A Case Study: Principal Actions in Inclusive School Practices at Yashiro Elementary School

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	The implementation of inclusive education in Japan's elementary schools is increasingly urgent, as national reforms prioritize equitable learning environments for special educational needs (SEN). Despite the commitment, challenges remain in interpreting the policy in school practices. School principals play critical role in the transition from policy to practice. This study explores the effectiveness of inclusive educational practices at Yashiro Elementary School under the principal actions in executing inclusive school practices. Utilize a qualitative case study design, data were collected through semi-structured interview with school principal and classroom observation in inclusive and resources setting. Focusing on the implementation of the Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS), data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, enabling the identification of recurring patterns and core theme with the qualitative data. The findings reveal that strategic leadership, knowledgeable hiring of specialized staff, and collaborative teaching approaches significantly enhance the learning experiences of special educational needs (SEN) students, ensuring their successful inclusion in mainstream educational settings.

1. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is a systematic approach that seeks to meet all students' requirements by minimizing the obstacles in the environment. It involves ensuring that children attend their local school at an age-appropriate level with personalized support tailored to their needs (UNICEF,2015). According to Spandagou (2020), Inclusive education is more specific focus than inclusion as a principle of education: it is an education subfield that is interested in making educational systems in inclusivle for children and students. The meaning defines inclusive education as a practice that considers an individual's interests while considering the available material, financial, and human resources within the context (Chennat, 2019). The fundamental transformation required to realize inclusive education systems is justified by the belief that developing an inclusive society requires an inclusive education system (Powell, 2014).

Inclusive education is a nuanced subset of the broader educational inclusion principle, specifically aimed at modifying the educational system to be accommodating for all children and students (Gargiulo & Metcalf, 2022). This specialized focus contrasts with special

education, a multidisciplinary field dedicated to delivering tailored programs and individualized support for students with disabilities (Spandagou, 2020). While both fields cater to students with specific needs, the implementations differ significantly due to the distinct environments in which they operate, necessitating a diverse array of adjustments to ensure equitable educational access.

The pursuit of an inclusive educational system is both a moral imperative and a practical necessity. It enriches the educational experience for all students, fostering an environment where diversity is not only accepted but celebrated. By integrating students with diverse needs and abilities, inclusive education promotes a more just and effective educational system, paving the way for a more inclusive society. The commitment to these principles is crucial for nurturing the potential of every student and ensuring that education remains a universal right truly accessible to all (Spandagou, 2020).

Japan's strides toward enhancing the social inclusion of individuals with disabilities are commendably reflected in its educational reforms. Under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT), Japan has transitioned from a segregated to an inclusive educational system since 2012. This shift is not merely a policy change but a profound evolution in educational philosophy, recognizing every individual's intrinsic right to access comprehensive educational opportunities (Maeda et al., 2021).

Currently, most special support is available in regular classroom at school focuses o students with developmental disabilities and inclusdes assistance for behavioral, learning, and interpersonal challenges. By 2017, approximately 107.000 students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) were receiving instruction within regular classroom representing 3.2% of the total Special Educational Needs (SEN) population- an indicator of Japan's ongoing progress toward nationwide inclusion (MEXT, 2018)

The momentum behind inclusive education in Japan has been promoted by teacher collaboration often rooted in the collectivistic nature of Japanese school culture (Futaba, 2016). This cultural foundation facilitates cooperative professional practices that support student's rights and inclusive learning environment. Japan's evolving model aligns with international standars, such as The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4) aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quaility education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Crucially, the success of this inclusive transition is heavily influenced by the leadership vision of school principals(DeMatthews, 2020; ISOGAI, 2017). As a key figures in school communities, principals shape the ethos and practices that define how inclusive education is conceptualized and enacted at the institutional levels. Their leadership plays an instrumental role in fostering environments where inclusive policies are not only implement but embraces as core values embbedded within school culture (DeMatthews et al., 2021).

Effective principals are those who leverage their understanding of disability, special education policies, and inclusive practices to enhance the organizational conditions and boost the professional capacity of their teams. The goal here is clear: to create high-performing, inclusive schools that are equipped to meet the needs of all students, including those with disabilities. Such leadership does not merely manage but transforms; it builds a school culture that can adapt and thrive amidst the complexities of varying educational landscapes (Billingsley et al., 2021).

The significance of leadership in promoting an inclusive school culture is further highlighted by the work of Riehl (in Ainscow & Sandill, 2010), who offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the tasks essential to fostering inclusivity in educational settings. According to Riehl (in Ainscow & Sandill, 2010), effective school leaders must engage in three pivotal activities: redefining perceptions of diversity, promoting inclusive educational practices, and building connections between schools and their broader communities.

In this research, Yashiro Elementary School participates in implementation of Inclusive education services as part of implementation of inclusive education reform at Hyogo Prefercture, Japan. The school was identified based on their focus on inclusive education practices. The criterion included their experiences accommodating students with special educational needs (SEN) in regular classrooms—the school with established programs, resources, and dedication to accessibility for students in an inclusive setting. The criteria included schools that actively included children with special educational needs (SEN), demonstrated an inclusive teaching style, and offered crucial support systems.

2. METHODS

2.1. Research Design

An extended case study design suggested by McNess (2004**)** is the methodology that best suits this research**.** An expanded case study approach to link the macro-concerns of both national policies with a micro-analysis of schools that implement inclusive education services. In this research methodology, the research design combines a cross-cultural analysis of past and present national policy findings from related research, empirical data drawn from multi-case studies, and a process of constant, iterative reflection supported by an ongoing relationship with key informants (McNess, 2004).McNess (2004) employed an interpretative approach in her research design, explicitly utilizing an extended case study design. Interpretive studies aim to understand educational phenomena better (Bray et al., 2014). These approaches heavily rely on naturalistic methods such as interviews, observation, and analysis of existing texts (Khakpour, 2012).
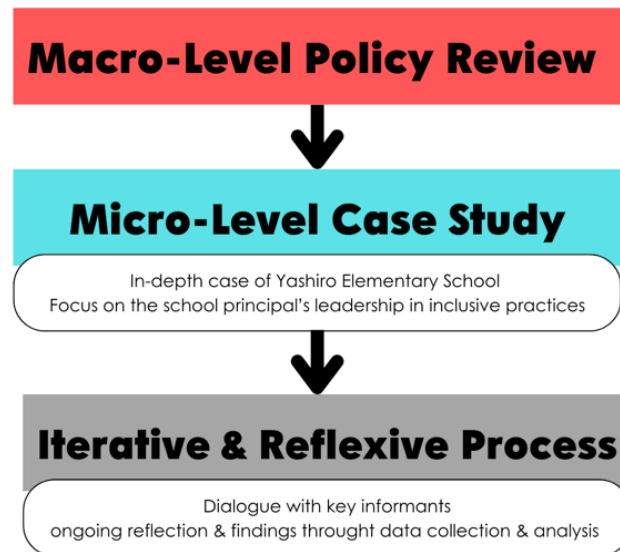
Figure 1 : Research Design Extended Case Study

2.2. Data Collection

The interview for this research focuses on the leadership role in inclusive schools. The first author and interpreter performed the interviews individually using a semi-structured interview guide using 16 indicators by Melloy et al. (2022). These indicators cover areas such as understanding special needs education laws, hiring and supporting special needs teachers, implementing Individual Educational Plans (IEPs), managing inclusive schools, implementing co-teaching models, curriculum, and assessment related to special needs education, behavior interventions, disciplining students with disabilities, supervising service providers and paraprofessionals, working with school counselors, and understanding the Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS). These indicators provide a comprehensive understanding of the roles and responsibilities of school leaders in inclusive education. The interview lasted about 30 – 60 minutes. After completing the interviews, the first author completed the transcription within three days, and all authors discussed and analyzed the transcripts of both school leader's experiences.

3.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1   Policy Directions for Special Needs Education Services

Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) has taken significant steps toward integrating special needs education nto broader framework. This vision aligns with a national and international commitment to inclusive education grounded in the principles of The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, ensuring "equal access to all levels of education, including for persons with disabilities" (UNICEF, n.d.).

MEXT's policy framework focuses on six foundational pillars including the diversification of educational settings, improvement of teacher training, and the development of continuous support systems. As stated by National Institue of Special Needs Education (NISE) (in ISOGAI, 2017), MEXT promotes the establishment of a school system that allows students with disabilities learn together with other kinds students. This approach ensures that students are supported in regular schools through tailored accommodations, while also strengthening the capaicty of teachers to meed diverse special educational needs (SEN) students. According to the OECD (2018), Japan's education system is increasingly focusing on equity and inclusion, particularly for students with special educational needs (SEN) (p.164). Yoshitoshi & Takahashi (2023) highlight that despote legal reforms, there remain a gap between an indeal inclusive education on paper and the actual situation in school. These reforms though progressive, must be coupled with practical implementation that respects parental choice and indvidual students.

Strategic School Organization

The effectiveness of inclusive education is deeply rooted in how schools are organized and staffed. MEXT has instituted special student-to-teacher ratios-ranging from 35 to 40 in regular classrooms, 8 in special needs classrooms, and 3 to 6 in special schools, to ensure personalized instruction and responsive support (ISOGAI, 2017). This structural foundation is reinforced by deployment of special needs education teacher as shadow teacher who facilitate inclusion by addressing practical and student needs. Cho & Park (2024) emphasize the necessity of collaborative teamwork between homeroom teachers and shadow teachers as means of addressing the multiple and complex needs of students with special educational needs (SEN). Furthermore, financial support in the form of government grants enables local authorities in improving support systems in mainstream schools, making inclusive education accessible and sustain at the grassroots level. According to Yoneda (2019), flexibility in educational placement isn crucial, but it must be supported by organizational readiness and trained human resources to be effective.

Creating a Rich Study Environment

The infrastructure and psychological learning environment play a critical role in improving inclusive education. As (ISOGAI, 2017) explains school buildings and faciliaties need to be designed for students with special educational needs (SEN) can move safely and learn comfortably with other students. Inclusive infrastructure goes beyond accessibility – it supports engagement, participation, and a sense of belonging for all students. The OECD (2018) also stresses of creating inclusive learning settings requires more than legislation, it demands coordinated investment in training, space, and materials. The othe tension highlighted while indeed there are ongoing barriers in the implementation of reasonable accommodation, reinforcing the need for inclusive school design-physically and pedagogically (Yoshitoshi & Takahashi, 2023). When school are designed with diversity in mind, they become spaces where

all learners can thrive, regardless of their conditions, this condition will foster social cohesion and academic equity.

3.2   Principal Actions in Supporting Inclusive School

The role of principals is pivotal in fostering inclusive environments that cater to the diverse needs of all students, including those with disabilities. Effective school leadership transcends administrative duties, embodying a commitment to inclusivity and strategic managerial integration (Billingsley et al., 2021). This section explores the multifaced strategies employed by school principal at Yashiro Elementary school, illustrating how principled and intentional leadership can enhance the educational experiences of students with special needs (SEN). Through commitment to inclusion, the empowerment of teacher leadership, and managerial coherence, such leaders cultivate learning environments that could accommodate and celebrate diversity conditions.

Commitment to Inclusion

At the core of transformative leadership lies a profound and sustained commitment to inclusion. Principals who prioritize inclusive education intentionally align school policies and practices with national and globa mandates such as the Japan Disability Acts and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (ISOGAI, 2017; Wulff, 2020). These frameworks provide a foundation upon which inclusive schools build systems and pedagogies that promote equity for all students. This conditions highlights principals's roles in fostering a culture of inclusion through change-oriented collaboration, planning and system-level thinking (DeMatthews et al., 2021b; Melloy et al., 2022).   School principals exemplify this commitment by collaborating with local educational boards to secure the necessary resources and infrastructure that facilitate the integration of special educational needs (SEN) students into regular classrooms. This proposed condition strategies reflects Japan's dual approach to inclusion (Cho & Park, 2024). This is not merely a compliance with policy but a deliberate strategy to enrich the learning environment for all students. Regular observation and feedback mechanisms further underscore this commitment, ensuring that enrollment and instructional practices are continuously refined to meet the diverse needs of the student body equitably.

Encouraging Teacher Leadership

Another significant aspect of fostering an inclusive school environment is empowering teachers to assume leadership roles in the development and implementation of inclusive practices (Scott & Lock, 2021). School principal promote a culture where teachers are encouraged to actively participate in decision-making processes related to inclusive education. Building capacity and shared leadership as critical components of effective inclusive schools. School principal's encouragements of teachers stepping into leadership roles directly reflects these practices (D. E. DeMatthews et al., 2021a). This empowerment fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility among staff, enhancing their commitment to the school's inclusive ethos. Moreover, providing professional growth opportunities for special needs

educators and shadow teachers to transition into broader roles like homeroom teachers not only diversifies the teaching landscape but also enhances the pedagogical depth of the school. Different condition such as homeroom teachers and shadow teachers are involved in individualized educational program and school principal needs to provide structure for them to collaborate

Managerial Integration

Effective managerial integration is crucial for the seamless implementation of inclusive education frameworks such as Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and School-Wide Positive Behavioral Supports (SWPBS) (Sugai & Horner, 2014). Under Yashiro Elementary school leadership, these frameworks are not merely implemented but are woven into the fabric of the school's culture. His hands-on approach in training staff and aligning school-wide practices with these frameworks ensures that inclusivity is both a priority and a reality. Regular professional development sessions are not just procedural but are strategic efforts to enhance the staff's capabilities in addressing the behavioral and instructional needs of all students. DeMatthews et al. (2021a) points out that inclusive principals indeed facilitate consistent information flow and promote reflective practices that allow staff to adapt and refine strategies. In this school leadership aligning vision, practice, and resources ensure inclusivity need to enact at every level of the school system

3.3   Redesigned the School for Inclusion

Based on observations conducted at Yashior Elementary School, inclusive education emerges through the intentional redesign of leadership practices, resource mobilization, and instructional innovation. Key dimensions of this transformation include strategic planning, collaboration with special school, co-development of Individual Education Program (IEP)s, and the integration of co-teaching models. These efforts demonstrate inclusive school is not isolotaed intervention but a holistic reconfiguration of school systems and culture.

Strategic Planning for Inclusive Education

Effective inclusive leadership requires deep knowledge of special education policies and regulation and its translation into school-level practice. School principal at Yashiro Elementary School exemplifies this by using locally sourced funds (from Kato Local Educational Board) to develop infrastructure and services necessary for supporting diverse students. This planning is closely aligned with MEXT guidelines and incorporates Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, ensuring adaptability across settings and students profiles (ISOGAI, 2017)

Strategic initiatives include long-term observaion of students with special educational needs (SEN) before determining placements and thougtful rescheduling of staff hours to support co-planning and team teaching. Such foresights reflects what DeMatthews, (2020) describes as "planning and evaluationg" within a systems-thinking leadership approach-ensuring that inclusive education is embedded not only in policy but in operational routines. These practices also align with OECD (2018) recommendations, which stress the importance

of adaptive planning, stakeholder engagament, and flexible use of resources for achieving equity in education.

Collaborating with Special Needs Schools

Collaboration with specialized institutions, Kita Harima Special School plays a central role in building inclusive capacity. These partnerships facilitate joint activities- including shared excursions and experiental learning that promote empathy and understanding between students with and without disabilities. More importantly, the contribute to teacher learning through exchange of knowledge about differentiated instruction and student behavior management. Tsirantonaki & Vlachou, (2024) underscore the value of such external collaboration in reinforcing inclusive leadership, noting that principals must suppot the sharing of inclusive values and provide opportunities for professional dialogue across special and mainstream education. This echoes Lambrecht et al. (2022), who emphasize that collaborative structures foster shared responsibility and improve the quality of individualized educational programs (IEPs)

IEPs Development and Implementation

At Yashiro Elementary School, the development of Individual Educational Programs (IEP)s is a collaborative and data informed process. Homeroom teachers, subject teachers, shadow teachers, and social workers jointly assess students over an acaemic year, producing individualized plans that are subject to ongoing review and refinement. This team-based model supports personalization while coherence with classroom instruction.

Lambrecht et al. (2022) highlight that "instructional leadership directly affects Individual Educational Program (IEP)s implementation," while transformational leadership facilitates collaboration – both of which are evident in Yashiro Elementary School's school principal dual leadership approach. Additionally Beqiraj et al. (2022) emphasize that Postive Behavior Supports (PBS) and Individual Educational Program (IEP)s when collaboratively developed, can lead to significant decreases in behaviors that challenge and increases in alternative behaviors, validating Yashiro Elementary School's practice of combining academic and behavioral supports.

Moreover, resource allocation is strategic; assistive technologies and trained supports (e.g., shadow teachers) are embedded into classroom environment to ensure full implementation of Individual Educational Program (IEP)s goals. This approach demonstrates a structural, rather than ad hoc, commitment to equity.

Co-Teaching Models

The integration of co-teaching practices at Yashiro Elementary School reflects a deiliberate move from parallel systems to unified teaching framework. Special needs education teachers shift from isolated instructional roles into co-teaching partnerships with homeroom and subject teachers. This model fosters real-time differentiation and mutual professional learning, contributing to a more inclusive classroom dynamic.

Co-teaching improves student engagement and improve the professional development of homeroom and subject teachers and special needs education teachers (Jurkowski et al., 2023). Regular planning sessions, shared evalution of teaching strategies, and flexible role transitions – such as mentoring shadow teachers into full-time homeroom roles – create a pathway for sustained growth and instructional quality.

Furthermore, Spandagou, (2020b) stresses that inclusive teaching is not about placing students in the same room, but about "reshaping teaching practices to create a learning environment that support all kinds of students". Yashiro Elementary School's co-teaching model embodies this philosophy, demonstrating how inclusive practices can be embedded into instructional routines rather than treated as add-ons.

3.4 Embedding School-wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS)

Providing inclusive setting requires more than responsive teaching; it demands a systematic, school-wide approach to behavior support. At Yashiro Elementary school, the implementation of school-wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) within the broader Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) framework illustrates inclusive practices embedded through proactive planning and collaborative leadership. As noted by Sugai & Horner (2014), SWPBS is designed to improve the capacity of school to educate all kinds of students, especially students with challenging conditions, and this vision is evident in the school's tiered approach to behavior support.

SWPBS operates on a three-tiered model: universal system (Tier 1) for all students, targeted interventions (Tier 2) for students at risk, and inidualized support (Tier 3) for those with specific conditions and challenges. This model aligns with finding by Mahabbati et al. (2023), who describe PBS as an integrated school system with individually tailored intervention levels for behavior and social-emotional intervention. Yashiro Elementary School's structured, proactive behavior plan reflects this framework by integrating clear expectations, early interventions, and intensive personalized supports.
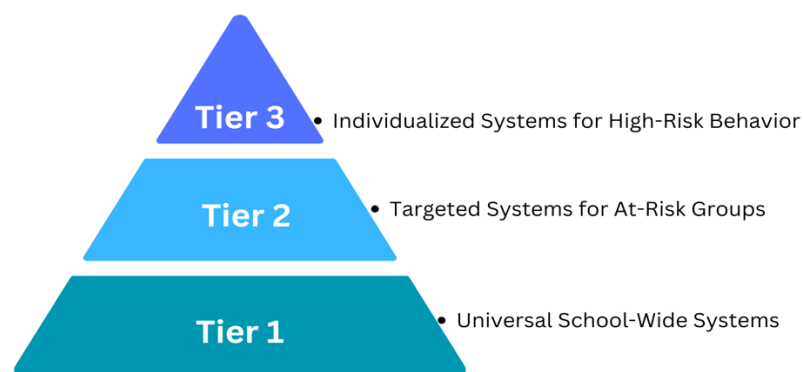
Figure 2 School-wide Positive Behavior Supports Hierarchy

Tier 1: Universal School-Wide Systems

At the foundational level, Yashiro Elementary School implements Tier 1 strategies to promote positive behavior among all students. Clear behavioral expectations are embeded into daily routines and reinforced consistently across school settings. Teacher utilizes structured group activities and cooperative learning models to facilitate social interaction and support behavioral learning. According to Mahabbati et al. (2023), universal strategies help reduce disruptive behavior and increase school belongingness. Similar concept by Randolph et al.(2024) emphasize the importance of early classroom management preparation, nothing that preservice teachers must be trained in evidence-based classroom management strategies to create inclusive and supportive classrooms. These strategies are evident in Yashiro's routine practices, including use of scaffolding, group work, ad consistent praise to reinforce prosocial behavior.

Tier 2: Targeted Systems for At-Risk Groups

For students displays early signs of difficulties, Yashiro Elementary School employs Tier 2 Interventions. These include increased adult supervision during non-classroom times, small-group sessions focused on specific skills, and classroom modifications such as personalized seating or flexible instruction methods. These practices align with recommendation from Rasmitadila et al. (2023) who emphasize inclusive education training increased teacher's competence and independence to develop instructional systems in inclusive classrooms. Moreover, Mahabbati et al (2023) observe that teachers in inclusive schools often initiate practice to mitigate behavior challenges based on routine assessment and contextual needs. Yashiro's strategic context-responsive approach underscores the critical role of middle-tier support in preventing behavioral escalation.

Tier 3: Individualized Systems for High-Risk Behaviors

Students with high-risk condition or behavioral challenges receive intensive personalized interventions through Tier 3 supports. These interventions are collaboratively designed by multidisciplinary teams, including homeroom teachers, shadow teacher, social worker and special needs education teacher at Kita Harima special school. Strategies encompass one-on-one counseling, personalized behavior plans, and adapted instructional methods. This approach aligns with findings of Beqiraj et al. (2022), highlighted that Positive Behavior Support (PBS) can be effective in supporting children and young people with developmental disabilities, emphasizing the importance of individualized, function-based interventions that are involve collaboration. The importance of such responsive practices will prevent and address challenging behaviors to ensure students success (Mahabbati et al., 2023; Randolph et al., 2024). Yashiro Elementary School ensures that special educational needs (SEN) students will receive the necessary support to succeed academically and sociailly. This commitment reflects a broader understanding that individualized, collaborative approaches are essential in fostering inclusive educational environments for all kinds of students.

Yashiro Elementary School's application of SWPBS within MTSS framework exemplifies how leadership, and systematized support can drive inclusive success. Mahabbati et al., (2023) affirms that PBS can transform a troubled school into place where all students develop healthy social relationship and enjoy learning- an outcome clearly mirrored in the inclusive and proactive culture at Yashiro Elementary School. By embedding SWPBS practices into daily routines and fostering collaboration, Yashiro Elementary demonstrated how mainstream schools can support special educational needs (SEN) students while promoting positive behavior school-wide.

3.5   Increasing Capacity for Inclusion

Developing an inclusive school environment is strategic process that requires building the capacity of teachers, support staff, and leadership teams. Inclusive school must deliberately invest in staffs, professional learning, collaboration, and resourcing to meet the diverse needs of all kinds of students, particularly students with special educational needs (SEN) and those requiring additional support. Capacity-building is not simply about meeting compliance mandates- it is proactive, systemic approach to embedding equity within the school cultures.

Hiring and Training Staff

Effective inclusive education begins with inclusive hiring practices. At Yashiro Elementary School, school principal prioritizes recruiting staff with appropriate qualifications and inclusive dispositions. Teacher with special education licenses and experience in differentiated instruction are particularly valued. As Billingsley et al. (2021) emphasize, school principal in effective inclusive schools actively "increase capacity for inclusion" by securing skilled personnel who align with the school's inclusive mission.

Ongoing professional development (PD) is equally esential. Teachers and paraprofessionals particpate in training sessions focused on understanding diverse learning needs, managing challenging behaviors, and applying instructional frameworks like Universal Design for Learning (UDL). This align with Tsirantonaki & Vlachou's (2024) findings, principal support for staff development in inclusive practices is a key enabler of successful inclusion.

At Yashiro Elementary School, shadow teachers are paired with homeroom teachers to co-support students, gradually gaining experience that allows them to transition into broader roles. This mirrors that collaborative structures and role mobility strengthen Individual Educational Program (IEP)s and inclusive practices (Lambrecht et al., 2022). It also illustrates how inclusive capacity-building is liked to career progression and pedagogical depth.

Building Professional Learning Communities

Inclusive schools thrive on sustained, purposeful collaboration. Yashiro Elementary School fosters this through the development of professional learning communities (PLCs), which serve as platforms for shared problem-solving, instructional design, and reflective inquiry. Informal

exchanges- through peers' observations or casual dialogues – complement more structured team meetings focused on planning and student progress reviews.

DeMatthews, (2020) identifies "capacity building and change-oriented collaboration" as central to the sustainability of inclusive inititatives. These professional learning communities (PLCs) also cultivate teacher leadership, as teachers are encouraged to take initiative in identifying gaps, co-developing strategies, and mentoring peers. When teachers are trusted to lead in inclusive practice, they develop a stronger sense of professional agency and commitment to equity(Scott & Lock, 2021). Inclusive schools benefit when school principals promote shared leadership and empower teachers to lead implementation efforts.

Resource Allocation

Inclusion cannot be achieved without strategic investment in people, tools, and infrastructure. At Yashiro Elementary School, school principal makes targeted use municipal funds (e.g., from Kato Educational Board allocation) to support inclusive progress. The OECD, (2018) states that inclusive reform "requires investment not only in legal frameworks, but in school infrastructure, capacity building, and materials that meet diverse needs. Yashiro Elementary School's resource management exemplifies this holistic view, ensuring teachers have the resources to implement evidence-based practices and students receive the accomodations necessary for striving. Investing in tools such as communication devices, flexible seating, and visual aids ensures that instruction is not only accessible but also engaging and equitable.

Observation and Feedback

A cuture of continuous learning is central to building capacity for inclusion. At Yashiro Elementary School, principal use systematic classroom observation and feedback to inform staff development and guide individualized student support. These observations allow leadership to assess instructional effectiveness, identify professional learning needs, and ensure that practices are aligned with inclusive goals. Effective principals facilitate ongoing reflection and feedback loops that drive school improvement (DeMatthews et al., 2021a). Similarly, Tsirantonaki & Vlachou, (2024)Inclusive leaders regularly engage with classroom data to refine teacher practices and school-wide strategies. Feedback mechanisms, embedded in a culture of trust and open communication. TEachers and support staff feel empowered to seek input and offer peer guidance. This collaborative, data-informed feedback cycle improves instructional quaility and fosters a sense of collective responsibility for student outcomes.

3.6 Supported Collaboration and Effective Instruction

Effective inclusive education highlights the colloboration among homeroom teachers, shadow teachers, special needs education teachers, and social workers. This collaborative framework ensures that students with special educational needs (SEN) receive comprehensive support tailored to their unique requirements.

Facilitating Collaboration

At Yashiro Elementary School, collaboration is not treated as school's organizational culture. Regular interdisciplinary meetings-organized by school prinicipal- bring together homeroom teachers, shadow teachers, and special needs educator to plan, assess, and refine inclusive instructional strategies. These shared sessions promote professional dialogue, joint ownership of student outcomes, and strategic problem solvings. DeMatthews, (2020) found that sucessful inclusive schools are grounded in "change-oriented collaboration" where principals able to create space for teacher and staff work together. Collaborative teamwork between all staffs is essential for addressing the complex needs of special educational needs (SEN) students, particularly in system like Japan which is still evolving.

Addressing Behavioral Challenges

Managing student behavior remains one of the greatest challenges in inclusive classrooms. At Yashiro Elementary School, this challenge is met through targeted professional development and coaching tailored to the needs of teachers. Randolph et al. (2024) highlight the importance of training teachers to proactively plan and implement function-based interventions that are aligned with student's emotional and behavioral needs. Teachers in inclusive setting initiate behavioral support themselves, yet often lack systemic training, which reinforces the need for leadership-supported strategies (Mahabbati et al., 2023). Spandagou, (2020b) adds that addressing behavior must be situated within broader systemic collaboration – among families, school staff, and external agencies- to be fully effective.

Promoting Effective Instruction

Inclusive instruction at Yashiro is based on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) which ensures that lessons are designed to be flexible and accessible for all students from the outset. Teachers employ techniques like scaffolding, flexible grouping, visual modelling, and culturally responsive teaching practices to accommodate diverse learning profiles. Pradhan & Naik, (2024)affirm that inclusive classroom in improve academic achievement and cultivate empathy, tolerance, and mutual understanding among students. Spandagou (2020b) advocates Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as a tool for "equity in access" allowing teachers to proactive design. Co-teaching models- where homeroom teachers and shadow teachers collaboratively design and deliver instruction-lead for better outcomes for both students and staff by distributing instructional responsibility and deepening mutual expertise.

Teachers incorporate Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles to create inclusive and engaging lessons. Instructional methods such as scaffolding, group work, and modeling are used to support diverse learners. Flexible arrangements ensure that instructional goals align with the needs of all students.

Monitoring and Building Positive Culture

Evaluation is embedded into classroom practice through regular observations, student progress monitoring, and feedback loops that inform both instructional and behavioral

interventions. The school implements the school-Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) framework, aligning universal expectations with individualized support tiers to build a cohesive, proactive behavioral culture. Classroom observations and assessments are used to evaluate the effectiveness of inclusive strategies. Data from these evaluations inform ongoing PD and resource adjustments.Beqiraj et al. (2022) found that PBS framework lead to signifcant decreases in behavior that challenge and increases in alternative behaviors. Under school leadership, equity and collaboration become central to fostering environments where all students, regardless of challenges, have opportunities to succeed.

4.   CONCLUSION

At Yashiro Elementary School, inclusive education thrives under the strategic leadership of School principal, whose actions exemplify effective practices for fostering an inclusive environment. His approach integrates policy alignment, collaborative leadership, and resource optimization to meet the diverse needs of all students, including those with disabilities.

Yashiro Elementary School principal emphasizes collaboration among teachers, shadow teachers, and specialists like social workers, creating a culture of shared responsibility for inclusive education. Regular team meetings facilitate discussions on student progress and instructional strategies, ensuring all stakeholders contribute to tailored solutions. To support behavioral and instructional challenges, Mr. Fujiwara incorporates frameworks such as Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and School-Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS). These frameworks enable tiered interventions, from universal behavioral expectations to targeted and individualized support for at-risk students.

His leadership also fosters teacher empowerment by providing professional development and encouraging staff to assume leadership roles. Shadow teachers gain opportunities to transition into homeroom roles, enriching their expertise and the school's capacity for inclusion. Through resource optimization, including local government funding, the school develops accessible infrastructure and integrates assistive technologies. Mr. Fujiwara's proactive actions ensure that Yashiro Elementary stands as a model for inclusive school practices, blending equity with excellence in education.

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