

Awareness survey of first-year students in the *yogo* teacher training program of University A's School of Education

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Abstract

A questionnaire survey on *yogo* teachers was administered to first-year students of the *yogo* teacher training program of the School of Education of University A. The survey concerned students' reason for choosing the program, future career goal, image of *yogo* teachers, skills to acquire in school, and plan to study in graduate school. The survey data showed that the students intentionally selected a school of education with a *yogo* teacher training program because almost all of them wished to become a *yogo* teacher. In addition, 38% of the students were aspiring to become *yogo* teachers because of their previous experiences of being taken care of by a *yogo* teacher, and half of these students regularly visited the school nurse's office for counseling for psychological distress. In addition to this finding, questions regarding students' image of *yogo* teachers and the skills they wanted to learn in school all indicated that the students were aware of the importance of mental health services. Almost all the students surveyed wanted to be immediately involved in school health education after graduation.

Key words : *yogo* teachers, training program, school nurse's office teachers

1. Introduction

1.1 The Beginning

The system to train *yogo* teachers, who play a central role in school health education in Japan, has a unique history distinct from that of the system to train general teachers, and a wide variety of *yogo* teacher training programs are currently available¹⁾. According to the 2013 Public School Teachers' Educational Attainment published by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, the vast majority of general teachers graduated from colleges or undergraduate schools for education, whereas as many as 19% of *yogo* teachers graduated instead from junior colleges²⁾. Furthermore, *yogo* teachers who were graduates of a 4-year university obtained their degree from a school of nursing, health, or welfare, thereby demonstrating a broad array of educational backgrounds. Accordingly, we conducted a questionnaire survey of first-year students in the School of Education of University A to reveal students' awareness about *yogo* teachers.

1.2 History of *yogo* teachers

In 1929, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology put forth the Matter Related to School Nurses to define the duties of school nurses³⁾. To place school nurses as

members of the teaching staff, the National School Ordinance (Edict No. 148) was enacted in 1941 to establish a position for *yogo* instructors in public schools and give *yogo* instructors responsibility for the well-being of schoolchildren under the direction of the school principal³⁾. The Fundamental Law of Education enacted in 1947 renamed the position from *yogo* instructors to *yogo* teachers and formally stated that *yogo* teachers were responsible for the well-being of schoolchildren³⁾. After the provision of the first *yogo* teacher training course in 1952, universities, colleges, and junior colleges across Japan began to offer *yogo* teacher training programs. Today, *yogo* teacher training programs are offered at both schools of education, which do not offer nursing certificates, and schools for nursing³⁾. The duties of *yogo* teachers currently include organizing and implementing all of their school's health-related activities to promote and maintain the health of schoolchildren.

1.3 Changes in health risks among children and in the roles of *yogo* teachers

In the postwar era, infection was the leading health concern for schoolchildren. In recent years, however, due to social shifts and changes in the living environment, students' health is seriously affected by various other factors such as bullying, school refusal, eating disorders, various mental health issues, the increasing prevalence of chronic diseases such as allergies or diabetes, smoking, drinking, drug abuse, and obesity. Consequently, the roles of school health education continued to multiply, and in 1993, it was established that schools with more than 30 classes hire an additional *yogo* teacher³⁾. Starting in 2001, multiple *yogo* teachers are appointed to elementary schools with ≥ 851 students, junior and senior high schools with ≥ 801 students, and special schools with ≥ 61 students³⁾. In 2008, the roles of *yogo* teachers were redefined in accordance with the recommendations of the Central Council for Education⁴⁾, which also led to partial amendment of the School Health Law in June 2008³⁾. As a result of these changes, *yogo* teachers, who previously had an auxiliary role in school health activities, are now able to play a more central role in school health activities, and the law now clearly states that *yogo* teachers are responsible for providing health guidance and consultation.

2. Methods

In April 2014, a self-administered questionnaire was given to 24 students (23 women, 1 man) who had enrolled in the *yogo* teacher training program offered by the School of Education of University A. The survey was voluntary and anonymous in accordance with ethical standards.

The survey asked open-ended questions about students' (1) reasons for choosing a school of education with a *yogo* teacher training program instead of choosing a specific program for acquiring a *yogo* teacher certificate, (2) future career goals, (3) idea of *yogo* teachers, (4) desired skills and experiences to acquire at school, and (5) plans for graduate school study. To ensure student backgrounds were consistent, pre-survey interviews were conducted with students to confirm that students' prior knowledge about *yogo* teachers was based on teachers at their former schools and that students were aware of the multiple paths toward becoming a *yogo* teacher.

3. Results

(1) Reason for choosing a school of education with a *yogo* teacher training program

Of the 24 students, 23 had specifically wanted to become a *yogo* teacher and the remaining 1, who had wanted to become a health and physical education teacher, had failed the National Center Test for University Admissions. Of the set of 23 students, 13 stated that they simply aspired to be a *yogo* teacher, 9 were previously cared for by a *yogo* teacher when they were injured or sick (and in 5 of these 9 students, in psychological distress), and 1 wanted to help his/her best friend, who refused to attend school.

(2) Future career goal

Yogo teacher was the future career goal for the set of 23 students described previously. Of these students, 1 listed nurse as a second-choice career goal, 2 listed a profession in psychology, such as counsellor, and 1 listed physical therapist. The 1 student who wished to become a health and physical education teacher listed *yogo* teacher as a second choice.

(3) Image of *yogo* teachers (multiple responses allowed)

Yogo teachers were perceived as teachers who are kind by 16 students, as teachers who provide counseling by 9, as teachers who provide urgent care by 2, as teachers who do not judge students by 1, and as the teachers who are the cornerstone of the school by 1.

(4) Skills and experiences to acquire in school (multiple responses allowed)

Six students listed volunteer experiences, 6 listed knowledge on diseases that *yogo* teachers should know about, 4 listed communication skills, 4 listed knowledge about urgent care and counselling, and 1 listed knowledge about current educational issues.

(5) Plans to study in graduate school

One of the students who were aspiring to become a *yogo* teacher was thinking of going to graduate school, but the remaining 23 students, including the 1 who wished to become a health and physical education teacher, did not plan to attend graduate school.

4. Discussion

Yogo teachers are generally thought of by students as simply the teacher in the school nurse's office who handles health-related issues. However, historically their position originally entailed only the duties of a school nurse, and it took 18 years to establish their present-day position as teachers. Various social changes and the increasing complexity of pediatric health issues have led to the placement of multiple *yogo* teachers at school and to the leadership role of *yogo* teachers in school health activities. Furthermore, the Ordinance for Partial Amendment of the Ordinance for Enforcement of the Teacher's License Act in 1998 stipulated that *yogo* teachers teach health education classes³⁾. Today, *yogo* teachers play a central role in the implementation of school health activities and are deeply obligated to address present-day health challenges. Their specific duties as a

teacher with experience and skills in *yogo* include expected assistance with special needs education; emergency care, health check-ups and health maintenance of students; cooperation with class teachers and school physicians, dentists, pharmacists, and counsellors; role as a coordinator; health guidance; and health education.

Despite being unaware of the historical transformation of the *yogo* teacher system, the present students knew the general job descriptions of the “teacher in the nurse’s office”. Furthermore, they were fully aware that it is possible to obtain a teaching certificate in health education from not only schools of education, but also from junior colleges or universities specialized in nursing.

In this study, one of the students had first wished to become a health and physical education teacher and listed *yogo* teacher as their second choice. Considering that *yogo* teacher was the career choice in the other 23 students, it is clear that all students chose the program with a clear sense of purpose. Of the 23 students aspiring to be a *yogo* teacher, approximately 40% (9 of 23) did so because of their previous encounter with a *yogo* teacher, mostly regarding psychological counselling. This emphasizes the importance of mental health and should be reflected in programs for training *yogo* teachers. *Yogo* teachers were overwhelmingly perceived as teachers who offer counselling instead of teachers who provide urgent care, indicating that students have higher expectation of mental health services than urgent care services. Skills and experiences that the students wanted to acquire in school were volunteer activities (25%) and communication skills (17%), both of which are useful qualities in *yogo* teachers. However, further study is needed to investigate whether the skills and experiences that students want to acquire in school differ between students in *yogo* teacher training programs and those majoring in other fields. Only 4% of the present students planned to study in graduate school, presumably because they wished to work in the field as soon as possible and help others. However, it is important to provide additional educational opportunities so that students can acquire knowledge and skills for handling various challenges that they would face in real-life situations. For the same reason, we believe that the demand for professional graduate schools of teaching that offer opportunities for study while interacting with children in a school setting will increase.

A limitation to this study exists; namely, because this survey was conducted at a single university, the findings do not necessarily represent the views of all students in *yogo* teacher training programs offered by schools of education. However, the present findings will serve as a useful preliminary measure of trends among students who aspire to become *yogo* teachers. We plan to conduct similar surveys across Japan in the future.

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