

# Japanese report on school education activities under COVID-19 pandemic

(Online discussion meeting between English teachers of Taiwan, South-Korea, and Japan)

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## 1. The general trend of the pandemic

The first infection of the COVID-19 in Japan was reported in early February, since then it rapidly spread around the country. The former premier led by SHINZO Abe began to take the countermeasures hurriedly to stem the spread, but it failed because they had no medical expertise concerning the epidemic. The nation's worry increased unchecked.

In this mid-November, the third wave of the COVID-19 hit the country, which again has threatened the people with further new distress.

The latest statistics of the consequences caused by the disease (as of November 11<sup>th</sup>) shows : in Japan, the number of the those infected confirmed : approximately 113,000, the death toll: 1,876. Worldwide: the number of those infected is 52,000,000, the death toll is 1,280,000.

## 2. Corona's effects on Japanese education

The Abe cabinet on February 27<sup>th</sup> suddenly requested all the schools across the country to close them. It was a government's request in name, but it was virtually a mandatory closure of all the schools, public and private, to check the pandemic, which upset teachers and students and other persons of education concerned. His decision was coercive, authoritarian, we the people, dreadful of the unknown virus-related disease, had to unwillingly comply with it. The closure which started on March 2<sup>nd</sup>, brought about enormous effects to the public. The school cancelled or postponed graduation and entrance ceremonies in March and April.

On April 16<sup>th</sup> the government issued the state of emergency as the pandemic worsened further. The closure continued until May 25<sup>th</sup> when the government announced lifting of the emergency. Overall, school closure lasted about three months.

Most schools began to operate class activities on June 1<sup>st</sup>. But they did a "dispersed schooling," with 20 students from each 40-student class coming to school every other day, or conducted "morning class and afternoon class" for 20 students to attend each.

## 3. Current class activities

In elementary, middle, high school level, they have been obliged to cancel school events such as sports meets, school excursion, campus festival, and teachers have to make up for the delayed instructions created by the pandemic. The crammed instructions enforce many students to suffer much stress because they don't enjoy only-studying-oriented classes, distant from pleasant school events. This type of school activities particularly affects underachievers, mentally-retarded or physically-disabled school children.

Due to delay of introducing IC-oriented education, those primary and middle level school education, online teaching has been restricted to only part of schools around the country. In university level, online education has been extensively conducted. According to the latest education-ministry's survey, 20 % of universities or colleges plan to implement conventional "face-to-face" classes while 80 % of them plan to do face-to-face class plus online

classes.

#### 4. Challenges posed by the Corona-ridden education

During the dispersed schooling period, every teacher has experienced the benefit of short-sized classes. They felt it is more effective in teaching in the 20-kid class than in big 40-kid class. In the smaller classes they can pay attention to each kid in every subject of classes. Conventionally, Japan ranks worst in class-size by OECD's 35-member states. Average class-size of our junior or senior high school is around 40 while the OECD's average is 25. Many boards of municipal education, teachers' unions, various academic organizations, and even All Japan Prefectural Governors' Association raised a voice, "Implement 20-member classes soon!" In a nationwide campaign for support, the Ministry of Education are forced to address the challenge in next year onward.