

Some Aspects for International Academic Exchange in TCT

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Abstract: Collecting and distributing information have dramatically come in useful in these days. It is very important for us to share the academic information of education research in higher education, understand the culture of other countries by personal exchange, and contribute to the education for students with disability. TCT, as an institution of higher education for people with sensory impairment, is aimed at international contribution through academic exchange and research cooperation. The issues for the exchange in TCT are the needs of communication by English, key persons for the negotiations, adequate contents of the activities, costs sharing, credit transfer system, and acceptance plan of foreign students

Key Words: academic exchange, higher education

1. Objectives of Academic Exchange

The access of information has improved astoundingly in the information society of today, and the environment which is hot-wired with computer networks is indispensable for our life. Though the physical distribution is still insufficient for us to control, information retrieval and transmission are electronically accessible in an eye blink wherever we are. If things go well, we can receive an e-mail response to the mail sent several minutes before from abroad and an order confirmation from an electronic bookseller within several seconds. Now, we can collect and send information on a worldwide scale.

The global dissemination of information gives the opportunity of more lively exchange among people from different countries. To interact with others, people have to exchange data with each other. If received data could not be recognized on the other side, the data have little meaning. Therefore, information has to be understood by each other. Each individual should share the value and function of the information.

In the information society, people should have an international perspective, which gives rise to a need to share the concept of values. Each others culture should be recognized in a friendly way, and people should take action positively to be accepted. While a society is keeping its own identity, each country must develop warm relationships with other countries.

This country has made an effort in absorbing the advanced culture and civilization from Europe and the United States for over one hundred years⁽¹⁾. Japan has been able to participate among developed countries from this background. However, we are just getting underway in exporting the culture of human activity. We are also afraid of whether we have been able to convey successfully the achievements of education and research in Japanese higher education. Therefore, one of the critical roles of higher

education is to promote those who can take an active part in the international arena. The international contributions are significant not only for higher education, but also the social development of this country.

Institutions of higher education are rightly under obligation to disclose the results of intellectual activities, and the window of information should be opened to the world. To create the intellectual information, the institution should find its specialized area of education research, and needs to intensively inject the personal and financial resources into those projects. Moreover, it should make a close network of colleagues here and abroad, bringing about active discussions and collaborating with them. This is an issue of communication and human networking in an international exchange. It is a fundamental viewpoint that the institution will promote exchange programs by finding appropriate partners and taking on a concrete form for research works^(2,3,4,5,6,7).

2. Roles of Tsukuba College of Technology

Tsukuba College of Technology (TCT) has a mission that the college will exclusively accept students with sensory impairment, implement professional education as a higher education institution and intends to contribute to the social independence of people with disability. For the attainment of the purpose, TCT provides an educational curriculum suitable for wide-ranging general education including information accessibility instruction, and also for high level professional training. In addition, the college makes efforts toward obtaining good teachers who can effectively guide students with disability, and promotes the continuous holding of faculty development programs for educational improvement. Moreover, the college provides a good learning environment for making it possible to compensate for the disability of students, and conducts research for the development of their potential abilities.

TCT intends to work strongly in social activities in order to share the outcomes of education research. For example, the opportunity of reeducation programs is supplied to graduates and working people with disability who are facing a new technological barrier. Furthermore, students included in common universities can accept academic support services from TCT as circumstances demand, and higher education institutions having students with sensory impairment can be delivered the information services which are best suited for their special needs.

On the issue of international activities, TCT has to campaign for the higher education needs of people with sensory impairment and for making the countries reflect it in their education systems. It is important to pronounce that the special support for people with sensory disability in higher education is absolutely necessary in our time and the outcomes of supports are up-and-coming educational activities for them. On the other side, as institutions providing support systems for people with disability should share the mission and objectives of education, the common understanding for those who have specific needs ought to be possible. This is the first role of international cooperation in TCT.

The second role of TCT is the information sharing of education and research of sensory disability. The information about contents and outcomes of the education should be opened and exchanged as wide as possible across the world. We can share and understand the mission commonly by information exchange. At the same time, the development of people-to-people links would result from related activities. Through

student and faculty interaction, information would be exchanged and consulted about with each other and the mission would be identified. Again, collaborative research and international meetings for education will be held, and human networks will begin to broadly spread out.

The third is that TCT thinks of support projects for the education of developing countries. In those countries the government may not be able to handle all the work of education for students with disability, especially at the higher education level. Therefore, we could present a modest contribution by accepting students and supporting educational research in the Asian region.

3. Present Situation of International Exchange in TCT

At present, TCT has made agreements of international academic exchange with three institutions. That with National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID), it was completed in 1992. Study tours by students and faculty interaction are extensively running. The agreement with the State University of New York at Buffalo was signed in 1999, and several students enrolled in the Division for the Visually Impaired in TCT went to the English Learning Institute as foreign students. Especially, TCT is strongly cooperating with the Center for Assistive Technology and carrying on collaborative research. In 1999, TCT gave assistance in editing the journal which was edited by the members of SUNY at Buffalo, *Technology & Disability*. The third is Interuniversity Institute for Information Systems for the Support of Print Disabled Students (i3s3) in Austria which assists university students with print disability in Europe. We are doing exchange with the researchers and have participated in their Computer Summer Camp for Students with Visual Disability since 2001. Furthermore, TCT has participated in an interuniversity consortium for deaf education, entitled PEN-International (Post-secondary Education Network-International), established in 2000. This consortium does many activities under the leadership of NTID in Rochester Institute of Technology; e.g., the education system, communication method and compensation of the deaf, etc.

In December of 2002, eight members of TCT visited educational institutions related to higher education for the sensory impaired in China and Korea. The purpose of our visit was to exchange information of the mission and education, and to explore the possibility of academic exchange. Both institutions of China and Korea are new institutions, established in 2002, based on the example of TCT. From the two countries, we accepted people who were associated with the establishment plan several times in the past.

In Beijing, we visited the Special Education College of Beijing Union University which has a teacher preparation program of special education and vocational training programs for students with sensory impairment (Photo 1). In the Course of Acupuncture and Massage, a professor expressed the wish of student exchange and a credit transfer system in training course programs. And we took this occasion to visit the Special Education Center of Beijing Open University, Beijing School for the Deaf and Acupuncture Clinic.

In Korea, we visited the National College of Rehabilitation and Welfare in Phongtaek (Photo 2). The college has ten departments concerned with vocational education, and accepts students with disabilities into an integrated education system.



Photo 1. Visiting party at Beijing Union University.



Photo 2. The friendship ceremony celebrating the intention for academic exchange.

There are not only sensory impaired students, but also the orthopedically impaired. About forty percent of the students have some kind of impairment. The president and some professors visited TCT and expressed a willingness to come to a conclusion regarding exchange programs. On the occasion of our visit, we had a friendship ceremony making the intention for academic exchange. Presently, our two institutions are developing a detailed description in the format of the exchange.

4. Some Issues for Academic Exchange in TCT

We have raised following some issues for academic exchange.

The first is the issue of language. Depending on language in communication, we cannot talk with other people if we do not share a system of speech or characters with

each other. In Middle Ages of Europe, Latin was the common language among scientists, as is English for the present. It is, therefore, important for faculty and students to be able to use English and send messages by English to the world on the field of international communication. In various parts of Asia, especially where English is not perceived as an official language, English is not necessarily to be acknowledged as the standard for communication, including Japan. In scientific monographs, at least the abstract should be written in English in order that the methods or results of the research are followed by readers. We could comfortably talk with Korea National College in negotiations toward the conclusion of academic exchange because Dr. Kim, the president of the college, is a fluent English speaker, in spite of my poor English communication skill.

The second is the issue of the key person for negotiations. During negotiations, the person of one side should assess whether the other person is responsible for finalizing an exchange. If the person is a representative of the institution, the agreement of exchange might be continued after his retirement, as a responsibility of the institution. Despite an exchange finalizing, there are some cases in which the activities are aborted because the key person retired from the institution or lost his drive to continue. It might be important for us to effect an arrangement by a system instead of by a person. Sometimes a third person intervenes in exchange negotiations as a facilitator. We always have to take into account the possibility that we may be negotiating with a third person instead of a real companion.

The third is an issue of contents in activities. As there should be differences in the cultural, financial and political situation among countries, the discrepancies themselves must not be a barrier for negotiation. The main activities may be the exchange of people and information, and the cooperation of research. Therefore, the description of activities may be better to be left on a conceptual level rather than detailed. It seems to be hard for a smooth conclusion to focus on the detailed items, such as the rate of student exchange per year or burden sharing of research cooperation.

The fourth issue is charges, such as sharing expenses for faculty interaction. It may be common that the cost of travel is borne by one side, and the rising cost of staying or in-country transportation is for the other side. It is better to talk with each other about the standard for this category

The fifth is the issue of the improvement of curricula for exchange. In order to develop a credit transfer system, the linkage of education processes needs to be examined. We should make a standard for student evaluation regarding the contents of education, hour requirements, or testing.

The last issue is the situation for the development of accepting foreign students. When TCT will begin to actively accept foreign students, we should discuss which language should be used for them, Japanese or English. Although universities in this country have almost always used Japanese for education, teaching by English should be studied for them today. If Japanese is the main language for foreign students, we need to be poised to teach it systematically before and after visiting this country. And there is the critical problem of financial support for foreign students from developing countries. As Japan has a high cost of living, it is very hard for foreign students to live. The development of a situation in which foreign students can comfortably study is an urgent need for us.

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