

# **What kind of support do foreign students need?**

– An analysis of records of  
the Japanese language Supplementary study System –

Kyoko ISHIZUKA, Kumiko KANENIWA,  
Nobuko SAITO, Kazumi TSUCHIDA

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In recent years, supplementary lessons or a support system for independent study has become a topic of interest as well as a practical area of teaching methodology in foreign language education at various universities accepting foreign students.

Yanagisawa (1993) outlines two ideas for dealing with learners' varying needs. One idea is to give each student an individual program that should be followed for study. The second idea is for each student to study autonomously while the teacher plays a supportive role. Yanagisawa also insists that the availability of resources as well as resource centers is significant as a condition to support independent study. These centers do not only supply and maintain various kinds of information as resources, but their role is also to support the education at goals of the university. Tanaka and Saito (1993) have called this integrated system a 'learning support system'. They state that the role of teachers in this system is to help learners make the best use of resources as well as to act as a resource for consultation.

With these goals in mind, Tokyo International University founded the Supplementary System of Japanese in March 1999. This system aims to reinforce the Japanese proficiency level of foreign students and to support independent study. Saito (2000) reported on the organization and aims of this system. However, since the program was still in the early stages, no clear needs analysis could be made.

In order to determine students' individual needs the following 3 sources of data were examined: the way the system is managed, the way the system is

actually used, and the results of an analysis of study records, with particular attention paid to the contents of consultation carried out in 2000.

'The Supplementary study system for Japanese' located on campus 1, provides computers, audiovisual education aids, and teaching materials for independent study. Also, Japanese language instructors are always available to answer questions as well as consult with students.

Users fall into one of two groups depending on their objectives. (A) those studying by themselves using computers and audiovisual education aids. (B) those asking questions as well as consulting with the instructors. With regard to group B, the details and the records of instructions were used to make a portfolio of each student with the students' permission. This data is used as a database.

The records show that the number of users of the Supplementary System for Japanese in 2000 was twice that of 1999. One half of the users were freshmen, who accounts for 61% of the total, while the second year students account for 26%. It seems that the older students become, the less they use the system. As for the resources that are used, first, the use of computers leads and accounts for 49% of use, followed by questions and consultations at 16%. Independent study 15%, the use of audiovisual aids is 13%, the use of teaching materials and teacher corrections are both 3%, and last, conversation practice is 1%. The contents of the questions and consultations were concerned with: (1) Japanese language (2) daily life (3) learning methods. As for (1), many students asked about the reading of *Kanji* in technical words. This information is necessary in order to read texts as well as to write essays. Next, questions on writing essays and dissertations are also often asked, an area in which foreign students need a lot of supports. There were also cases in which the student had come only to practice conversation with an instructor at first, but later talked about learning through such a conversation. With regard to (2), questions on writing letters as well as New Year's cards were asked in addition to questions on Japanese culture and daily life. As for (3), questions were asked on how to keep up with classes in the university, including questions about materials for essays and ways to learn *Kanji* in technical words.

To sum up the result, foreign students' needs can be considered as following: First, it is important to provide a place where it is possible to deal

with learners' varying needs and where foreign students have the opportunity to seek support. Next, it's necessary to make learners' autonomy a priority and offer support unrelated to academic credit or evaluation. In order to maintain such a learning environment, instructors need to find a learner's potential ability and let him/her realize it fully. In this way, the system functions as a human resource. In some cases the learner analyzes his/her own needs and develops an individual curriculum. In this case, the system should function as a physical resource.

The variety of learners' needs cannot be dealt with in only one way. A learning space or environment, which can supply both human and physical resources unrelated to class of credits or evaluation, is necessary to support foreign students. The space should function as a human resource as well as a physical resource.

(ISHIZUKA, KANENIWA, TSUCHIDA: Tokyo International University)

(SAITO: Obirin University)