whaling traditions, children with disabilities were thought to embody the spirits of whales and were highly valued by their local communities. However, as part of the modernization initiatives during the Meiji Restoration (1868), these customs and beliefs were dismissed as superstitions.

[24] The *Wakan Sansai Zue* (和漢三才図) is an illustrated encyclopedic work created in Japan during the Edo period. and published in 1712. It consists of three volumes and covers a wide range of subjects regarding every life, including history, geography, natural phenomena, plants, animals, and human anatomy. The title translates to "Sino-Japanese Illustrated Encylopedia".

[25] Kobayashi Issa (小林一茶) was a haiku poet known for his humorous verses, often employing straightforward language and showing empathy for the underprivileged. His works likely drew inspiration from the many challenges he faced during his lifetime.

[26] *Terakoya* (寺子屋) is a compound word deriving from the word *Tera* (寺) or Buddhist temples. The word is formed by the word *Terako* (寺子), a child who attends temple school, and the suffix -*Ya* (屋), in this case a house or a hut. Together, the word is typically translated as "Temple School".

as well as higher-end families grew. More places, such as temples and houses were converted into learning institutions. *Terakoya* became fairly popular around the country and grew considerably in number during the 19th century (Nagata, 1995). *Terakoya* had a high attendance rate, especially in big cities such as Edo (modern Tokyo), Osaka, and Nagoya.

Education in *Terakoya* focused on practical matters useful to the daily life of common people. Along with the standard subjects of reading, writing, and mathematics, students learned topics like geography, calligraphy, and letter writing. Deaf students were among those attending *Terakoya*. The teaching approach for Deaf students included displaying fingers to deaf students to teach mathematics and presenting common objects like iron kettles, tea bowls, and chopsticks while writing their names in characters and teaching vocabulary. The teaching style was likely influenced by Dutch *Ransho* (蘭書) works on Deaf education that circulated at the time (Sagi, 2018).[27]

Terakoya were dismantled after the Meiji Restoration (1868), when education was made compulsory under public institutions, with the Educational System called *Gakusei* (学制) becoming effective in 1872. The *Gakusei* aimed to modernize the education system and provide all citizens with a basis of literacy. However, education was not made compulsory for children with disabilities. Some Deaf and Blind children thus transitioned to private institutions made specifically for them, which were founded toward the end of the 19th Century.

From the Meiji Restoration to World War II (1868-1945)

The first Institution for special education in Japan - the *Kyoto Institute for the Blind and Mute* (京都盲唖院) - was founded by Tashiro Furukawa (1845-1907) in the Kamigyo-ward of Kyoto in 1878 and provided education for children with visual and

[27] During the Edo era (1603–1868), Japan had a policy of isolation known as *Sakoku* (鎖国), which restricted foreign trade and contact. However, the Dutch were one of the few Westerners permitted to trade with Japan through the port of Nagasaki. Japanese scholars and intellectuals began to study Dutch texts, mainly obtained through the Dutch trading post in Dejima. The term *Rangaku* (蘭学) refers to the study of Dutch learning or Western science that occurred in Japan during that period. It is a compound word made from *Ran* (蘭), "Dutch," and *Gaku* (学), meaning "learning" or "study"). *Ransho* (蘭書) are books and documents that were imported from the Netherlands through trade. These books were written in Dutch and covered various subjects, including science, medicine, and technology. Japanese scholars translated Dutch works into Japanese, making them accessible to a wider audience. The study of *Rangaku* and *Ransho* played a crucial role in introducing Western knowledge and technology to Japan during a time when the country was largely isolated from the rest of the world. This exchange of information eventually contributed to the modernization of Japan during the Meiji Restoration in the late 19th century.

hearing disabilities.[28] Furukawa is often likened to de L'Épée and Gallaudet for his significant contribution to shaping Deaf education and Sign Language in Japan. The institute later became a public prefectural school the following year as part of the school development efforts implemented by the Mayor of Kyoto at the time, Masanao Makimura (1834–1896). Shortly after, the *Training Institute for the Blind and Mute* (東京訓盲唖院) opened in Tsukiji ward, Tokyo, in 1884. The foundation of the Tokyo Institute was encouraged by Henry Faulds (1843–1930),[29] an English physician and missionary, and the *Rakuzen Kai* (楽善会),[30] a charitable society that promoted education for Deaf and Blind children. Subsequently, Institutions for the Deaf and Blind opened all over the country and grew greatly in number, especially toward the end of the 19th century.

Although the *Kyoto Institute for the Blind and Deaf-Mute* partially benefited from public funding, it primarily depended on charitable contributions for its operations. Consequently, it encountered financial challenges, and in 1933 it was transferred to city management and renamed the *Kyoto City Institute for the Blind and Mute* (京都市盲唖院). Similarly, the *Tokyo Training Institute for the Blind and Mute* operated as a charitable initiative by the *Rakuzen Kai* and relied solely on donations. After facing economic difficulties in the 1920s, the organization requested the school to be placed under the direct control of the Ministry of Education. The request was approved, and the school became public in 1929. The *Rakuzen Kai* dissolved shortly after.

In an effort to ease the financial challenges experienced by the Schools for the Blind and Deaf, which heavily depended on donations, the government formulated an order to regulate these schools and offer financial subsidies. In 1923, the *Law for the Schools of the Blind and Deaf-Mute* (盲学校及聾唖学校令) was enacted. With the

[28] At the time, deaf people in Japan were often referred to as Oshi (唖), "mute". The term was based on the common misconception that Deaf people cannot produce sounds. Therefore, Schools of the time addressed to Blind and Deaf students were called Mōain (盲唖院), "Institute for the Blind and mute". The term to address Deaf individuals later evolved into Roa (聾唖), "Deaf and mute", which is based on the same misconception and the Japanese equivalent of "Deaf and Dumb".

[29] Henry Faulds was a Scottish physician and Presbyterian missionary. He founded the first English Mission in Japan in 1874, where he taught medicine to Japanese students. He was among the founders of the Rakuzen Kai and helped found the Tokyo Institute for the Blind and Mute.

[30] The Rakuzen Kai (楽善会) was an organization formed by influential figures in Tokyo during the Meiji era, aiming to support and promote the establishment of educational institutions for the Blind and Deaf. Notable people who belonged to the organization were missionary Henry Faulds (18431930) and educator Nakamura Masanao (1832 1891).

number of private and public schools growing, there was a lack of guidelines regarding establishment and teacher qualifications. In 1934, provisions regarding the establishment and abolition of schools for the Blind and Deaf were established for the first time in the *Revised Elementary School Law* (改正小学校令). Subsequently, in November of the following year, the *Ministerial Ordinance No. 18* (省令第十八号) was issued, which outlined qualifications, appointments, dismissals, and instructional matters for teachers. This provided the first legal framework for Blind and Deaf education institutions.

During the Meiji era, there was a rise in the number of schools catering to the Blind and Deaf, as well as an increasing enrollment of students in these institutions. However, most of these newly established schools were small private institutions. This initiated an argument against the disadvantage of educating students with different disabilities in one school, as they require different educational methods. With the *Law for the Schools of the Blind and Deaf-Mute* (1923), Schools for the Deaf and Blind also transformed into distinct institutions, catering specifically to Blind Students and Deaf students, respectively.

After the Milan Congress in 1880, which advocated for the oral method as the preferred educational approach for deaf students, many countries transitioned from Sign Language-based education to oralist practices. In Japan, this shift occurred from the late Taishō era (1912-1926) onwards with a change in government education policies. Following directions issued by the Ministry of Education during the *National School for Deaf Principals' Conference* (全国聾学校校長会) in 1933, all National Schools for the Deaf were instructed to prioritize oral education, leading to the nationwide prohibition of Sign Language use.[31] Despite this ban, children continued to communicate using Sign Language during breaks and other discreet times to avoid detection by teachers. Consequently, Japanese Sign Language likely persisted within schools and dormitories by being transmitted among students (Nakazawa, 2022).

[31] The Sign Language ban was lifted in 1993 with a report from the *Ministry of Education Conference of Specialists* (文部省専門家会議).

From the Post-war Period to the Present (1945-2021)

The mid-Shōwa (1926-1989) years saw a major turning point in Japanese Deaf education. The number of students enrolling in Schools for the Deaf remained low until the post-war period. Until then, students with disabilities had been exempted from the education system. However, education for children with vision and hearing disabilities in Schools for the Blind and for the Deaf became compulsory in 1947. At the same time, Schools catering to the needs of Deaf students, which were known as *rōagakkō* (聾唖学校), or “Schools for the Deaf-Mute”, changed their name to *rōgakkō* (聾学校), or “Schools for the Deaf”. The number of students rose steadily, reaching its peak in 1954. After that, mainstream schools began incorporating *Special Classes*, leading to an increased enrollment of students with disabilities in regular schools. The growing popularity of hearing aids during this period also allowed deaf students to participate to some extent in hearing classrooms. Consequently, the number of students enrolled in Schools for the Deaf, along with the number of schools and school sections, started decreasing around this time.

In the late 1990s, guidelines were introduced by the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare (MHLW) with the goal of preventing deafness and its implications. The collaboration between the MHLW and the MEXT initiated medical efforts to support deaf/HoH children and their families through the implementation of *Early Detection and Early Intervention* (早期診断・早期療育) for hearing disabilities. During this period, research on Newborn Hearing Screening (NHS) and cochlear implantation surgery began in Japan. NHS, which was introduced at the end of the 20th century and rapidly expanded in the 21st century, enabled ultra-early detection, diagnosis, and intervention for hearing disabilities in newborns. In 1985, the first multi-channel cochlear implant surgery in Japan was performed, and since its approval for pediatric use in 1994, cochlear implantation utilization rates have grown among young children with severe hearing loss.

In 2007, the *Partial Amendment to the School Education Act* brought about a significant change in the Special education system. The Special Education (特殊教育) system up to 2006 included rōgakkō (聾学校), “Schools for the Deaf”, mōgakkō (盲学校), “Schools for the Blind”, and yōgogakkō (養護学校). “Special Needs Schools for the Intellectually Disabled, the Physically Disabled and the Health Impaired”, strictly dividing between the type of disabilities. The *Partial Amendment* grouped all

the existing institution under a new Special Needs Education (特別支援教育) system. Schools that catered to the needs of students with disabilities were included under the broader category of *tokubetsu shien gakkō* (特別支援学校), or “Schools for Special Needs Education*”*. As a result, what was once known as *Rōgakkō* is now officially referred to as *tokubetsu shien gakkō - chōkaku shōgai* (特別支援学校-聴覚障害), which translates to "Schools for Special Needs Education (hearing disability)".[32] The shift to the Schools for Special Needs Education system involved a change in terminology and introduced two significant structural changes to the landscape of Deaf education in Japan. Firstly, this transition led to the establishment of schools specifically tailored for students with multiple disabilities, including hearing loss. Secondly, it brought about the creation of *Resource Rooms*(通級指導教室) within mainstream schools. *Resource Rooms* are classrooms where students with disabilities can receive occasional special support guidance focusing on their specific disability while participating in regular classes alongside their hearing peers for most of their education. This initiative represents a pivotal step by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) toward an "integration" approach to the education of students with disabilities. The option of attending mainstream schools while receiving special support guidance in *Resource Rooms* gained popularity among deaf students with sufficient residual hearing, allowing them to participate in most regular classes.

Following pressure from Deaf activists in the 1990s, Schools for the Deaf began experimenting with Sign Language elements as a more effective way of teaching Deaf students. Sign Language was recognized as a communication method in Deaf education by the Ministry of Education in 1993, officially ending the Sign Language ban in Schools for the Deaf (Kimura and Ichida, 1995). Toward the end of the 20th Century, *Total Communication* and Bilingual Education theories from the United States became popular in Japan. By 2000, Total Communication was officially

[32] Japanese Schools for the Deaf after 2007 are still informally called *rōgakkō* by many members of the Deaf community and Deaf studies researchers. The term *rōgakkō* holds special significance because members of the Deaf community address themselves as *rōsha (ろう者) or “Deaf person”*, and not *chōkakushogaisha* (聴覚障害者) or “person with a hearing disability”. The term *Rō* (Deaf) refers to the social dimension of Deafhood, not as a disability but as a shared experience of Deaf people as a cultural and linguistic minority. The same *Rō* can be found in words such as *Rōbunka* (ろう文化), “Deaf culture”, *rōbungaku* (ろう文学), “Deaf literature”, etc. While the term *rōgakkō is a* compound of the words *rō* (Deaf) and *gakkō* (school), the term *rokubetsu shien gakkō - chōkaku Shōgai* stresses the medical aspect of deafness as a hearing disability.

included in the MEXT Deaf education curriculums (Hayashi and Tobin, 2014) and is used as the main communication method in Schools for the Deaf to this day. Expressing dissatisfaction with the insufficient emphasis on Sign Language in education, a group of Deaf activists established the *Meisei gakuen* School for the Deaf in Shinagawa City, Tokyo (2008). *Meisei gakuen* holds the distinction of being the first (and currently the only) Bilingual-Bicultural School for the Deaf in Japan. Additionally, Bilingual education is provided in another public institution, the Hokkaido Sapporo School for the Deaf, which incorporates a Japanese Sign Language program alongside its standard Total Communication curriculum.

Table 4

Milestones in the History of Japanese Deaf Education

Japanese Era	Date	Occurrence
Edo Era (1603–1867)	Unknown	Education for Deaf children and children with disabilities is offered in *Terakoya* (temple schools).
Meiji Era (1868–1912)	1878	The first Institution for Special Education, the *Kyoto Institute for the Blind and Mute* (京都盲唖院), opens in Kyoto.
	1884	The *Tokyo Training Institute for the Blind and Mute* opens in Tokyo.
Shōwa Era (1926–1989)	1923	The *Law for the Schools of the Blind and Deaf-Mute* is enacted, dividing Schools for the Blind and for the Deaf.
	1933	Strictly oralist methods are adopted in Schools for the Deaf following the *Milan Congress.* A Sign Language ban in educational settings i.e., enacted.
	1947	Education for Blind and Deaf students becomes compulsory.
	1954	Schools for the Deaf reach peak enrollment rate
Heisei Era (1989–2019)	1993	Sign Language is recognized as a communication tool in Schools for the Deaf. The Sign Language ban is lifted.
	2007	the *Partial Amendment to the School Education Act* is enacted. *Special education* transitions to *Special Needs education*. Schools for the Deaf transition under *Schools for Special Needs Education.*
	2008	*Meisei gakuen*, the first Bilingual-Bicultural School for the Deaf in Japan, opens in Tokyo.

3.1.3 Organization of Schools for the Deaf Following the Partial Amendment to the School Education Act (2007)

To foster independence and social participation of children with disabilities, efforts are made to establish a diverse range of learning environments to provide the most appropriate instruction tailored to each individual's educational needs. These include regular classrooms, *Resource Rooms*, *Special Classes*, and *Schools for Special Needs Education.* Although efforts are made to encourage interaction[33] between students with and without disabilities in mainstream settings, Schools for Special Needs education remain the recommended option in the case of severe disabilities.

The current legislation concerning Deaf education, which is primarily based on the *Partial Amendment to the School Education Act* (2007), places Schools for the Deaf (聴覚障害) under *Schools for Special Needs Education* alongside Schools for the Blind (視覚障害), Schools for the Intellectually Disabled (知覚障害), Schools for the Physically Disabled (肢体不自由) and Schools for the Health Impaired (病弱・身体虚弱). *Schools for Special Needs Education* offer educational programs equivalent to those in kindergarten, elementary, middle, or high schools for children with disabilities. Additionally, they focus on teaching how to overcome challenges in learning or daily life that may arise because of disabilities, aiming to foster independence. Alongside standard educational curriculums, Schools for the Deaf focus on subjects such as vocational training and Japanese language to enhance spoken language skills, and training students' residual hearing and pronunciation abilities. Schools are divided between Schools that address students with single disabilities and Schools that address multiple disabilities. Like regular schools and other Schools for Special Needs Education, Schools for the Deaf are divided into *National* (国立), *Public* (公立), and *Private* (私立) schools.

Public schools are managed by prefectures, cities, and towns. These are typically attended by children of the local area. Admission doesn't require entrance exams, and there are no tuition fees. *National schools* are operated by the government and are typically connected from elementary schools to junior high schools. While there are no tuition fees, admission generally involves taking an entrance exam. *Private schools* are *Incorporated Educational Institutions* (学校法人) founded and managed

[33] Examples of interactions and collaborative learning activities in mainstream educational settings include joint school events, club activities, sports and outdoor activities, volunteer activities, exchanging correspondence, exchanging artworks, and utilizing computers and information networks to enhance communication.

by independent individuals. Admission typically requires passing an entrance exam, and tuition fees tend to be higher.
Based on the *School Education Act* (1964), Public schools and National schools (including those for Special Needs education) adopt a national curriculum set by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). The curriculum is revised every 10 years. On the other hand, Private schools have more flexibility in curriculum and decision-making. For this reason, they are more likely to introduce unique innovations in their teaching practices. This is the case of the *Meisei gakuen* School for the Deaf, a private institution that does not adopt the MEXT-endorsed Total communication approach and instead introduced a Bilingual-Bicultural educational model.

In the case of hearing disabilities, attendance at Schools for Special Needs Education is recommended for students with severe to profound hearing loss who have difficulties communicating even with the help of hearing aids. Students with sufficient residual hearing, commonly referred to as hard of hearing (HoH) or *nanchō* (難聴) in Japanese, qualify to receive education in *Special Classes* or mainstream classrooms with Special Needs support in *Resource Rooms*, as illustrated in the *Notification on the integrated and early-stage support of elementary, junior high, and high school students with disability* (2013).
Tokubetsu shien gakkyū (特別支援学級), or “Special Classes”, are separated classrooms implemented in mainstream primary and junior high schools. In the case of students who are deaf, Special Classes are suggested for students who have mild to severe hearing disabilities and experience difficulty hearing even with the help of hearing aids. Special support classrooms share the same educational objectives as regular classrooms but implement a specialized curriculum focusing on enhancing Japanese speaking and listening skills. While learning occurs primarily in a separate space, students are encouraged to interact with their peers in mainstream classrooms.
Deaf and HoH students with sufficient residual hearing can attend mainstream schools and receive most of their education in regular classrooms alongside hearing peers. However, in specific instances, students may benefit from Special Needs academic guidance in *Tsūkyū Shidō Kyōshitsu* (通級指導教室) or “Resource Rooms”. The guidance strongly focuses on practicing the students’ Japanese language skills

(speaking and listening). Students who have difficulties in hearing even with the help of hearing aids but can generally participate in mainstream classrooms are encouraged to join resource rooms. Additionally, there are a number of deaf and HoH students who join regular classes without receiving Special Needs support. The number of these students is difficult to estimate as they are not considered in the annual Basic School Survey conducted by the MEXT. Students attending regular classrooms can benefit from Reasonable accommodations, which typically include signing, writing, communication boards, and communicating slowly (McGuire, 2020).[34]

3.2 Deaf Education and Sign Language in Japan

This paragraph introduces the main language education theories that have shaped formal Deaf education in Japan throughout the years. The first section presents the historical transition from the use of Sign Language to the rise of Oralism. The influence of Western Deaf education trends is highlighted, as well as the societal and nationalist context that led to the marginalization of Sign Language in 1933. The second section then focuses on the reintroduction of Sign Language elements and the shift to *Total Communication*. The adaptation of this approach in Japan and the controversy surrounding its effectiveness are discussed. Lastly, the Bilingual-Bimodal approach is introduced. Drawing from research on bilingualism's positive effects on cognitive development and language acquisition, this approach aims to establish a foundation in Sign Language before transitioning to spoken language education. The practical implementation of the Bilingual method in Japan is further discussed in section 2.3.

[34] Reasonable accommodation refers to adjustments or modifications made by employers, educational institutions, or service providers to accommodate individuals with disabilities. The accommodation is called “reasonable” because it should be feasible for the provider and not result in undue hardships. The 2016 Act for Eliminating Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (障害者差別解消法) prohibits unfair discriminatory treatment by governments and private entities based on disability and requires that the government-related agencies provide Reasonable accommodations (合理的な配慮) to enable the elimination of social barriers as long as the burden is not excessive.

3.2.1 Evolution of Deaf Education Policies in Japan: From Sign Language to Oralism and Back

From the establishment of the *Kyoto School for the Blind and Mute* in 1878 until the early 1920s, Sign Language was employed as the main educational language. However, with the introduction of trends in Deaf education from Western countries following the Milan Congress of 1880, Oralism became rapidly adopted from the 1920s onwards. Oralist teaching methods focus on the development of speaking and lip reading skills. Although Oralism involves various teaching methods, manual elements such as fingerspelling and signs are generally avoided to maximize exposure to spoken language. In 1925, the *Japan Oralism Propagation Association* (日本聾口話普及会) was founded, initiating a movement to strictly implement *Pure Oralism* (純粋口話法), which emphasized the superiority of speech and strongly denied Sign Language in education (Kwak, 2017). This advocacy for Oralism quickly gained support in the country. In 1933, Minister of Education Ichiro Hatoyama (1883 1959), who attended the *National Conference of Principals of Schools for the Blind and Deaf*, stated:

「全国盲唖学校においては、聾児の日本人たる以上国語の理解は大切であり、国民思想涵養のためにも全国聾唖学校では口話教育に奮励努力せよ。」

In schools for the blind and deaf nationwide, understanding the national language is crucial for deaf students as Japanese citizens. Therefore, all schools for the Deaf and Mute nationwide should strive for oral education to cultivate national ideological understanding. (Free translation)

Extract of a Speech by Ichiro Hatoyama (1933), reported in JFD (2022)

Following Hatoyama's endorsement of oral education for the Deaf in 1933 at the National Conference of Deaf School Principals, Oralism became the official policy of Deaf education. As a result, Sign Language was practically banned from Schools for the Deaf.

As nationalist ideologies started circulating in Japan in the early 20th century, education and language policies aimed at promoting the idea of a homogeneous Japanese identity came into effect. This resulted in the exclusion and marginalization

of minority languages in favor of standard Japanese.[35] Kawamoto Unosuke (1888–1960), one of the founders of the *Japan Oralism Propagation Association*, strongly advocated for the oralist method, arguing that language education should give Deaf individuals a solid foundation as citizens, individuals, and members of society (Kawamoto, 1927). Thus, Oralism was not only seen as a way to integrate Deaf children into society but also as a means of national language education to foster citizenship and identity as “Japanese”. In contrast, Sign Language was viewed as foreign and incomprehensible compared to Japanese, leading to its classification as a "lesser language." Kawamoto perceived Japanese Sign Language as inadequate for expressing the values necessary for Japanese citizenship because it did not align with the national language. He emphasized the auxiliary role of Sign Language in spoken language instruction rather than treating it as equal (Kwak, 2017). Similar to Western countries, Japan experienced minimal changes in Deaf education methodologies until the latter half of the 20th century. After the *Total Communication* approach and Bilingualism education theory started to spread in the West, Sign Language was re-introduced in Schools for the Deaf as a communication method in 1993 to ensure smoother communication between students and teachers, *de facto* ending the Sign Language ban. Oralist methods have recently regained popularity because of the advancements in hearing aid technology and the growing availability of cochlear implants, which have enabled deaf children to utilize their residual hearing more effectively and participate to some extent in mainstream educational settings (Moores, 2010).

3.2.2 The Total Communication Approach to Language Education: Origins and Controversies

Total Communication is a communication approach to teaching deaf children that was developed in the United States during the 1970s and utilizes a combination of lipreading, fingerspelling, cued speech, and written language to teach spoken language (Evans, 1982). In the case of Deaf education in Japan, elements from JSL and Signed Japanese, as well as written Japanese, are incorporated into the *Total*

[35] During the Meiji period government policies aimed at standardizing the Japanese language by suppressing regional dialects where implemented. For example, Ryukyuan languages (spoken in what is now know as the Okinawa prefecture, which was annexed by Japan in the 1870s) were banned from public education with the Dialect Ban of 1907. In 1931, the Movement for the Enforcement of Normal Language further restricted the sue of dialects and minority languages.

Communication approach to teach spoken Japanese. From the late Shōwa era to the early Heisei era, practical experiments introducing Sign Language elements in classes began in schools. The results of introducing Sign Language included smoother communication and more reliable transmission of information. In 1993, Sign Language MEXT Deaf education specialists began endorsing the *Total Communication* approach in the 1990s, and it was officially included in curriculums in 2000 (Hayashi and Tobin, 2014). However, it evolved into indistinguishable from simultaneous communication and cued speech.

Despite incorporating elements of Sign Language, such as finger spelling and signs, *Total Communication* is an approach that is fundamentally rooted in spoken language and oralist practices (Kimura and Ichida, 2005). In Japan, the approach heavily relies on Simultaneous Communication (sim-com), a communication strategy that uses some JSL vocabulary to visually express spoken Japanese and teach it to deaf students. In sim-com, words and parts of speech are signed in a simplified way while speaking in Japanese. It is in many ways similar to cued speech and manually coded Japanese. Japanese and JSL differ not only in modality but also in grammar structure and vocabulary. This makes it impossible to speak the two languages at the same time. Consequently, students in schools that employ *Total Communication* are exposed to a kind of pidgin that lacks the complexity and expressive qualities found in natural languages such as Sign Language and spoken Japanese (Nakamura, 2006). *Total Communication* is an approach to Deaf education that sparks controversy, especially among advocates of Sign Language and Deaf activists. One common criticism is that children taught using *Total Communication* may not be exposed to any natural language, leading to significant implications for language acquisition and cognitive development (Ladd, 2003).

3.2.3 The Bilingual-Bimodal Approach: Fostering Language Development and Deaf Identity

A Bilingual approach ensures that deaf children learn Sign Language as their primary language, acknowledging the visual modality as the most natural means for them to acquire language. Bilingualism involving Sign Language differs from that of spoken languages because it involves different modalities as well as different languages. Sign Language has a visual input and a manual output, whereas spoken languages use an auditory input and a vocal output. Thus, users of both Sign

Language and spoken/written language are not only Bilingual but also bimodal (Emmorey et al. 2005). By establishing an environment where Sign Language is the first language learned, this approach aims to foster language and cognitive development. It then expands on this basis to teach reading and writing in spoken language as a secondary language. Pioneering implementations of this approach have been progressing since the 1980s in Scandinavian countries and since the 1990s in the United States (Abe, 2014).

Peal and Lambert's (1962) research showed that Bilingual individuals tend to perform better in cognitive tasks than monolinguals, challenging the prevailing notion that bilingualism negatively affects cognitive development and first language acquisition, which persisted until the 20th century. Particularly in the field of Deaf education, there was a longstanding belief that acquiring Sign Language might hinder spoken language acquisition (Kanazawa, 2000). However, contemporary studies on language acquisition suggest that acquiring Sign Language could enhance spoken language acquisition in Deaf individuals instead. The theoretical basis underlying the Bilingual Approach is the *Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis* and the *Common Underlying Proficiency* model advocated by Cummins (1981). Cummin's findings show that there is a shared cognitive and linguistic foundation for language skills across different languages, suggesting that proficiency in one language leads to positively influencing proficiency in another. Supporters of bilingualism in Deaf education argue that the acquisition of Sign Language as the first language, the only language Deaf children can naturally fully acquire, is crucial for their language and cognitive development and provides a solid foundation for transferring skills to learning a spoken language (Hermans et al., 2010). Although it has been argued that because of the lack of written form Sign Language skills may not transfer to literacy in a spoken language (Mayer and Wells, 1996), several studies found a significant correlation between proficiency in American Sign Language (ASL) and English reading comprehension ability (Strong and Prinz, 1997; Chamberlain and Mayberry, 2000; Padden and Ramsey, 2000). In Japan, studies examining the interdependence between JSL and Japanese have argued that students who are proficient in Sign Language tend to have better reading comprehension skills (Samizu, 1988; Abe, 2011).

In Japan, the prevailing method for teaching Deaf children to acquire spoken

language through early educational interventions has remained dominant to this day. Almost all public deaf schools in Japan practice this conventional auditory-oral method. Since the establishment of the first deaf school in Kyoto in 1887, where hearing impairment education began in Japan, Sign Language, except for the early years, has been prohibited due to the belief that it hinders the acquisition of spoken language. However, in recent years, there has been an increase in Schools for the Deaf that, while fundamentally employing an oral method, also incorporate Sign Language elements into education. However, these typically do not involve proper JSL but *nihongo taio shuwa* (Signed Japanese or manually coded Japanese), a communication system that visually represents spoken Japanese and is not a natural language (Abe, 2014). The first private School for the Deaf in Japan to adopt a Bilingual Approach was the *Meisei gakuen* School for the Deaf (2008). The school claims to follow a Bilingual-Bicultural education method that is aimed at fostering Deaf identity in a Sign Language environment.

3.3 The *Meisei Gakuen* School for the Deaf

This paragraph discusses the background and educational characteristics of *Meisei gakuen* (明晴学園), a private School for the Deaf based in Shinagawa, Tokyo, that practices Bilingual-Bicultural education. The aim of *Meisei gakuen* is to provide immersive Sign Language education for Deaf Children. In other words, *Meisei gakuen* aims to facilitate the acquisition of Japanese Sign Language for deaf or hard-of-hearing children by providing an environment conducive to learning JSL in all educational activities. Previous research discussing the unique features of *Meisei gakuen* has focused on the characteristics of Bilingual Deaf education in JSL and written Japanese (Oka, 2011; Kaya, 2012; Saito, 2016) and strategies utilized in JSL classroom discourse (Abe, 2013). Additionally, *Meisei gakuen* has been included in anthropological research comparing Implicit pedagogical practices in preschool divisions of Schools for the Deaf and hearing schools (Hayashi and Tobin, 2014). The first section examines the process that brought to the establishment of *Meisei gakuen* as a private School for the Deaf with considerable freedom in deciding it own teaching practices. Then, the structure of *Meisei gakuen* and its unique features are presented. Lastly, the Bilingual-Bicultural education model utilized by *Meisei gakuen*

and the educational objectives of the School are explained.

3.3.1 Establishment of Meisei Gakuen

In 1999, the Free School *Tatsu no ko gakuen* (龍の子学園) was established in Tokyo.[36] It was born as a space for Deaf children to gather and enjoy various activities in Sign Language, such as recreational activities, discussions, and studying. The school advocated introducing Sign Language in educational environments instead of focusing solely on spoken Japanese. After efforts to provide official Sign Language education for Deaf children, the *Tatsu no ko gakuen* eventually evolved into the private institution *Meisei gakuen,* the first and only Bilingual-Bicultural School for the Deaf in Japan.

Meisei gakuen became operational as a Bilingual School for the Deaf in April 2008 after receiving certification as a *Sign Language and Japanese Bilingual Deaf education special zone* (手話と書記日本語によるバイリンガルろう教育特区) under the 2007 *Structural reform special zone plan* (構造改革特別区域計画). This certification was facilitated by the *Education special zone* framework established under the *Structural Reform Special Zones Act* (2002) which allowed local governments to implement projects in various fields, including welfare and education, to revitalize their regions.[37] Until then, school establishment was only permitted for the national government, local governments, and (private) legally incorporated educational institutions based on the *School Education Act*. The *Structural Reform Special Zones Act* allowed, among others, Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs) to establish schools. In 2003, the *Bilingual-Bicultural Deaf Education Center* received NPO certification and, together with the *Tatsu no Ko Gakuen,* submitted a proposal for *Sign Language education for Deaf children* (「ろう児へ の手話教育」)to establish an incorporated educational institution utilizing the *Structural Reform Special Zone* system. In 2005, the final proposal was accepted, and efforts were made to find municipalities to implement the special zone. Subsequently, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government submitted the *Bilingual Deaf Education Special Zone* (「バイリンガルろう教育特区」) application to the Cabinet Office in 2007 and received a Special Zone certification in

[36] *Free Schools* (フリースクール) are educational institutions where children who don't attend traditional schools due to various reasons such as school refusal, social withdrawal, mild developmental disorders, physical disabilities, or intellectual disabilities can continue their education. These institutions are typically operated by individuals, nonprofit organizations, or volunteer groups.

[37] Among the structural reform special zones based on the *Structural Reform Special Zones Act* (2002), those related to education are called *Education Special Zones.*

March of the same year (Kwak, 2017). As a special school operating under the Structural Reform Special Zone Act, *Meisei gakuen* enjoys the same legal status and benefits as regular schools classified as *Article 1 Schools* (第1条校). These benefits include legal subsidies and tax exemptions. This grants *Meisei gakuen* relatively stable management, unlike other institutions such as Bilingual or international schools, or ethnic institutions like Korean Schools, which fall under the category of *Miscellaneous Schools* (各種学校). Miscellaneous schools receive smaller legal subsidies, and students often encounter difficulties when attempting to enroll in higher education institutions.

3.3.2 Structure of Meisei Gakuen and Unique Educational Approach to Bilingualism

Meisei gakuen's academic structure includes three departments: the kindergarten section (ages 3 to 5), the elementary school section (ages 6 to 12), and the middle school section (ages 13 to 15). Additionally, there is an infant class for deaf children aged 0 to 2. Approximately half of the teachers at *Meisei gakuen* are Deaf, and almost all teachers are proficient in Japanese Sign Language. *Meisei gakuen* provides consistent education from the kindergarten section to the middle school section. According to Kwak (2017), there were a total of 57 students enrolled in 2015, and the number has grown to 70 as of April 2023. According to inquiries made with *Meisei Gakuen* officials as of May 2015, it is reported that just over 20% of children enrolled are native Sign Language users with Deaf parents, while 80% of the children were born in hearing families and have acquired Sign Language through the school's immersive Sign Language education program. The vast majority of children did not use cochlear implants. All activities at *Meisei gakuen* are conducted through a visual modality. In terms of facilities, flashlights indicating the beginning and end of classes and alarms with colors or lights are installed in classrooms and corridors. Monitors are also installed in classrooms and corridors, which are less common in regular schools but frequently seen in deaf schools. There are no walls between classrooms and corridors. Large mirrors are installed in the handwashing area to facilitate Sign Language visibility. As for language education, teaching is mostly conducted in Japanese Sign Language to provide an immersive learning environment for Deaf children. In the infant class, parents and caregivers can also learn Sign Language and learn how to communicate with their Deaf children in a way that will foster their language skills. Classes, events, administrative tasks, and parent

meetings are conducted using Sign Language. For visitors who do not know Sign Language, interpretation is usually provided by hearing faculty members (Kwak, 2017). Additionally, Meisei gakuen offers Sign Language Salons (similar to conversation clubs) and Sign Language classes for Parents and caregivers of Deaf children.

2.3.3 Bilingual-Bicultural Educational Activities at Meisei gakuen

The educational objectives concerning the Bilingual and Bicultural education of *Meisei gakuen* are stated as follows:

「①第一言語（母語）として日本手話、第二言語として書記日本語を身につけ、日本手話と書記日本語を使用するバイリンガルとして育成する。」
To acquire Japanese Sign Language as the first language (native language) and written Japanese as the second language, nurturing individuals who use Japanese Sign Language and written Japanese as bilinguals. (Free translation)

「②ろう者としてのアイデンティティ（自己肯定感）を育成するとともに、聴文化の理解と尊重する態度を身につける。」
To foster a sense of identity (self-affirmation) as a Deaf person and to develop an attitude of understanding and respect for hearing culture. (Free translation)

Meisei gakuen (n.d.)

Meisei gakuen's Bilingual education program focuses on the acquisition of two languages: Japanese Sign Language (JSL) and Japanese. Japanese is taught solely in its written form, emphasizing reading and writing skills rather than listening and speaking. *Meisei gakuen*'s learning environment aims to make Deaf children acquire Japanese Sign Language as a first language. Children then learn Japanese as a second language after having acquired a strong foundation in Sign Language. As noted by *Meisei gakuen*, children may initially lag in Japanese language proficiency. However, it is important for them to grow up and learn in a language they can fully understand "without stress", and they will eventually catch up with their writing and reading skills. Unlike other minority languages, Sign Language is rarely spoken in the home because most Deaf children are born into hearing families. For this reason,

Meisei gakuen strives to create a fully Sign-Language-speaking environment for children to naturally acquire Japanese Sign Language.

One of the unique features of *Meisei gakuen* is that Japanese is taught as a second language, similar to how foreign languages (e.g. English) are taught in mainstream schools. In mainstream schools, the subject typically referred to as "Japanese Language" is known as *kokugo* (国語), translating to "National Language." In Japanese, *kokugo* commonly denotes the language spoken by Japanese people. On the other hand, the language itself (on the same level as English, French, German, etc.), particularly when learned or spoken by foreign individuals, is referred to as *nihongo* (日本語), meaning "Japanese Language." As a special school, *Meisei gakuen* implements unique educational programs that do not necessarily adhere to the MEXT-endorsed curriculum guidelines. Instead of the subject of *kokugo,* the school has introduced the subjects of *shuwa* (手話), "Sign Language", and *nihongo* (日本語), "Japanese Language." The subject of Sign Language holds the same rank as *kokugo* in mainstream schools. In *nihongo* classes, emphasis is placed on reading and writing without the use of speech. With this unique perspective, *Meisei gakuen* underscores that Japanese is a second language for deaf children, their native language being Japanese Sign Language.

With regards to Bicultural education, *Meisei gakuen* aims to teach Deaf culture and Sign Language to foster a sense of identity as *rōsha* (ろう者), "Deaf people" as well as hearing culture. By doing so, children can become active participants in hearing society as self-confident Deaf individuals. *Meisei gakuen*'s approach to Deaf education through Japanese Sign Language embraces Deaf children for who they are and emphasizes the content of learning and the individual development of children over overcoming challenges arising from disabilities.

4. Trends of Enrollment Decline in Schools for the Deaf and Contributing Factors (2007-2021)

This chapter aims to analyze the state of Deaf education in Japan by examining enrollment trends in Schools for the Deaf and factors contributing to its decline. Previous studies conducted by Iwata (2012) and Funakoshi et al. (2020) suggest that the decrease in enrollment at Schools for the Deaf can be attributed to advancements in medical technology, particularly the widespread use of hearing aids and cochlear implants, enabling more deaf individuals to participate in hearing environments. Additionally, there has been a governmental emphasis, led by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT), on mainstreaming and integrating deaf students into regular education settings. However, anthropological research on the experience of deaf students in mainstream settings by McGuire (2020) and in Schools for the Deaf by Nakamura (2003, 2006) suggest that there may be additional factors at play. MEXT's integration efforts frequently prove inadequate, as numerous students report insufficient accessibility in mainstream classes, resulting in academic underperformance. Furthermore, many students experience feelings of isolation and loneliness due to their inability to interact with fellow deaf peers or effectively communicate with hearing classmates. Nakamura (2006) notes that these challenges often lead students to go back to Schools for the Deaf after attempting regular schools. A paradox arises: if conditions are less than ideal, why is there a continued trend of increased enrollment in regular schools? The reality is that the situation in Schools for the Deaf is also far from perfect. Petitions and surveys undertaken by Deaf organizations such as the JFD show dissatisfaction of *tōjisha* (Deaf people and their families) with current educational practices, advocating for changes in language education approach and curriculum as well as specialized education professionals. Considering voices from the Deaf community, this chapter argues that the declining number of students in Schools for the Deaf is a consequence of interconnected factors that include not only integration policies and technological advancements, but also dissatisfaction with

current practices in Deaf education.

The chapter focuses on the state of Schools for the Deaf after the 2007 *Partial Amendment to the School Education Law*, which introduced significant changes in Japanese Deaf education. These include the creation of schools for students with multiple disabilties and the implementation of additional reasonable accommodations for students attending regular classrooms. Although the number of students enrolling in Schools for the Deaf was already experiencing a decline, the introduction of Resource Rooms in regular schools is said to have prompted more HoH student to enroll in mainstream educational settings. The first paragraph of this chapter examines trends in Deaf education using data from the annual MEXT Basic School Survey, beginning with a historical overview of enrollment figures in Special Education. Subsequently, it analyzes the changes in enrollment at Schools for the Deaf, differentiating between those catering to students with single and multiple disabilities. Additionally, it addresses the increasing presence of d/Deaf students in mainstream education. Following this, subsequent sections introduce factors contributing to the downward trend in student enrollment. These factors are categorized into two main groups: (i) those associated with population and welfare policies and (ii) those linked to dissatisfaction with educational policies. Lastly, the chapter concludes with a discussion on the findings and the present challenges facing Deaf education, examining the notions of mainstreaming and assimilation in the context of MEXT endorsed policies.

4.1 Analyzing Trends in Japanese Deaf Education

This chapter exemines trends in the number of Schools for the Deaf and in the number of students enrolled. The first section presents an historical overview of trends in Schools for people with disabilities, focusing on the number of Schools for the Deaf. The second section analyses how the *Partial Amendment to the School Education Act* of 2007 changed the trends in Deaf education, analyzing the declining numbers in Schools for single disability and schools with multiple disabilities. The numbers are then compared to the ongoing declining trend in *rōgakkō.* Lastly, the trend and number of students attending mainstream schools either in Special Classes or regular classes with Resource Rooms are analyzed, to understand how

the changes introduce by the Partial Amendment influenced the mainstreaming of d/Deaf students.

4.1.1 Trends in Special Needs Education in Japan from Post-war to Present (1948-2021)

The first institution for Special Needs Education in Japan, the *Kyōto Institute for the Blind and Mute*, was founded in Kyōto in 1878 and provided education for children with vision and hearing loss. After that, various institutes dedicated to the edcuation of the Blind and the Deaf opened throughout the country, followed by Schools addressing other types of disabilities.

Figure 1 shows changes in the number of students enrolled in Special Education Schools from 1948 to 2021.[38] Enrollment rates in *rōgakkō* (Schools for the Deaf) and *mōgakkō* (Schools for the Blind) remained consistently low until the post-war period. In 1947, a significant shift occurred when compulsory education for the Deaf and Blind was introduced, marking the beginning of a visibly upward trend in both types of schools. The number of students attending *rōgakkō* and *mōgakkō* continued to increase until the late 1950s, with the year 1959 marking the peak enrollment rates with respectively 10,264 and 20,744 students.

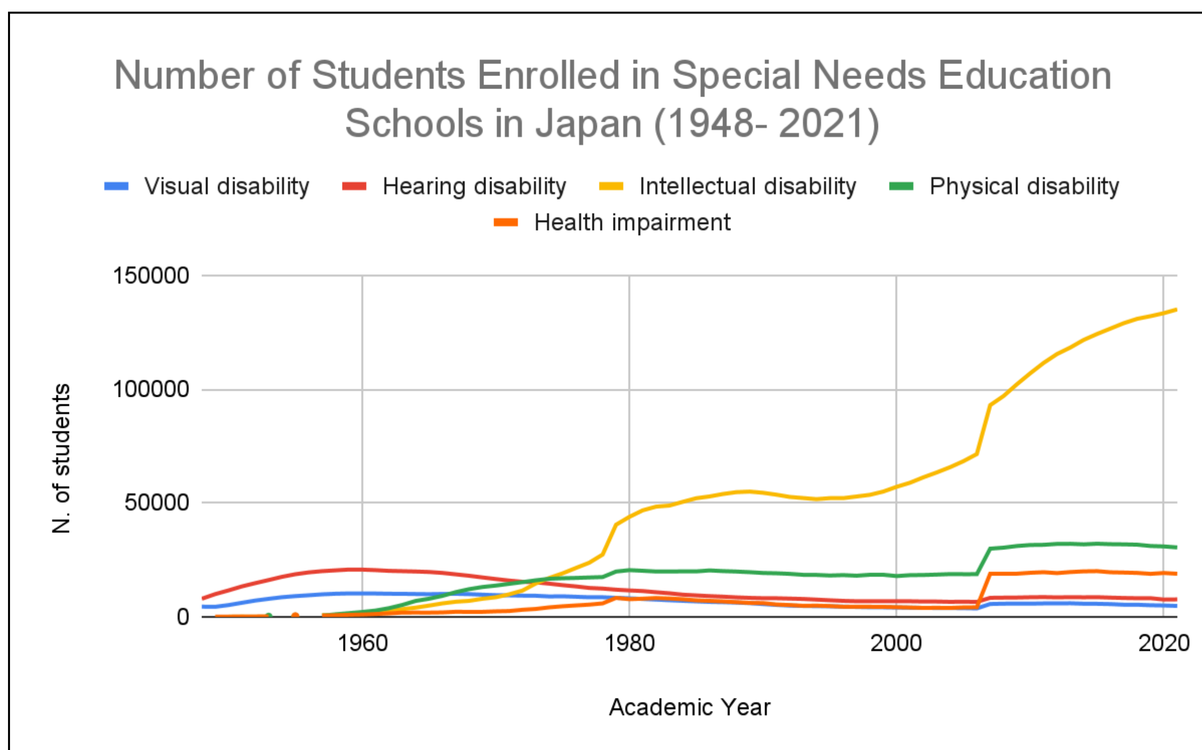
The establishment of the first *yōgogakkō* (schools for intellectually disabled, physically disabled, and health-impaired students) started sometime between 1949 and 1953, with very few schools and students. Enrollment trends in these schools showed a consistent rise from the 1960s. In 1978, the introduction of compulsory education for all students with disabilities led to the first noticeable upward trend in *yōgogakkō*. At the same time, a downward trend in the enrollment rate of *rōgakkō* and *mōgakkō* started after 1959, and persisted until the late 1990s. The *Partial Amendment to the School Education Act* in 2007 marked a second significant shift in the enrollment rates of Special Needs Education facilities. The existing *rōgakkō*, *mōgakkō,* and *yōgogakkō* transitioned under the umbrella division of *tokubetsu shien*

[38] The original data is based on the annual School Basic Survey collected by MEXT from 1949 to 2022. The first figures refer to the Fiscal Year 23 of the Showa Era (April 1, 1948 - March 31st, 1949). The last statistics refer to the Fiscal Year 3 of the Reiwa era (April 1st, 2021 - March 31st, 2022). Data from 1948 to 2006 accounts for students enrolled in Special Education Institutions (Rōgakkō, mōgakkō, yōgogakkō). Data from 2007 to 2021 include students attending Schools for Special Needs Education (total of schools for single disability and multiple disabilities).

gakkō, “Schools for Special Needs Education”.[39] The *Partial Amendment* also introduced schools specifically designed for students with multiple disabilities, causing an increase in student numbers in all Schools for Special Needs Education. This increase brought about a slight deviation from the previous downward enrollment trends of Schools for the Deaf and Schools for the Blind. New facilities were built, and a consistent number of students with multiple disabilities enrolled in the new schools. However, the overall trajectory of the enrollment trend continued to show a gradual decline.

Figure 1

Number of Students Enrolled in Special Needs Education Schools in Japan (1948- 2021)



Source. Author, based on MEXT (2022), *Special Needs Education Materials (FY 2021)*【特別支援教育資料(令和3年度)】

According to MEXT (2022), in the fiscal year 2021 Japan counted 1,160 Schools for Special Needs Education, 119 of which cater to the needs of students with hearing disabilities. Of these, 85 are institutions addressed to students with hearing loss as a

[39] Schools for the Deaf after the 2007 partial Amendment are named *tokubetsu shien gakkō (chōkaku shōgai)*, which can be translated in English as “Schools for Special Needs Education (hearing disability)”.

single disability, while the remaining 34 cater to the needs of students with multiple disabilities including hearing loss.[40] Table 1 illustrates the current situation of Schools for Special Needs Education divided by the type of disability addressed.[41]

Table 5

Current Situation of Schools for Special Needs Education in Japan (2021)

	N. of schools	N. of school sections	N. of enrolled students				
			Kindergarten div.	Elementary School div.	Junior High School div.	High School div.	Total
Visual impairment	84	2,054	181	1,552	1,066	1,976	4,775
Hearing impairment	119	2,759	1,018	2,945	1,674	2,014	7,651
Intellectual disability	801	32,095	177	44,252	29,138	61,395	134,962
Physical disability	354	12,114	97	13,256	7,836	9,267	30,456
Health impairment	154	7,518	17	7,397	5,032	6,450	18,896

Source. MEXT (2022), Special Needs Education Materials (FY 2021)【特別支援教育資料(令和3年度)】(Free translation)

4.1.2 Enrollment Trends and Number of Special Needs Education Schools for the Deaf: Single Disability and Multiple Disabilities (2007-2021)

During the fiscal year 2007, there was a significant shift in the enrollment patterns of Special Education Schools. The year marked the second most crucial change after compulsory education for students with disabilities was implemented. The *Partial Amendment to the School Education Act* was proposed in 2006 and took effect the following year, briefly reversing the declining trend in Deaf education. From 2007 to

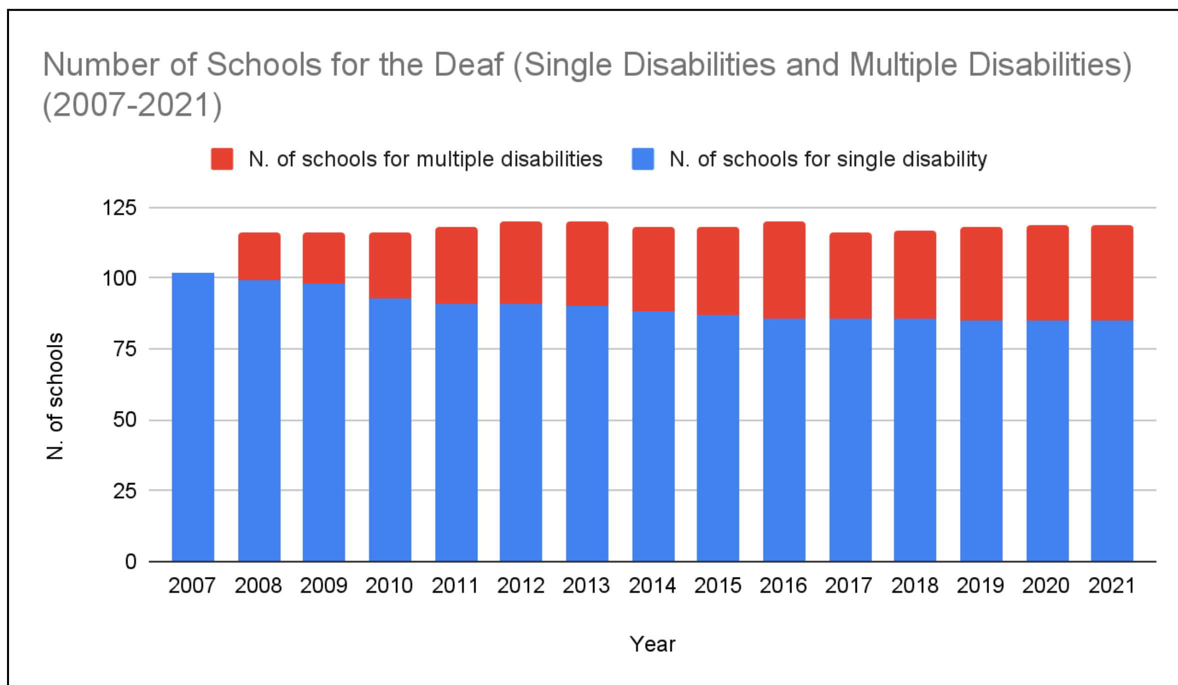
[40] Special Needs Education Schools for the Deaf (multiple disabilities) include: schools for the deaf and intellectually disabled (11); schools for the deaf, intellectually and physically disabled (3); schools for the deaf, intellectually, physically disabled and health impaired (2); schools for the blind, deaf, intellectually and physically disabled (1); schools for the blind, deaf, intellectually, physically disabled and health impaired (17). Schools for the deaf, intellectually disabled and health impaired are not currently operating, although one school has been in place from 2011 to 2016.
[41] The data refers to the Fiscal Year 3 of the Reiwa era (April 1st, 2021 - March 31st, 2022). The figures account for the total of kindergarten, elementary schools (primary education), junior high schools (lower secondary education), and high schools (secondary education). The number refers to the total of national, local, and private schools.

2021, the overall number of schools addressing students with hearing disabilities increased and stabilized alongside the number of students enrolled in such schools. However, a closer examination of the enrollment trend in these schools reveals that the reversal in trend is mainly due to schools addressing multiple disabilities. Following the introduction of Schools for Special Needs Education addressing multiple disabilities in 2007, these schools maintained relatively stable figures in the number of schools and student enrollment rates, even experiencing a slight increase over the years. In contrast, schools addressing students with hearing loss as a single disability saw a continued and harsher decline. The following figures show the changes in the number of Schools for Special Needs Education (Figure 2) and students enrolled (Figure 3) from their creation in 2007 to 2021. The total number of schools and students are divided into schools for single disability and multiple disabilities.[42]

[42] The first figures refer to the FY 19 of the Heisei Era (April 1, 2007 - March 31st, 2008). The last figures refer to the FY 3 of the Reiwa era (April 1st, 2021 - March 31st, 2022).The figures refer to the total of national, public, and private schools at Kindergarten, Primary school, Junior high school and high school divisions. Although the partial Amendment was enacted in 2007, the first schools opened in the Academic Year 2008.

Figure 2

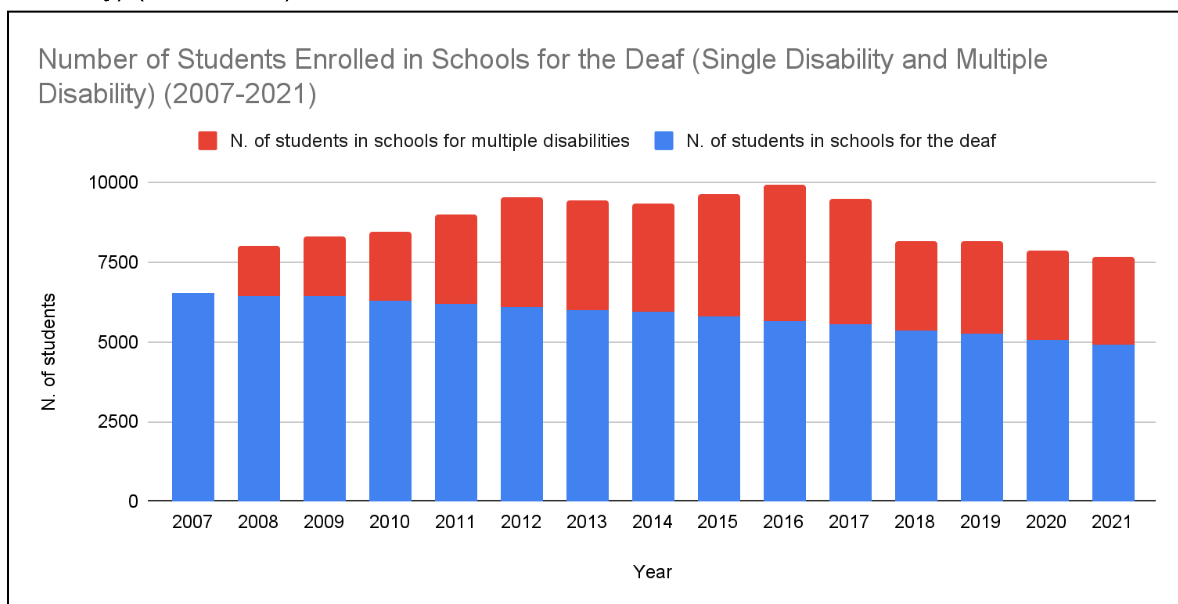
Number of Schools for the Deaf (Single Disabilities and Multiple Disabilities) (2007-2021)



Source. Author, based on MEXT (2008-2022), Special Needs Education Materials (FY 2007-FY 2021) 【特別支援教育資料(平成19年度-令和3年度)】

Figure 3

Number of Students Enrolled in Schools for the Deaf (Single Disability and Multiple Disability) (2007-2021)

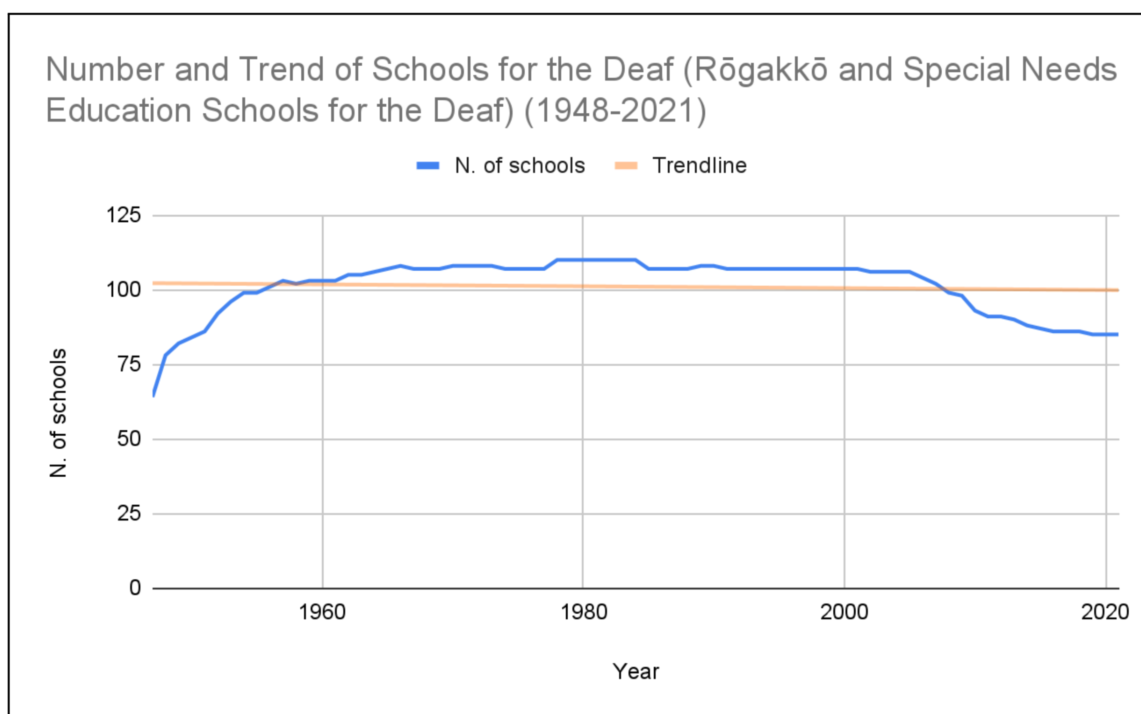


Source. Author, based on MEXT (2008-2022), Special Needs Education Materials (FY 2007-FY 2021) 【特別支援教育資料(平成19年度-令和3年度)】

A broader analyisis of the change in the trends of Schools for the Deaf (addressing a single disability) shows that although the declining trend started in the 1960s, it exacerbated around 2007. Figure 4 and Figure 5 show the trend in the number of Schools for the Deaf and students enrolled from 1948 to 2021. Data from 1948 to 2006 account for the number of *Rōgakkō* facilities, while data from 2007 to 2021 refers to *Special Needs Education Schools for the Deaf* (single disability).[43]

Figure 4

Number and Trend of Schools for the Deaf (Rōgakkō and Special Needs Education Schools for the Deaf) (1948-2021)



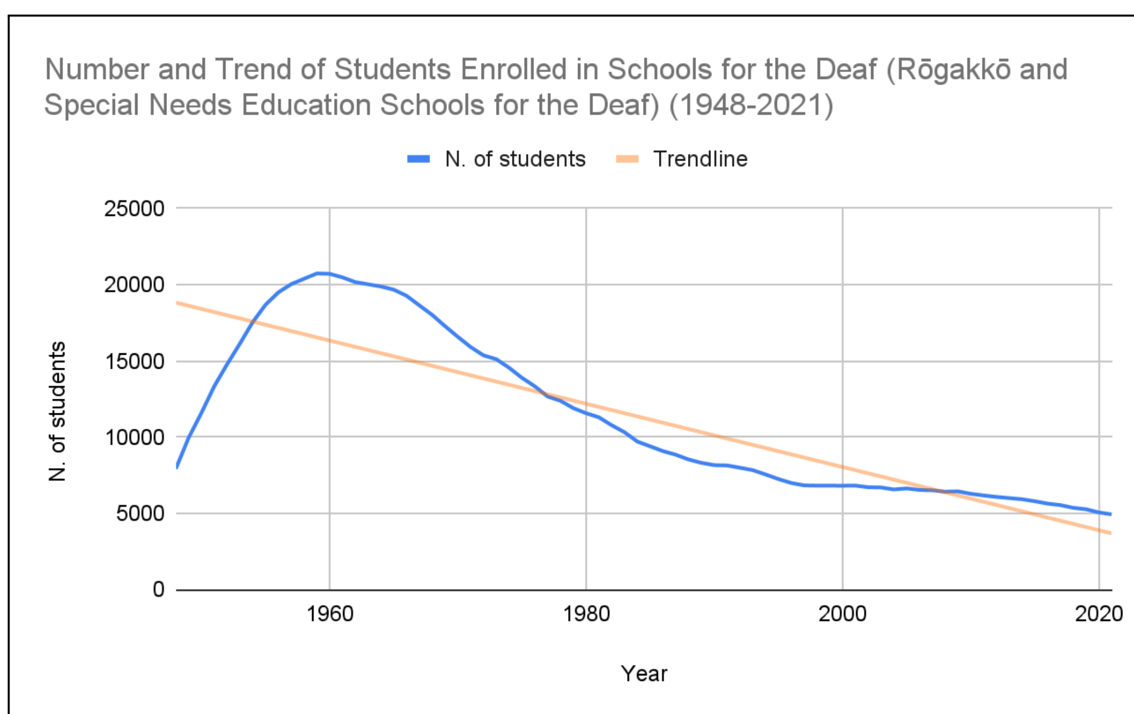
Source. Author, based on (1) MEXT (2007), *Changes in the Number of Schools for the Blind, Deaf, and Special Needs - Total for National, Public, and Private Schools (Up to FY 2006),*【盲・聾・養護学校数の移動ー国・公・私立計ー(平成18年度まで)】and (2) MEXT (2008-2022), *Special Needs Education Materials (FY 2007 to FY 2021)*【特別支援教育資料(平成19年度ー令和3年度)】

[43] The first figures refer to the FY 23 of the Showa Era (April 1, 1948 - March 31st, 1949). The last figures refer to the FY 3 of the Reiwa era (April 1st, 2021 - March 31st, 2022). The figures refer to the total of national, public and private schools in Kindergarten, primary, lower secondary, and secondary education divisions. Data of Schools for Special Needs Education (multiple disabilities) are not included.

After a rapid rise following the post-war years, the number of schools remained relatively stable until the 1990s when schools started to decrease. A significant declining trend began in 2007, resulting in the closure of almost 20 schools within less than 20 years. During this time, there was a decline in the enrollment of students in Schools for Special Needs Education. The number of students in Schools for the Deaf began decreasing rapidly in the early 1960s after reaching its peak in 1959. While the trend briefly stabilized toward the late 1990s, it resumed a decline in the period from 2007 to 2021.

Figure 5

Number and Trend of Students Enrolled in Schools for the Deaf (Rōgakkō and Special Needs Education Schools for the Deaf) (1948-2021)



Source. Author, based on (1) MEXT (2007), *Changes in the Number of Schools for the Blind, Deaf, and Special Needs - Total for National, Public, and Private Schools (Up to FY 2006),*【盲・聾・養護学校数の移動ー国・公・私立計ー(平成18年度まで)】and (2) MEXT (2008-2022), *Special Needs Education Materials (FY 2007 to FY 2021)*【特別支援教育資料(平成19年度ー令和3年度)】

4.1.3 Enrollment Trends of Deaf Students in Special Needs Classrooms and Mainstream Education (2007-2021).

The 2007 *Partial Amendment to the School Education Act* marked the beginning of MEXT's shift towards the integration of people with mild disabilities into mainstream education. The *Partial Amendment* introduced three possibilities for students with disabilities to receive education: (i) *Schools for Special Needs Education*, addressed to students with one or more (severe) disabilities and available at all levels of education from kindergarten to high school; (ii) *Tokubetsu Shien Gakkyū* (Special Classes), addressed to students with various types of (mild) disabilities and available at mainstream elementary schools and junior high schools; (iii) mainstream classrooms, where students with various (mild) disabilities and disorders can receive Special Needs guidance in *Tsūkyū Shidō Kyōshitsu* (Resource Rooms) while attending regular classes at mainstream schools.[44] The option of receiving education in mainstream schools proved popular among hard of hearing (HoH) students. The implementation of reasonable accommodations likely contributed to an increase in those choosing mainstream education over Schools for the Deaf. *Figure 6* shows a consistent rise in the number of students joining Special Classes and regular classrooms with Resource Rooms since 2007.[45] Data from MEXT's *School Basic Survey* (2008-2022), indicates a particular popularity of mainstream classrooms with Resource Rooms, with approximately 2,000 HoH students enrolling in recent years. Although there was a decrease in 2021 (around 50 students less than the previous year), the overall trend remains positive and growing. The number of students in Special Classes at mainstream schools shows an even more rapid growth, with the figures almost equalizing during 2021. The rise in the number of students enrolling in mainstream schools coincides with the negative trend of enrollment in Schools for the Deaf, which started in 2007. It should be noted that several Deaf and HoH students enroll in mainstream schools and attend regular classes without any type of

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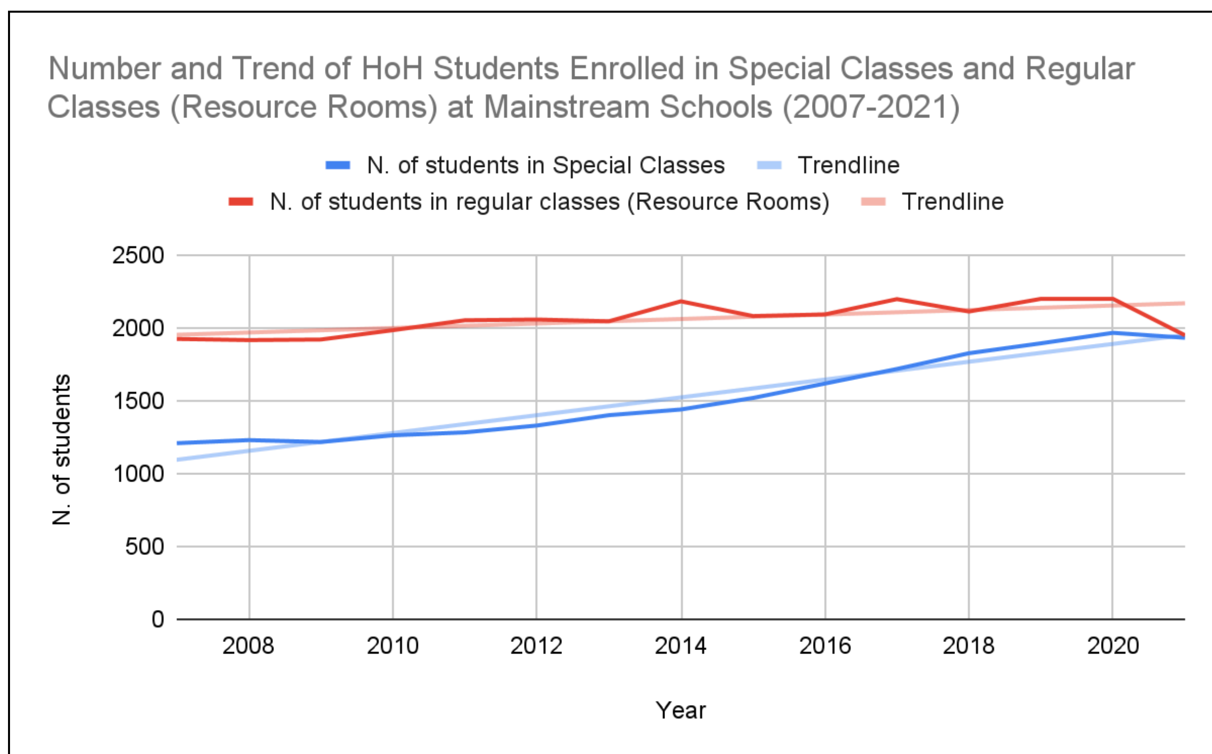
[44] This revised framework for Special Needs support in mainstream settings included learning disabilities and developmental disorders, such as ADHD and ASD for the first time in the category of Special Needs.

[45] The first figures refer to the FY 19 of the Heisei Era (April 1, 2007 - March 31st, 2008). The last figures refer to the FY 3 of the Reiwa era (April 1st, 2021 - March 31st, 2022).The figures refer to the total of national, public and private schools. Because Special classes are only available at elementary and junior high schools, the number of student enrolled in Special Classes only refers to at primary education and lower secondary education school divisions. The number of students in regular classes (Resource Rooms) refers to the total of students enrolled at primary education, lower secondary education and secondary education school divisions.

Special Needs support. However, it is difficult to estimate the number of these students as there is no official record (McGuire, 2020).

Figure 6

Number and Trend of HoH Students Enrolled in Special Classes and Regular Classes (Resource Rooms) at Mainstream Schools (2007-2021)



Source. Author, based on MEXT (2008-2022), *Special Needs Education Materials (FY 2007-FY 2021)* 【特別支援教育資料(平成19年度ー令和3年度)】

4.2 Contributing Factors Related to Population and Welfare Policies

This paragraph examines some of the factors contributing to the declining enrollment rates in Schools for the Deaf. The first section highlights the overall downward trend in demographics that has adversely affected the student population in Japan. Additionally, the section discusses initiatives for the early detection and intervention of hearing disabilities. Early detection strategies encompass practices such as Newborn Hearing Screening (NHS) and genetic screening for congenital deafness. These efforts enable early interventions, including specialized educational support, the provision of hearing aids, and cochlear implantations. Finally, the section

explores the increasing number of young children undergoing cochlear implantation surgery and its role in facilitating the integration of d/Deaf children into mainstream education.

4.2.1 The Declining Demographic Trend and Birth Rate

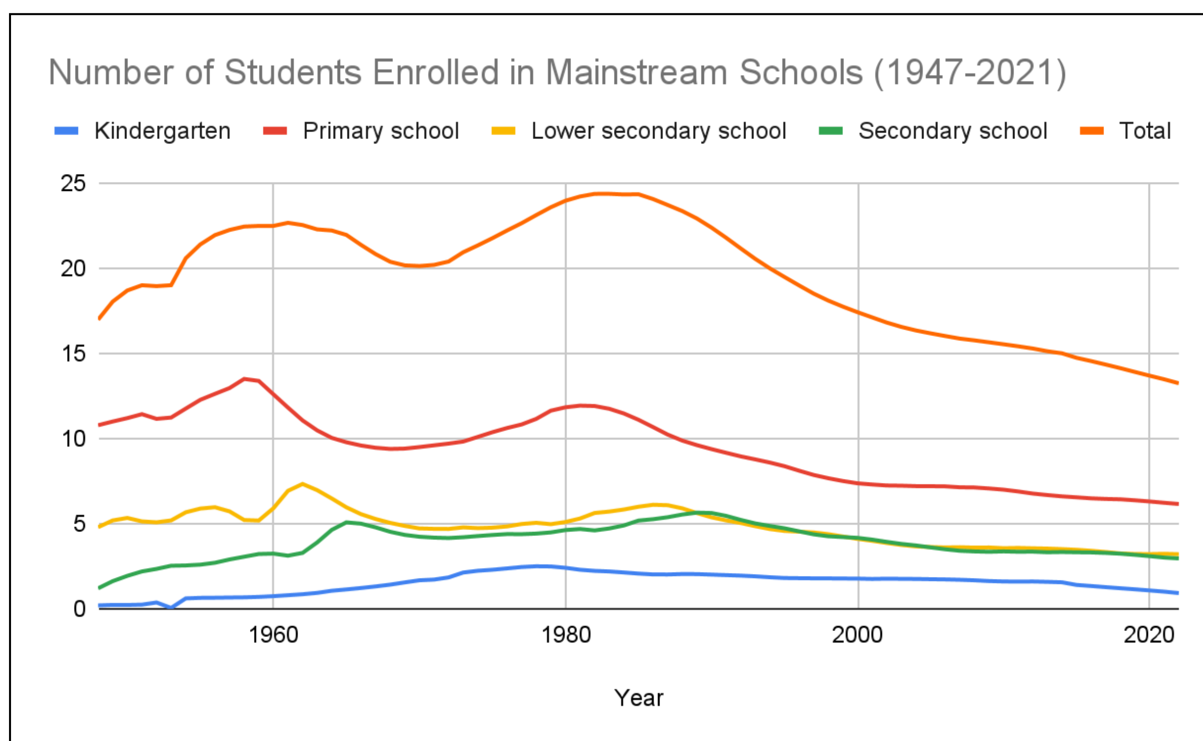
When discussing the declining enrollment trends in Schools for the Deaf, it's essential to consider the broader context of Japan's overall declining student population. This is a result of Japan's negative demographic trend. Japan is characterized by a rapidly aging society, and it has experienced a significant decline in birth and fertility rates since the 1960s. With a long life expectancy of citizens, a low birth rate and minimal immigration, Japan has one of the oldest populations iin the world according to the United Nations' World Population Prospects (2022). Additionally, COVID-19 negatively impacted marriage, birth, and immigration rates during the period 2020-2022. As of 2021, the overall population amounted to 125.5 million, with a decrease rate of 0.51 percent. It is estimated that, if current rates persist, Japan's population will decrease by approximately 70% in the next 50 years (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, 2023).

The ongoing demographic shift has had a notable impact on the student population of regular schools. An examination of school statistics by MEXT (2022) in *Figure 7* reveals a consistent decrease in the number of students attending regular schools at kindergarten, primary education (elementary schools), lower secondary education (junior high school), and secondary education (high school) levels.[46]

[46]The first figures refer to the FY 23 of the Showa Era (April 1, 1948 - March 31st, 1949). The last figures refer to the FY 4 of the Reiwa era (April 1st, 2022 - March 31st, 2023). The figures refer to the total of students enrolled in national, local and private schools. Data related to Special Education Schools (1948-2006) and Schools for Special Needs Education (2007-2022) is not included.

Figure 7

Number of Students Enrolled in Mainstream Schools (1947-2021)



Source. Author, based on MEXT (2023), *Statistical Handbook of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (2023 Edition)*【文部科学統計要覧(令和5年版)】.

4.2.2 The Implementation of Early Detection and Intervention Efforts

In recent years, there has been an increasing effort from the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) and the Ministry of Education, Culture Sports Science and Technology (MEXT) to provide support for deaf and hard of hearing (HoH) children and their families through the practice of *Early detection and Early Intervention.* Depending on the age of onset and severity of hearing loss (mild, moderate, severe, profound), deafness can have a strong impact on cognitive and linguistic development. This often results in a lack of linguistic competence in oral languages (Cardinaletti et al., 2016). Children who are born deaf are particularly vulnerable if they don't receive medical or linguistic support from an early age.

Newborn Hearing Screening (NHS) has become a standard practice in many healthcare systems, as early intervention can significantly improve a child's overall development and quality of life. The goal of NHS is to detect hearing loss early so that appropriate interventions and support can be provided to optimize the child's

language and communication development (The Joint Committee on Infant Hearing, 2019). NHS methods are non-invasive and quick. The screening is typically done when the baby is 2 to 4 days old, and it is typically a routine part of newborn care. If the screening suggests a potential hearing loss, further diagnostic testing is usually conducted to confirm the presence and degree of hearing loss. Early detection is considered crucial because it allows for timely intervention, including the use of hearing aids or cochlear implants, as well as early initiation of language and communication therapies.

Research on newborn hearing screenings in Japan started in 1998, with large-scale experimentation in various prefectures being carried out in the early 2000s (Hallowel and Takagi, 2022). The current approach is modeled after the United States' *Early Hearing Detection and Intervention* (EHDI) guidelines of 2000, which follow the "1-3-6 rule." This rule includes newborn hearing screening by one month of age, comprehensive hearing testing by three months of age, and early intervention by six months of age. The result of the NHS test does not indicate the extent of the child’s hearing ability but simply indicates a “pass” (正常)or “refer” (要再検) status. If the initial hearing screening indicates a "refer" status, the test is repeated before the baby can be discharged from the hospital. If the result remains as "refer," further tests are conducted within the first month of the baby's life. The aim is to identify and diagnose hearing loss in the baby before the third month. Upon diagnosis, "early intervention," involving the use of hearing aids, cochlear implantation surgery, and language education support, is initiated by the sixth month of age (Hayashi, 2012).
In 2008, the MHLW introduced genetic screening for congenital hearing loss as part of the initiatives for early diagnosis and intervention. It is estimated that congenital deafness affects 1-2 children per 1,000 births (WHO, 2023). Approximately half the cases of congenital hearing loss result from genetic mutations. Understanding the genetic causes behind hearing loss makes it possible to predict how the condition will evolve and to plan effective medical strategies (Matsunaga, 2014). Notably, Japanese health insurance started covering genetic screening for congenital hearing loss in 2012.
The implementation of NHS guidelines in 2000 and genetic screening has allowed for timely medical and educational intervention of hearing disabilities. The early detection of hallowed more deaf children to receive measures including speech

therapy support, hearing aids and cochlear implantation surgery. This has allowed a shift from an education largely based on visual cues in dedicated spaces to oral based education in mainstream settings (Oliver, 2013).[47]

4.2.3 The Growing Number of Cochlear Implantation Surgeries Performed on Deaf Children

Following a diagnosis of severe hearing loss after neonatal screening, if hearing aids prove ineffective the standard in Japan is to proceed with cochlear implantation surgery (Kwak, 2017). Cochlear implantation surgery is a medical procedure that involves the implantation of a cochlear implant, a device designed to help individuals with severe to profound hearing loss to have a sense of sound.[48] Cochlear implantation is typically recommended for individuals who have severe to profound hearing loss, a hearing threshold of ≥81 dB according to the WHO and ≥70dB according to the Japanese Audiological Society's framework on the grades of hearing loss. This option is viable for both children and adults, though the procedure's success may vary depending on factors like the cause and extent of the hearing loss, with better outcomes often associated with early implantation (Tobey et al. 2013).

The first surgery involving a multi-channel cochlear implant in Japan was performed in 1985.[49] Since then, more than 11,000 cochlear implantation surgeries have been performed. From the early 2000s, the number of cochlear implantation surgeries steadily increased while the average age of implantation decreased (Fig.11). In 1998, the surgery was recommended for children and young adults between the ages of 2 and 18 and recommended before reaching school age in the case of congenital deafness. The recommended minimum age was then lowered from 2 to 1.6 years in 2006, along with the degree of hearing loss shifting from ≥100 dB to ≥90

[47] In March 2019, the MHLW and MEXT took steps to enhance cooperation among medical, welfare, and education departments within local public bodies and institutions to support children with hearing disabilities and their families. To achieve this goal, the *Health, Medical, Welfare, and Education Collaboration Project for Early Support of Children with Hearing Loss* was created to promote early detection and intervention for hearing loss on a broader scale in each prefecture.

[48] A cochlear implant is a surgically implanted electronic device that directly stimulates the auditory nerve by connecting to the cochlea, a spiral-shaped bone structure in the inner ear that is responsible for hearing.

[49] Multichannel (or multiple-channel) cochlear implants use multiple electrodes to stimulate auditory nerves, representing a significant advancement in audiology technology. These sophisticated implants allow a better differentiation of sounds, facilitating speech perception and hearing in noisy environments. Originating from earlier single-channel models, multichannel cochlear implants were developed to improve speech understanding for profoundly deaf people (Clark, 2006)

dB (ibid.). In 2015 the recommended minimum age for surgery was further lowered to 1 year. Individuals with severe hearing loss (70-90 dB) became eligible for the surgery in 2017. Presently, surgery is recommended from the age of 1, specifically for cases of profound hearing loss (≥90 dB) when conventional hearing aids prove ineffective (Mori, 2015). According to Kashio et al. (2023), the number of cochlear implantation surgeries, especially pediatric ones, is increasing but remains relatively low when compared to other developed countries. The number is expected to continuously grow in the future and medical professionals advocate for more awareness campaigns to promote cochlear implantation surgeries.

The modifications to cochlear implant eligibility criteria in 2006, 2014, and 2017 have led to a growing number of young children undergoing cochlear implant surgery. As a result, there has been an increase in the number of children with cochlear implants participating in mainstream education. Kono's findings (2016), based on surveys conducted by the *Japan Society of School Health*, revealed that approximately 70% of children with cochlear implants in elementary and middle school were part of mainstream school settings as of 2011, indicating an increasing trend toward integration in education.

4.3 Contributing Factors Related to Dissatisfaction with Educational Policies

This chapter presents factors linked to educational policies that contribute to *tōjisha* dissatisfaction. Issues in curriculum guidelines, teacher formation and lack of accessibility are analyzed considering petitions, surveys and voices from Deaf organizations and Deaf community members. Firstly, issues in MEXT-endorsed guidelines and the *Total Communication* approach are presented. Controversies surrounding educational practices in Schools for the Deaf center on concerns about the potential deprivation of natural language exposure for deaf children. The section then discusses issues in teacher formation, such as the lack of Special Needs Education License holders. Lastly, the section discusses future prospects for students who graduate from Schools for the Deaf. The data shows that Schools for the Deaf graduates who pursue university are significantly fewer compared to mainstream school graduates. This underscores the need for quality education and

improved accessibility to ensure a more equitable future for the Deaf community in Japan.

4.3.1 Issues in MEXT Guidelines and Total Communication Approach to Language Education

In Japan, most Schools for the Deaf are public and follow the curriculum designed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT).[50] Typically, students attending these schools do not learn Japanese Sign Language (JSL), as Schools for the Deaf officially employ the MEXT-endorsed *Total Communication* approach which focuses on the teaching and practice of spoken Japanese. *Total Communication* is a communication approach to teaching deaf children that was developed in the United States during the 1970s. It utilizes a combination of lipreading, fingerspelling, cued speech, and written language with the aim of teaching spoken language (Evans, 1982). In the case of Deaf education in Japan, elements from JSL, Signed Japanese and written Japanese are incorporated into the *Total Communication,* which is used by teachers to communicate with students. MEXT Deaf education specialists began endorsing the *Total Communication* approach in the 1990s, and it was officially included in School for the Deaf curriculums in 2000 (Hayashi and Tobin, 2014).

Total Communication is an approach to Deaf education that sparks controversy, especially among advocates of Sign Language and Deaf activists. One common criticism is that children taught using *Total Communication* may not be exposed to any natural language, leading to significant implications for language acquisition and cognitive development (Ladd, 2003). Despite incorporating elements of Sign Language, such as finger spelling and signs, Total Communication is an approach that is fundamentally rooted in spoken language and oralist practices. In Japan, the approach heavily relies on what Kimura and Ichida (1995) refer to as *Simultaneous Communication*, or *sim-com*, a communication strategy that uses some JSL vocabulary to visually express spoken Japanese and teach it to deaf students. In *sim-com*, words and parts of speech are signed in a simplified way while speaking in

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[50] Schools for Special Needs Education are public. Public schools can be national (国立) or local (公立). Based on the *School Education Act*, public schools (primary, lower secondary, secondary education and Special Needs education) adopt a national curriculum set by the Japanese government. The national government body that publishes the national curriculum standards is the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). The curriculum is revised every 10 years.

Japanese. It is in many ways similar to cued speech and manually coded Japanese. Japanese and JSL differ not only in modality (spoken versus visual) but also in grammar structure and vocabulary. This makes it impossible to speak the two languages at the same time. Consequently, students in schools that employ *Total Communication* are exposed to a kind of pidgin that lacks the complexity and expressive qualities found in natural languages such as Sign Language and spoken Japanese (Nakamura, 2006).

The endorsement of the Total Communication approach represents a step forward in Sign Language-friendly educational practices. After the *Milan Congress* of 1880, Schools for the Deaf in Japan adopted strictly oralist teaching practices, and JSL was banned from Schools for the Deaf. Following pressure from Deaf activists in the 1990s, Schools for the Deaf began experimenting with elements of Sign Language as a more effective way of teaching deaf students. Sign Language was recognized as a communication method in *rōgakkō* by the Ministry of Education in 1993 (Kimura and Ichida, 1995). MEXT began further implementing signing in Schools for the Deaf following the enactment of the *Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities* (CRPD) of 2006 which in *Article 21* (Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information) *section e* and Article *24* (Education) *section 3b* states that governments should encourage Sign Language learning and promote the linguistic identity of the Deaf Community.[51] Although the CRPD encourages the implementation of bilingual education for the Deaf - that is, education in JSL and written Japanese- this is not yet a reality in Japan. The introduction of signing in MEXT-endorsed curricula remained limited to finger spelling and sim-com without ever leading to formal instruction in JSL. Dissatisfaction with oralist-based educational practices in public Schools for the Deaf led Japanese Deaf culture and Sign Language activists to create the *Meisei gakuen* School for the Deaf in 2008.

[51] The CRPD was signed by Japan in 2007 and ratified in 2014. Japan ratified the Convention after seven years to have the time to make the necessary adjustments to ensure that the freedom and rights mention in the Convention could be respected. However, associations of people with disabilities have argued that some rights are not fully granted. For example, the Japanese Federation of the Deaf advocates for a Sign Language Act to officially recognize JSL as a language of Japan and implent it in education. According to Deaf People Organizations such as the JFD, the recognition of JSL is necessary to ensure the right of deaf students to receive education “in the most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication for the individual, and in environments which maximize academic and social development.” (Article 24, Section 3c).

The Japanese Federation of the Deaf (JFD) also expresses discontent with current Deaf educational policies that neglect JSL education in Schools for the Deaf. The JFD strongly advocates for the introduction of a Sign Language-based curriculum, asserting the right of Deaf children to acquire and learn JSL, similar to how hearing children have the opportunity to study Japanese during *kokugo* classes (JFD, 2013).

4.3.2 Issues in Teacher Formation and Academic Curriculum in Schools for the Deaf

The *National Institute of Special Needs Education* (2018) highlights the importance of environmental factors in school settings for students with hearing disabilities to actualize the principles of an inclusive education system.[52] According to Han's (2015) Inclusive Education and Activity Index (IEAI), an index developed to assess the degree of inclusivity and accessibility of educational practices, teachers' expertise is an essential component in fostering an inclusive learning environment. However, previous research based on surveys by Iwata (2012) and Mori et al. (2017) raises concerns about the expertise of teachers in Schools for the Deaf.

Teachers in Schools for Special Needs education must hold a *School for Special Needs Education Teaching License* (特別支援学校免許状) as well as a regular *School Teaching License* (教諭免許状) for kindergarten, elementary school, junior high school, or high school (MEXT, n.d.). Teacher's licenses in Japan are regulated by the *Education Personnel License Act* (教育職員免許法), and licenses for teachers of Schools for Special Needs Education are granted based on Article 4 of the Act. The types of licenses for teachers of Schools for Special Needs Education are divided into *Specialized*, *Type 1,* and *Type 2* based on academic qualifications, number of credits, and hours of training. After receiving a *Special Needs Education teaching License*, it is also possible to add one or more *Special Needs Education Field* (特別支援教育領域) qualification. The five *Special Needs Education Fields* include vision disability, hearing disability, intellectual disability, physical disability, and health impairment (ibid.).

Due to the *Partial Amendment to the School Education Law* of 2007*,* the previously existing licenses for teachers in *mōgakkō, Rōgakkō,* and *yōgogakkō* were unified

[52] School settings include Schools for Special Needs Education, Special Classes, Resource Rooms, and other learning environments.

under the *Special Needs Education Teaching License*. Moreover, according to Article 15 of the *Supplementary Provisions to the Education Personnel License Act* it is stated that “for the time being, one can become a special education teacher without holding a special education teacher's license” (free translation). Thus, although only provisionally, teachers without a Special Needs Education Teaching License can teach in Schools for the Deaf. The provision was implemented to make up for the shortage of teachers in Schools for Special Needs Education (Isogai, 2017). As of 2022, only 60% of teachers in Special Needs Education Schools for the Deaf helld a *Special Needs Education Teaching License* (MEXT, 2023).

Mori et al. (2017) raised concerns about the recent situation of teacher formation, particularly with the unification of licenses after the partial Amendment to the *School Education Law* of 2007, which allowed teachers without licenses in the field of hearing disabilities to work in Schools for the Deaf. Additionally, they point out a significant difference of expertise in teaching methods and understanding of hearing disabilities between teachers with and without licenses, as well as between temporary teachers and teachers with longer teaching experience. They also observe that Deaf education has changed significantly in recent times because of technological innovations and advancements in medical care that show the overlapping of medical or learning conditions. Therefore, teachers should have specialized knowledge through continuous training and research. Additionally, Iwata (2012) points out that the possession rate of licenses for the Special Needs education field of hearing disabilities of teachers working in Schools for the Deaf is not sufficient, and acquiring specific skills in deaf education is challenging for teachers due to issues such as frequent personnel changes to different types of schools (Schools for Special Needs Education and mainstream schools).

Another issue that concerns Deaf community members, researchers, and organizations is that Schools for the Deaf are developed within a predominantly hearing environment and value frame (Kanazawa, 1996). The majority of teachers in these schools are hearing, with about half of them having limited, if any, knowledge of Japanese Sign Language. Furthermore, the school curricula heavily emphasize *gengo shūtoku* (言語習得), or language acquisition, which primarily focuses on learning spoken Japanese (Sawa, 2020). Students in Schools for the Deaf invest a

significant amount of time in activities such as training residual hearing, practicing speech, lip-reading, and studying *kokugo*. However, the emphasis on creating an environment where deaf children can communicate in Japanese, especially through oral methods that emphasize reading and speaking, often results in a lack of an adequate communication setting (Kwak, 2017).

The Japan Federation of the Deaf (JFD) advocates for the inclusion of more Deaf educators and specialists in Sign Language and Deaf education in Schools for the Deaf. This is seen as crucial for fostering various educational aspects in Deaf children, including language development and identity formation. According to a survey conducted by the Japan Federation of the Deaf, in 2019 there were around 500 d/Deaf and hard of hearing (HoH) teachers working in Schools for the Deaf nationwide. However, a significant number of them were encountering accessibility barriers in their workplaces and often had to depend on informal assistance from their colleagues. This not only created an extra burden for both parties but also limited the career opportunities available to deaf educators compared to their hearing counterparts (JFD, n.d.). The JFD thus strongly advocates for the promotion of information support and training initiatives for Deaf educators to improve their employment opportunities.

4.3.3 Limited Professional and Academic Prospects for Students Graduating Schools for the Deaf

According to the NISE and the MEXT, the goal of Schools for Special Needs Education is to cultivate the students' *nōryoku* (能力),"ability" and *kanōsei* (可能性), "potential" to foster participation in society and independence, especially in terms of occupation (Isogai, 2017). To address the issue of unemployment of people with disabilities, education in Schools for Special Needs Education focuses on Japanese language education and vocational training in high school divisions. Additionally, some high schools offer *Specialized Courses* (専攻科) that provide more specialized vocational education. The paths taken by graduates from high school divisions of Schools for the Deaf vary based on their degree of disability, and personal preferences. These paths include options such as pursuing higher education in universities or specialized courses, entering vocational education institutions, securing employment in companies, and utilizing social welfare facilities.

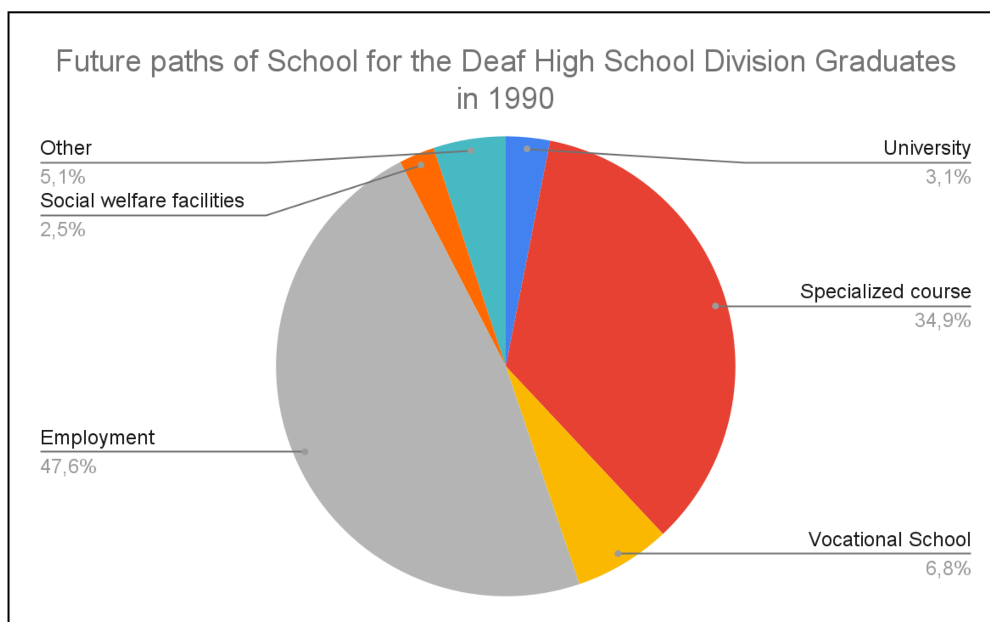
As for Deaf education, vocational training tends to center around manual-visual tasks that require minimal interaction with others. Traditionally, the most prevalent occupations for Deaf individuals in Japan have been in the fields of industrial crafts, textile and clothing, and printing. As of 1995, 70 out of 107 *rōgakkō* had high school divisions. The central departments were industrial crafts sciences, clothing sciences and barbering and beauty sciences. Other minor departments included mechanical sciences, home economics, and printing sciences. As for specialized courses, 22 schools offered programs in barbering and beauty sciences, 17 in industrial and craft sciences, and 3 schools provided courses in dental technology sciences (NISE, 1995).

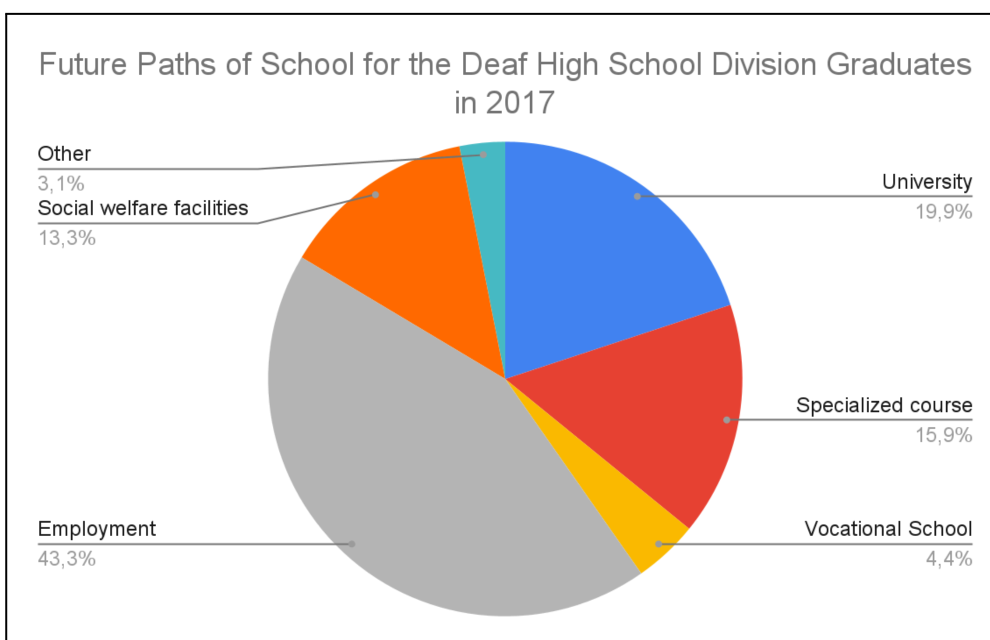
Figure 9 compares the post-graduation paths of *Rōgakkō* high school divisions in 1990 and of Schools for the Deaf (Special Needs Education) in 2019. In 1990, the graduates pursued the following: 38% continued to higher education, with 3.10% enrolling in universities and 34.90% in Specialized Courses. About 6.80% opted for vocational education institutions. The majority, comprising 47.6% of students, found employment in companies or similar settings. Additionally, 2.50% became residents at social welfare facilities or availed themselves of its day services.

Over the course of 30 years, the post-high school paths chosen by d/Deaf students remain largely the same. In 2017, The number of students pursued further education went down to 35.9%, of which about 20% enrolled in university and 16% enrolled in Specialized courses. 4.4% of students enrolled in vocational education institutions. 43.20% of students, the majority, found employment in companies or similar settings. The number of students who became residents at social welfare facilities or availed themselves of its day services was 13.30%.

Figure 8

Future paths of School for the Deaf High School Division Graduates in 1990 and 2019





Source. Author, based on (1) NISE (1991) *Special Education Materials* (FY 1990)【特殊教育資料(平成2年度)】and (2) MEXT (2018), *Special Needs Education Materials* (FY 2017)【特別支援教育資料(平成29年度)】.

According to Nakamura (2003), Schools for the Deaf lag 2-3 years behind their hearing counterparts and, unlike mainstream high schools, they did not prioritize preparing students for college entrance exams. Nakamura notes that students that students attending Deaf schools are considered “slow” compared to peers attending regular schools and are often aware of it themselves.

> *The brighter students with strong academic records are usually encouraged to mainstream. [...] The culling of the top layer of students for mainstreaming has the significant effect of removing any potential leaders of the deaf community and reinforcing the image that schools for the deaf are for the non-academically minded.*
>
> Nakamura (2003: 221)

Universities in the early 2000s offered limited reasonable accommodation services and typically did not provide Japanese Sign Language (JSL) interpreters. This, coupled with the fact that prospective students were evaluated based on written and spoken tests, significantly discouraged d/Deaf individuals from pursuing higher education. As a result, many students opted to enter the workforce directly, benefiting from the 1960 *Act for the Promotion of Employment etc. of Persons with Disabilities* (障害者の雇用の促進等に関する法律). The Act determines a hiring quota for companies to employ individuals with disabilities. However, most companies tended to hire disabled employees for part-time or low-level positions or simply paid relatively low fines for not meeting the hiring quotas.[53]

Considering the changes in the post-high school graduation paths of students enrolled in Schools for the Deaf, notable shifts involve an increase in the number of students entering universities and those opting for social welfare facilities. Data of Schools for Special Needs Education for multiple disabilities likely account for the rise in welfare facility users. Students with multiple disabilities are less likely to join the workforce or pursue higher education because of multiple and overlapping health

[53] The Law at the time did not include provisions to ensure equal opportunities for people wit disabilities in the workplace. The 2013 Amendment of the Act on Employment Promotion etc. of Persons with Disabilities introduced additional policies to promote the employment of persons with disabilities, including anti-discrimination measures against persons with disabilities and the obligation for employers to provide reasonable accommodation. The hiring quota for private companies used to be 1.6% in the late 1990s to early 2000s and underwent a gradual rise over the years. The quota was raised to 2.3% in March 2021, and a further increase to 2.7% is planned in 2026.

issues. The percentage of students enrolling in universities saw a substantial increase from 3% to nearly 20%. Simultaneously, there was a significant decline in students selecting specialized courses and vocational education institutions. The growing number of deaf students enrolling in university may be a result of a broader educational focus beyond vocational independence, with the curriculum in Schools for the Deaf aligning more closely with that of regular schools (MEXT, 2007). Moreover, Japanese universities are increasingly adopting inclusive practices and offering various reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. For students who are Deaf and HoH, the types of accommodations typically include note-taking services, printed summaries of the lesson contents, preferred seating, and test modifications. Some Universities offer JSL interpretation services, although it is not required by Japanese Law. Technological advancements, including hearing aids and tools such as speech-to-text apps during lectures, have enhanced students' ability to learn in a hearing environment. Despite these positive developments, the percentage of graduates from Schools for the Deaf choosing to enroll in universities remains considerably lower compared to graduates from regular schools. In the same year, the percentage of students graduating from regular high schools and enrolling in universities was 49.6% (MEXT, 2018).

Voices from the deaf community suggest that d/Deaf students still struggle in university because of lack of accessibility. In 2018, the NHK aired a report titled "What to do? Sign Language interpretation support for deaf university students." (『どうする？聞こえない大学生への手話通訳支援』) as part of the TV program *Living as Deaf & hard of hearing*.[54] The report featured interviews with d/Deaf university students discussing their experiences. The focus of the interviews was the insufficient Sign Language support available for Deaf students in academic settings. Prof. Shirasawa Mayumi, an associate Professor at the University of Tsukuba, explained that while there has been a significant increase in the enrollment of Deaf students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels in recent years, there

[54] Living as Deaf & hard of hearing『ろう者を生きる　難聴を生きる』is a TV program that focuses on welfare and lifestyle information for Deaf people in Japan. The program concluded in March 2022 and has been renewed as a new project on Heartnet TV titled『#ろうなん　ろうを生きる　難聴を生きる』. The program covers a wide range of topics, from current affairs to cooking, art, and international subjects. Every episode features deaf and HoH people who are active in various fields.

remains a shortage of JSL interpreters capable of providing specialized interpretation for academic subjects. Sign Language interpretation is crucial for Deaf signers because speech-to-text technology often fails to offer accurate real-time transcriptions for complex or specialized subjects. Despite the growing population of Deaf and HoH students, only a minority of educational institutions provide Sign Language interpretation services. Additionally, other support services such as note-taking are typically reliant on volunteers. This situation highlights the need for increased accessibility and support to ensure equitable learning opportunities for d/Deaf students in higher education settings.

4.5 Discussing Challenges and Transformations in Japanese Deaf Education: Trends, Policies and Cultural Perspectives.

The enrollment trends in Schools for the Deaf in Japan underwent a significant transformation during the late Shōwa (1926-1989) and Heisei (1989-2019) era, particularly following the *Partial Amendment to the School Education Law* in 2007. This amendment marked a shift towards an integration model, offering three possibilities for students with disabilities: Schools for Special Needs Education, Special Classes within mainstream schools, and attending regular classes with Special Needs support in Resource Rooms. While Special Needs Education Schools for the Deaf (single disability) are experiencing a continued decline, the option of receiving education in mainstream schools, either in regular classes or Special Classes, is growing rapidly. The number of students in mainstream classrooms and Special Classes showed consistent growth from 2007 to 2021, aligning with the negative trend in enrollment in Schools for the Deaf.

The declining enrollment in Schools for the Deaf in Japan is partially connected to broader demographic trends affecting the country. Japan is experiencing a significant decrease in population, driven by an aging society, declining birth rates and fertility rates, and minimal immigration. This demographic shift has widespread implications, affecting both mainstream and Special Needs education institutions. However, this demographic shift alone does not entirely explain the decreasing enrollment in Schools for the Deaf. One of the major contributing factors to the declining popularity

of Schools for the Deaf is the growing preference for mainstream education among deaf and hard-of-hearing students. This shift is influenced by efforts from the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW) and the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Technology (MEXT) to promote early detection and intervention for hearing disabilities. The implementation of Newborn Hearing Screening (NHS) and genetic screening for congenital hearing loss have become standard practices, enabling timely identification and intervention for children with hearing loss. Cochlear implantation surgery has also played a significant role in shaping the educational landscape for deaf students. Changes in eligibility criteria and the lowering of the recommended minimum age for surgery have led to a notable increase in cochlear implant surgeries, particularly among young children. This has resulted in a growing number of children with cochlear implants and their consequent participation in mainstream education.

The analysis of factors related to educational policies sheds light on critical challenges within Deaf education in Japan, particularly the dissatisfaction expressed by *tōjisha* which are likely influence their choices in education. The dissatisfaction is rooted in several factors, starting with issues in MEXT-endorsed Deaf education guidelines and the *Total Communication* approach in language education. The *Total Communication* approach has faced controversies over concerns about potential language deprivation for deaf children, raising questions about its negative effect on language acquisition and cognitive development. Another crucial factor contributing to dissatisfaction is the shortage of licensed teachers who specialize in Deaf education. The impact of the unification of licenses after the *Partial Amendment* of 2007 allowed teachers without licenses in the field of hearing disabilities to work in Schools for the Deaf, and teachers without Special Needs Education Licenses can provisionally teach in Schools for Special Needs Education to make up for the shortage of specialized professionals. This has led to disparities in expertise and understanding of hearing disabilities and teaching methods among teachers, raising concerns about the quality of education. Additionally, the limited professional and academic prospects for students who graduate from Schools for the Deaf underline the need for improved accessibility and support in higher education. While there has been a shift with an increasing number of deaf students entering universities, challenges such as the lack of special support and JSL interpreters in academic

settings persist.
Considering the apparent dissatisfaction with these aspects, a crucial question arises: What is the rationale behind sending a deaf child to a School for the Deaf? Arguably, the benefits might be limited, as it could potentially hinder their overall development and restrict their future academic or career opportunities. Many parents might believe that introducing their child to the hearing society at an early stage is the optimal approach for them to acclimate successfully. Consequently, Schools for the Deaf might be viewed as an "emergency solution" for children who are profoundly deaf or encounter challenges such as academic difficulties and social isolation in mainstream schools.

Japanese Deaf education policies, ranging from early detection and intervention to the Total Communication approach, seem to be significantly shaped by the medical viewpoint of deafness as a disability. Despite Japan's signing and ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which underscores the right of Deaf students to learn Sign Language and receive education fostering their culture and identity, this is not the prevailing reality in Japan. Similar to many other countries, Deaf schools in Japan adhere to an oralism-centric approach. While Sign Language is utilized to some extent, it is generally considered as a visual aid to spoken language. The primary focus seems to be on improving spoken Japanese skills and vocational training, aiming for students to “overcome” their disability and integrate into the hearing society. *Normalization* is an ideology that is often discussed within the field of Disability Studies. This concept proposes that society should embrace individuals with disabilities who have historically been "isolated" and "excluded". As highlighted by Kimura and Ichida (1995), the normalization ideology is directly associated with the push for mainstreaming in Japanese Deaf education, which aims to cease the practice of “excluding” disabled deaf students from regular schools and placing them in separate special schools. However, there is a potential risk that normalization may devolve into an assimilationist ideology. In the fields of anthropology and sociology, *Assimilation* refers to the process where a minority group, forcibly or voluntarily, adopts traits of the dominant culture and is eventually absorbed by the dominant segment of society (Kónya, 2005). Throughout history, assimilation has often been enforced on minority groups and indigenous people, particularly during the European colonial periods spanning the 18th to 20th centuries.

Japan has a historical background of implementing assimilation policies targeted at indigenous populations and minorities, with the aim of integrating them into Japanese culture and identity. Throughout different historical periods, these assimilation policies were directed at the Ainu people in Hokkaido, the Ryukyuan people in what is now the Okinawa prefecture, and the Korean people during Japan's colonial occupation of Korea. These policies rigorously restricted the cultural and linguistic heritage of these populations, replacing them with Japanese language and costumes. Japanese Deaf activists argue that the environment in Schools for the Deaf, particularly after the introduction of oralist practices in the late 19th century, resembled a form of colonialism for Deaf individuals (Kimura and Ichida, 1995). During this period, Sign Language and Deaf educators were banned from schools, and concerted efforts were made to assimilate Deaf individuals as closely as possible to the hearing society. Nonetheless, even when Sign Language was banned it continued to secretly thrive among students. Sign Language was often transmitted by students coming from deaf families who were native speakers. Students would sign in secret at the risk of being beaten by teachers for violating the schools' language education policies (Kanazawa, 1996). Through this “word-of-hand”, Schools for the Deaf became important places of linguistic and cultural transmission and the center of the Deaf Community in Japan.

Despite advancements in Deaf education practices, the prevailing cultural perspective that hearing is superior to not hearing continues to exert significant influence in policy-making. In the field of Deaf Studies, this perspective is termed *Audism*, which represents the ideology that "hearing" is the socially accepted norm, and any form of "not hearing" or hearing disabilities is viewed negatively. In this sense, Audism is strictly linked to normalization, as “hearing” becomes the norm or standard to reach (Kwak, 2017).[55] Educators who are immersed in hearing culture often identify the linguistic abilities and communication challenges faced by Deaf children as the primary issues in Deaf education. Their proposed solution typically involves facilitating the smooth acquisition of Japanese and establishing an

[55] It is important to notice that “normalization” does not involve bodily modification to become like the non-disabled. However, we are witnessing the bodily normalization of deaf people as the number of cochlear implantation surgeries is rising exponentially. Additionally, Deaf activists have argued that the push for early detection and intervention of hearing disabilities, especially genetic screening for congenital hearing loss, is rooted in eugenic ideologies.

environment that leads to it. However, language education methods are typically constructed based on a unidirectional set of values rooted in hearing culture (Kanazawa, 1996). Establishing an environment in Schools for the Deaf where the primary mode of communication is Japanese, especially through reading and speech-focused oral methods, frequently results in a poor communication setting. On the other hand, for Deaf children attending regular schools, the experience can be likened to being thrown into a crowd where communication becomes impossible, risking isolation in practice. Growing up without genuine companionship during childhood is likely to impact a child's future (Kimura and Ichida, 1995). These children may be denied the opportunity to acquire Sign Language, and in the worst-case scenario, they might lack any language they can freely use.

Deaf activists argue that the medicalization of deafness, early diagnosis and intervention efforts for hearing loss, and mainstreaming hinder the rights of Deaf individuals to learn Sign Language and become part of the Deaf community. The Deaf community argues that Schools for the Deaf are necessary for children with hearing loss. However, these claims are not easily understood by hearing society and are often seen negatively as movements against normalization. The changing landscape of Deaf education raises questions about the future of Schools for the Deaf. The balance between mainstreaming and preserving Deaf education and Deaf rights remains a complex challenge, requiring open dialogue and consideration of the unique needs of the Deaf community in the evolving educational landscape. As educational policies undergo reassessment, it is crucial to incorporate perspectives from the Deaf community to formulate policies that not only serve their interests but also preserve their cultural heritage.

5. Conclusions: Challenges and Future prospects of Japanese Schools for the Deaf

This thesis examined the development and current status of Schools for the Deaf in Japan. Approximately 8% of Japan's total population with disabilities consists of deaf and hard of hearing individuals. Within this demographic, members of the Japanese Deaf community, predominantly Deaf signers, identify themselves as part of a linguistic-cultural minority. Deaf organizations, established within the Deaf community, actively advocate for Deaf rights and the official recognition of *shuwa* (Japanese Sign Language) through the implementation of a *Sign Language Act* in Japan. Historically, the Deaf community has its roots in Schools for the Deaf, where Deaf students from diverse regions could come together and establish connections. In recent times, Deaf organizations have raised concerns about the declining enrollment trends in Schools for the Deaf, which were analyzed in this work.

The Enrollment trends in Schools for the Deaf in Japan reveal a significant transformation, particularly after the 2007 *Partial Amendment to the School Education Act*. This amendment led to a shift towards an integration model, offering various possibilities for students with disabilities. While Schools for the Deaf are experiencing a decline, the option of mainstream education, either in regular classes or Special Classes, is growing rapidly. Factors contributing to the declining popularity of Schools for the Deaf include efforts from the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW) and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science, Sports and Technology (MEXT) to promote early detection and intervention for hearing disabilities. The implementation of screening practices for hearing loss and cochlear implantation surgery has increased the number of deaf students participating in mainstream education. However, the analysis of educational policies reveals critical challenges, including dissatisfaction among *tōjisha* ("Stakeholders"). Issues in MEXT-endorsed Deaf education guidelines, controversies surrounding the *Total Communication* approach, and a shortage of licensed teachers in Deaf education contribute to this dissatisfaction. Disparities in teacher expertise and understanding of hearing disabilities, as well as limited professional and academic prospects for graduates, underscore the need for a re-evaluation of Deaf education in Japan.

The conclusions drawn from an analysis of Japanese Deaf education policies reveal a complex interplay between medical perspectives, cultural assimilation, and the rights of Deaf individuals. Despite Japan's commitment to the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD), which emphasizes the importance of Sign Language and Deaf culture in education, the reality in Japanese Schools for the Deaf often leans towards oralism and assimilation into the hearing society. Deaf activists argue for the continued existence of Schools for the Deaf as crucial spaces for Deaf children to learn Sign Language and develop a sense of belonging. However, these are perceived negatively as an opposition to normalization.
In the changing landscape of Deaf education, *Meisei gakuen*, located in Tokyo, emerges as a unique institution offering Bilingual-Bicultural education for Deaf children. This innovative approach has led to an increase in student enrollment, unlike public schools for the Deaf. *Meisei gakuen*'s model presents a potential solution for revitalizing Deaf education in Japan and making it more attractive to *tōjisha*. However, *Meisei gakuen* also faces challenges, notably in the area of non-native competence in spoken Japanese, a concern that does not align with the preferences of the MEXT.

Modern advancements in technology have improved the lives of d/Deaf individuals, enabling them to engage in activities end environments previously limited to hearing people. However, it's essential to recognize that the Deaf community represents a linguistic and cultural minority rather than merely individuals with disabilities. While technology enhances their quality of life in a world made for the hearing majority, it also poses an additional threat to their existence as a minority. As enrollment trends and educational approaches evolve, Deaf educational policies are likely to undergo transformations as well, with two potential directions emerging: a modern Bilingual education model such as the one adopted by *Meisei gakuen*, or a shift towards reliance on mainstream education. Regardless of the direction taken, these changes must consider the opinions and wishes of *tōjisha*, which have historically been overlooked or downplayed by policymakers. The next steps in the research include conducting interviews with *tōjisha*, particularly members of the Deaf community, to obtain qualitative insights into the factors influencing their decisions regarding educational settings.

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