Postsecondary Education Programs Network of Japan

Mayumi Shirasawa
National University Corporation
Tsukuba University of Technology

Abstract

Postsecondary Education Programs Network of Japan (PEPNet-Japan), a grant program of Nippon Foundation and supported by PEN-International, is a collaborative network among pioneer universities and colleges which provide effective services to Deaf or hard of hearing individuals. It is led by National University Corporation-Tsukuba University of Technology (NTUT), which is the only university for Deaf or hard of hearing individuals in Japan, and 12 partner institutions across Japan. The mission of PEPNet-Japan partner institutions is to develop the best support model for students who are Deaf or hard of hearing, and assist other institutions using know-how developed by them.

In this paper, after the sharing current situation surrounded students who are Deaf or hard of hearing, the process which PEPNet-Japan has been taken shape is cited. Based on this information, the role and mission of PEPNet-Japan will be discussed.

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Current Situation of Postsecondary Education for Deaf or Hard of Hearing Students

In recent years, a great deal of effort has been made on enhancing accessibility to the students who are Deaf or hard of hearing in postsecondary educational institutions in Japan. More and more universities and colleges accept Deaf or hard of hearing students and provide better services. However, it is not yet enough. Before discussing the mission and role of PEPNet-Japan, it is important to consider the current situation of postsecondary education for individuals who are Deaf or hard of hearing.

In Japan, there are approximately 1,200 universities and colleges. According to the nationwide survey conducted by PEPNet-Japan, individuals who are Deaf or hard of hearing are enrolled in about 30% of the universities and colleges throughout Japan. This includes 237 institutions, or 287 institutions if we include the data for the past three years. However, only half of these institutions (132 institutions) provide support services to access information in their classes. One of the most common services is notetaking which is done by volunteer students who are trained as notetakers. In this survey, all 132 institutions that provide any kind of student service for Deaf students provide notetaking service. But interpreting and speech-to-text services are rather limited. Only 18% of institutions provide interpreting services, and only 14% provide speech-to-text services. However speech-to-text services are now expanding and we can expect that it will be one of the major services in the near future. Regarding the organization of student service systems, only 10% of universities and colleges have disability service office in their institutions, and less than five of them hire sign language interpreter.

Examples of student services available from institutions
**Notetaking services.** Notetaking services in Japan are much different from those in America. It is more like text interpreting using handwriting. The notetaker provides a text message by handwriting and deriving what the instructor says by summarizing meaning for meaning. Deaf or hard of hearing students usually sit next to the notetaker and use the notes as a real-time access service. Short-term training programs for notetakers are sometimes offered by the institutions. Most of notetakers are volunteer students in their institutions who are not in that particular class. Hourly based wages might be paid.

**Speech-to-text services (laptop-to-laptop).** Speech-to-text services are now expanding in Japan. More and more institutions which already have notetaking services have been considering starting speech-to-text service as another option for their students. In Japan the most common technology in using speech-to-text services is a laptop-to-laptop service that uses IP-Talk software. In this method, text chat technology is used and two or more people can type simultaneously to provide one sentence. Three or more laptops are linked by a local LAN: one for the student and the others for the operators. One operator types the first part of the sentence which is delivered by a speaker, and the second operator types the next part of the sentence. Thus these sentences are connected together and displayed in the student’s laptop. Students can get much more information than normal typing and be able to access their class easily. Two or four operators usually work together in one class, and most of them are trained volunteer students, similar to notetakers.

**Interpreting services.** Although interpreting services are very important to ensure real-time access to classes for students who are Deaf or hard of hearing, they are still very limited in this country. No university or college has an interpreter training program in Japan, and only two programs are available throughout the county: one is in a two-year technical school, and the other is in a two-year vocational rehabilitation school. Although some universities or colleges provide interpreting services for Deaf or hard of hearing students, most of them use this service only for seminars which are likely to have interactive communication, and in which having support from notetaking services would not be successful. Therefore, only a few students can access interpreting services. Most interpreters are freelance interpreters who are registered in the region agency. Most of them do not have an opportunity to take specific training courses focused on postsecondary educational interpreting.

**Establishment of PEPNet-Japan**

Let us turn to the establishment of PEPNet-Japan. The first trigger in setting up PEPNet-Japan was the faculty development activity in April 2004 held by PEN-International supported by Nippon Foundation. In this faculty development activity, six Japanese people (three from NTUT and the others from three different pioneer institutions which provide advanced support service for students who are Deaf or hard of hearing) had an opportunity to observe the NTID support system and join the PEPNet 2004 conference in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. At that time, there were several institutions that had outstanding support services in Japan; some of them discussed establishing some sort of collaborative network among these institutions. But lack of communication between those institutions kept them apart and never gave them a chance to start up. That is why the attendance of delegations from different pioneer institutions had a great impact on changing the situation. After a ten-day faculty development activity, delegates from
pioneer institutions agreed to continue collaborative work to improve their practices and exchange information with each other, and then expand this connection into the collaborative network similar to PEPNet in America. As a result, they decided to establish PEPNet-Japan six months after the faculty development activity.

**Mission and Projects of PEPNet-Japan**

According to decisions from the first business meeting in October 2004, PEPNet-Japan is a collaborative network among pioneer universities and colleges which provide effective services to Deaf or hard of hearing individuals. It is led by National University Corporation-Tsukuba University of Technology (NTUT), which is the only university for Deaf or hard of hearing individuals in Japan, and 12 partner institutions across the country. The mission of PEPNet-Japan partner institutions is to develop the best support models for students who are Deaf or hard of hearing, and assist other institutions using know-how developed by them.

After a few months of discussing and reviewing the situation surrounding students who are Deaf or hard of hearing, PEPNet-Japan has addressed three major issues that all Japanese universities and colleges should look into:

- Volunteer-based support services which are currently adopted by many universities and colleges must be introduced into all of institutions which accept Deaf or hard of hearing students. This is the most fundamental and critical issue.
- Universities and colleges which currently provide volunteer-based support services must move into the next stage which provides a higher quality of access services.
- Partner institutions which already have advanced access services have to be a good model to other institutions as they introduce high quality services and experiment with putting new technology into practice.

Based on these issues, PEPNet-Japan has decided to work on three major projects as well as offering workshops, symposia, informational guides, and consultation to help postsecondary institutions improve the accessibility of their programs.

- Development of Japanese tipsheets
  - Develop a reference booklet on support for Deaf students applicable to Japanese universities, based on the tipsheets developed by NETAC.
- Development of curriculum and materials for notetaker training
  - Evaluate notetaker training programs currently provided in postsecondary education institutions, and develop audio-visual materials and curricula for successful training.
- Development of a manual on how to create and operate student support systems
  - Develop a manual that provides the know-how to structure a support system for Deaf or hard of hearing students at each institutions, including how to set up a support office, hire interpreters, etc.

These projects are mainly focused on first issue cited above. However since notetaking services or other volunteer-based services have rapidly spread throughout the country, it can be suggested that next project for PEPNet-Japan after these might be to standardize higher quality services in institutions, such as speech-to-text services or interpreting services. In addition to this, studies on video remote interpreting, evaluation and training of interpreters, and trial training of speech-to-text providers using voice recognition technology have been initiated by some partner...
institutions as practices on the third issue. Since these studies can be a key to further progress, more effort should be emphasized in the future.

Conclusion

In Japan, establishing student services in each institution has been a significant issue for a long time. However volunteer-based support services have been rapidly increasing these days, and it became not impossible to make all of institutions provide some kind of student services to improve their accessibility for students who are Deaf or hard of hearing. Materials which PEPNet-Japan is developing can provide the impetus for making this a reality. However, as soon as these three projects are accomplished, the focus should be shifted into the next stage which focuses on higher quality services. Specifically, evaluation and training of interpreters is a very important issue as well as increasing number of institutions which hire interpreters as service coordinators. To address these issues, the expectation toward PEPNet-Japan has been increasing.

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Appendix: Footprint of PEPNet-Japan

The major progresses of PEPNet-Japan are the following:

**Year 2004**
- April 14-25
  - The first faculty development activity at NTID and PEPNet 2004 conference
- May to September
  - Conducted a nationwide survey on student services for Deaf and hard of hearing individuals
- October 29
  - The first business meeting
- January
  - Publication of the report of American support system for students who are Deaf or hard of hearing

**Year 2005**
- January 4-8
  - Visited NETAC office and NETAC site in New York City
- January 28
  - The second business meeting
- March 13-24
  - Faculty development activity at NTID and NETAC New York site
April 3
- Exchange event for Deaf and hard of hearing students in the Kita-Kanto and Tohoku areas

May 14
- The third business meeting

June 12
- The first project operational meeting

July 24
- The second project operational meeting

September 23
- Symposium: “Toward the development of a postsecondary educational support network for deaf and hard of hearing students”

October 7-11
- Visited partner institutions by PEN-International board members

October 8
- The first PEPNet-Japan symposium

October 9
- The fourth business meeting

December 16
- Training seminar for service coordinators: “Support services in postsecondary educational institutions for individuals who are Deaf or hard of hearing:

**Year 2006**
- January 28-29
  - The fifth business meeting
- February
  - Construction of new website
- February
  - Started listserv service
- March 29-April 9
  - The third faculty development activity at NTID and PEPNet 2006 conference in Kentucky

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