

The Actual Situation of Sexuality Education in Japan and its Problems

Fact-finding for teachers interested in Sexuality Education

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Abstract

Background: In recent years, sexually transmitted infections have increased rapidly among young people in Japan. Nevertheless, conservatives have attacked sexuality education (SE). As a result, SE in Japan was forced into retreat, and the positioning of SE in the school has become unclear and ambiguous.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to clarify the actual situation of Japanese SE and to establish the type of problems Japanese SE faces.

Method: A questionnaire survey was sent to about 850 persons, who are members of The Council for Education and Study on Human Sexuality, which has many teachers among its members.

Result: The questionnaire collection rate was 40.5% ($n = 344$). The rate by gender was 87.6% women and 11.5% men. Of these, 68.1% were schoolteachers, and most of them were primary schoolteachers. In particular, they included many Yogo teachers (who are similar to school nurses). The percentage of schools that had SE classes was about 60%. The average time spent by each grade in SE classes was 3.08 hours at the elementary school level and 2.93 hours at the junior high school level. More than 80% of SE classes were a part of the health and physical education class. The majority of responses about the problems in undertaking SE were ‘Finding enough time for classes’ and ‘Insufficiency of training programs for teachers.’

Conclusion (This is only a partial list of conclusions): In Japan, the class hours of SE are much more limited than in other countries. Health and physical education teachers and Yogo teachers have important roles in SE. The teacher’s interest in SE is reflected in the contents of SE.’

Keyword: Sexuality Education, Schoolteachers

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of Sexuality Education in Japan

In recent years, the sexual behaviour and consciousness of children and youth in Japan have undergone major changes. For example, the age of first sexual intercourse has decreased, the number of sexual partners has increased, sexual behaviour has diversified, the period of association before engaging in sexual relations has shortened, the gender gap in sexual behaviour has reduced and the proportion of prostitution in the younger generation has increased. In addition, the number of youths with a negative image of sex has increased (KIHARA, 2006). There are also situations in which we cannot decipher the sexual activity of the youths simply by watching their sexual behaviour. In addition, situations in which the media seek out children and youths have increased greatly, and the media has had a great influence on the sexual behaviour and consciousness of children and youths since the second half of the 1990s, when the Internet began to spread (ASAI, 2009)(CESHS, 2009).

Furthermore, sexuality education (SE) that guarantees the sexual security and sexual health of children is lacking. This is an important characteristic of the sexual environment that surrounds Japanese children. Japanese SE made progress only after World War II. Nevertheless, even as the 21st century began, neo-conservatives attacked the superior SE provided by those teachers who deal with the developmental stages of children and with their needs. As a result, SE in Japan was forced to retreat. More precisely, SE in and around Tokyo collapsed, with instructions such as, ‘Don’t teach the names of the sexual organs, or about sexual intercourse and condoms’. It is said that there is a school in which not even menstruation is taught, because the teachers are afraid of being attacked.

However, SE that teaches a concrete contraception method and knowledge of prevention against sexually transmitted infections (STI) is essential. The children themselves demand SE. The children want to avoid the ‘danger’ of sexual activities. According to The National Investigation about Life Style and Consciousness of High School Students, (2004) (The Association of National High School PTA, 2004), among things that high school students wanted to learn in SE, the highest percentage (70–80%) was for ‘The danger associated with sex’. The next highest, ‘The way of thinking of the opposite sex’, accounted for 60–70%, ‘Usage of the condom’ for 45–48% and ‘Usage of the pill’ for around 60%. In an investigation in 2005 by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, it was confirmed that about 60% of respondents thought that by age 15 children should know how to use condoms. Moreover, 71.8% thought that children should be given knowledge about ‘The prevention of HIV/AIDS’ and 65.7% thought that children should be given knowledge about ‘Sexual intercourse’.

Moreover, SE is not an independent statutory subject in classes. As a result, SE

in each school differs. For example, SE is taught as a part of a variety of subjects, and there are no special teachers for SE. Instead, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) operates in a manner that increases the confusion in schools.

1.2 The MEXT survey

In such a situation, the schools and teachers have demanded that MEXT should clarify the policy. However, MEXT has had no concrete policy on SE since ‘The way of thinking on how to advance SE in the school’, which was published in 1999. A typical example of this literature is ‘Fact-finding of Sexuality Education in compulsory education: different kinds of studies of schools carried out in April 2005’ (an MEXT investigation). The 2004 MEXT survey is a typical example: ‘A factual survey on SE at compulsory schools in Japan’. (The results were published in 2005.)

The purpose of the MEXT investigation was stated as follows: ‘In recent years, the build of children has improved and sexual maturity is reached earlier. There is a flood of information about both sex and the sex industry. The social environment surrounding children has changed greatly. In addition, the younger population has been facing the problems of STI. On the other hand, it is also pointed out that there are schools in which SE is not based on developmental stages or in which students’ ability to understand what is being taught has been tested only recently. We investigate such situations to establish the actual situation of SE in public compulsory schools, and we want to contribute to effective SE in future schools.’ From this statement, we can see that MEXT has responded to the neoconservatives’ attack on SE in an uncritical manner.

These findings were announced in December 2004. However, the media reports of the findings were not fair. A certain newspaper published only a part of the findings, selectively reporting only ‘the complaints’, such as ‘Parents are not given an explanation’, ‘A total of 155 public schools received a complaint from parents about SE’ and ‘The MEXT survey has revealed the serious situation of excessive SE’. This is one-sided and unfair news, because the following facts were not mentioned: ‘There were 314 answers stating that the parents were given sufficient explanation and they understood it’ and ‘There was no complaint by parents about SE in the junior high school’. To begin with, the 155 schools that made a complaint constitute about 0.47% of the 32,431 schools included in the investigation.

We can also clarify the next points made by the MEXT survey. If MEXT aims at ‘Contributing to the substance of SE in future schools’, it should be able to obtain the facts and causes that result in SE being placed outside school education.

1.3 Purpose

On the basis of the above survey results, we aim to clarify the actual situation of Japanese SE, and what kind of problems it experiences. Therefore, we undertook a quantitative investigation of the members who belonged to ‘The Council for Education and Study on Human Sexuality’ (CESHS), which has many teachers among its members, a total of about 850 persons.

Our research is based on two other studies. One cites the MEXT survey. The other is the ‘Provision of SE at Junior High Schools in Japan with Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research from 2006 to 2008 (junior high school investigation)’ (HASHIMOTO, 2009). Using this report, we also analyse our findings by comparing them with the findings of these investigations. A simple comparison is impossible because the objectives differ, but it should be able to provide some common knowledge.

This research is part of a three-year research project, started in 2008, titled ‘A study on the actual situation and the effectiveness of SE in Japan’, with a Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (project leader, Mieko TASHIRO, project No. 20530718) supported by JSPS.

2. Method

2.1 Subject

The subject of our research is The Council for Education and Study on Human Sexuality, which was established in 1982. CESHS is a private SE study group led by a teacher. The group recognises SE as a part of human rights, gives importance to human relationships, including gender equality, and aims to construct a comprehensive SE. It should be noted that CESHS promoted the development of Japanese SE. There are about 850 members all over Japan, and they organise circles in each area in which they are active. It cannot be said that all members understand the SE policy of CESHS, but they are at least interested in SE. They also have many opportunities to participate in seminars about SE and to obtain new information about it. So it is thought that our investigation subjects may learn about and teach SE comparatively eagerly.

We choose members of CESHS as the subjects of investigation because we want to clarify what kind of contents and methods dedicated teachers use to teach SE and what problems SE presents for them. From the situation mentioned above, we expect to find that SE is not taught sufficiently in Japanese schools. Regrettably, the MEXT survey does not improve our understanding of the concrete content of SE.

2.2 Research framework and Plan

We devised our framework by comparing it with ‘The MEXT survey’ and the ‘Junior high school investigation’ (Table 1).

Table 1. Research framework

Large category	Small category
Characteristics of responder	Gender/Age/The situation of the circle activity/ Current occupation/Location/Kind of school/Career
The situation of SE in the school	Curriculum position/Subject/Class hours/ Person in charge/Training courses
Personal situation on SE teaching	Contents/Materials/Method/Cooperation/Training course/Problems/Worth/Promoting factor/Obstacles

The investigation period was September–December 2008. We sent postal questionnaires not only to each individual but also to each local circle. Therefore, the number of questionnaires sent has some uncertainty. We distributed about 850 questionnaires, of which 344 were returned (response rate 40.5%). We used SPSS ver17.0j for statistical analysis.

3. Results and Discussion

In this report, we report mainly the actual situation of the teachers. Of course, some members of CESHs are not teachers.

3.1 Subject attributes

First, we report the sex (gender identity) distribution of the subjects. Woman accounted for 87.6% , men for 11.5% and others for 0.9% of the responses (We made the choice ‘others’ from the situation in acknowledgment of sexual diversity). This suggests that women are keener on SE than men. Concerning age, people in their 40s accounted for 32.8% and those in their 50s for 38.2%. These two groups are much larger than any of the other age groups. The ratio of teachers (including university teachers) is about 65%. The largest group of teachers works in elementary schools (39.6%). The proportion of Yogo teachers among teachers is high (Fig. 1).

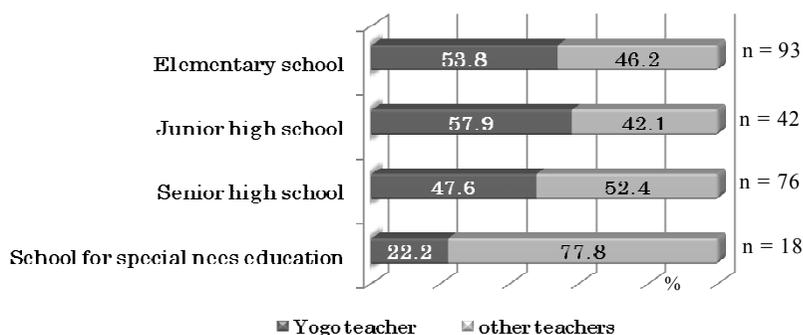


Figure 1. Percentage of Yogo teachers (school health teachers) among all teachers

In the elementary and junior high schools, the ratio of Yogo teachers is over 50%. Yogo teachers contribute to promote health in the schools. A Yogo teacher is similar to a school nurse, except that Yogo teachers are teachers, not nurses, and they have a teacher’s license. This system is unique to Japan. The major finding of this investigation suggests that the role of the Yogo teachers is important and that they are key persons in SE.

3.2 SE in schools

The first question we asked was ‘In your school, is SE currently in the curriculum?’ (n = 229), and 60.3% answered ‘Yes’. In the MEXT survey, the percentage of schools that created an SE year plan was 53.8%. There is a difference between making a plan and actually teaching SE. However, we think that it is highly likely that our result reflects the nationwide situation.

Table 2. Class hours of SE

	Year grade	Average hours	Minimum	Maximum	Number of Respondents
Elementary School	1	2.6	1	10	57
	2	2.9	1	20	56
	3	2.8	1	11	53
	4	3.4	1	9	56
	5	3.5	1	14	55
	6	3.2	1	8	57
	Class for special needs	2.3	0	10	21
Junior High School	1	3.4	1	15	58
	2	2.9	0	10	57
	3	3.6	1	10	58
	Class for special needs	2.3	0	5.5	11
Senior High School	1	8.3	1	50	18
	2	3.9	1	8	14
	3	2.6	1	6	12
	Night class 4	1.3	1	2	3
School for Special Needs Education	Elementary	2.2	0	5	5
	Junior High	5.0	2	10	3
	Senior High	4.5	0	6	4

In response to the question, ‘How many hours of SE does your school have for each grade this year?’ on average 3.08 hours are assigned to SE in elementary school, 2.93 hours in junior high school and 3.12 hours in senior high school. In junior high school, we see that fewer hours are assigned to the second grade SE. This may be

because the course of study in the second grade (health and physical education) includes fewer elements that are relevant to SE. The first grade covers physical changes during puberty, and the third grade covers STIs, including HIV/AIDS.

In response to the question ‘In which subject is SE taught?’ (Fig. 2), most SE classes are taught under health and physical education. SE is also taught during the time for class activities. One-third of respondents teach SE during comprehensive education and one-fourth during morality. In junior high school, class activity accounts for a higher percentage (62.7%) than health and physical education (59.3%). Comprehensive education became statutory in Japan in 2003. The contents of teaching are left entirely to each school or its teachers. Some teachers use this time for SE. In senior high school, home economics accounts for a higher percentage (40.7%) among subjects under which SE is taught.

In response to the question ‘Did your school plan training or learning about SE in 2007 and 2008?’, 36.0% answered ‘Yes’, and 63.6% had an opportunity of training in SE once a year. The Yogo teacher conducted about 60% of these classes. It is clear that Yogo teachers play an important role.

3.3 SE of personal

Next is the personal situation on SE teaching. In response to ‘Do you teach SE yourself?’ (n = 231), 79.2% answered ‘Yes’. This number is higher by nearly 20 points than the percentage of schools that answered ‘Yes’. This suggests that many teachers practice SE in their school without an SE curriculum. Considering only the Yogo teachers, 77.0% answered ‘Yes’ (n = 113). This rate is lower than the total rate. This reflects the fact that Yogo teachers do not usually teach a class by themselves. Nevertheless, many Yogo teachers are involved in SE. We see that Yogo teachers are key persons for SE.

Regarding class hours for SE, the hours increase from the elementary school upper grades to junior high school, but they then show a tendency similar to the overall school situation.

The results of responses to ‘In which subject is SE taught?’ suggest that most SE classes (44.0%) are taught as a part of class activities. Health and physical education is the next largest subject for SE (35.1%). Comparing the responses for personal situation and those for school, the percentage of SE taught as a part of health and physical education is lower in the personal situation. We assume that class teachers use class activity time for SE (Fig. 2). We think that this result also reflects the subjects of this investigation, because there are many Yogo teachers who basically do not teach in a classroom. However, as we will show later, Yogo teachers cooperate with class teachers for teaching SE.

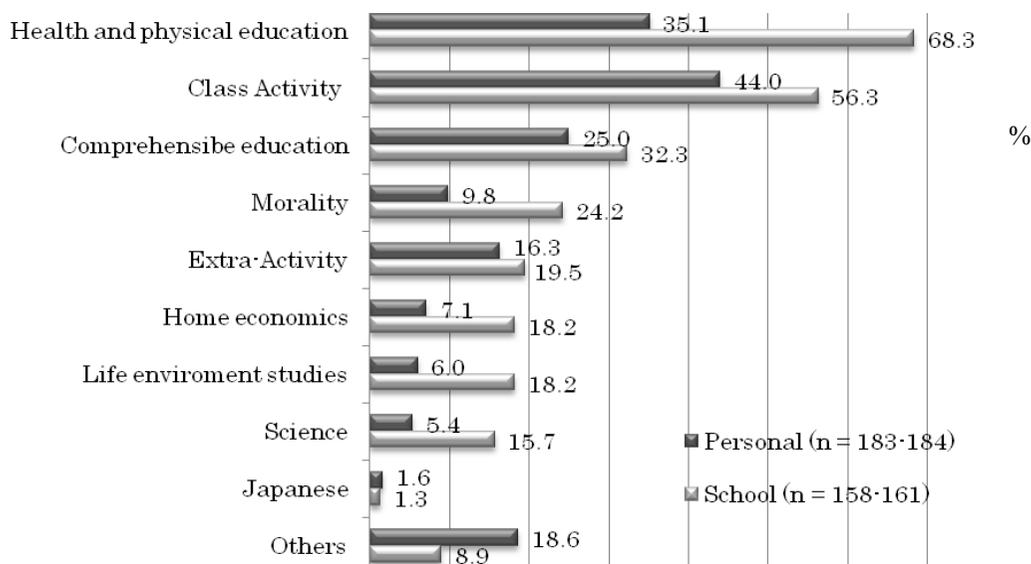


Figure 2. Comparison between personal and school subjects of SE (multiple answer)

Table 3. Contents that are included in SE (multiple answer)

Contents	Elementary school	Junior high school	Senior high school
1. Sexual organs/Private zone	67.7	51.3	16.7
2. Reproduction/Birth	69.9	50	28.6
3. Change of body at puberty/Menstruation/ Ejaculation	74.2	55.3	33.3
4. STIs	16.1	44.7	52.4
5. HIV/AIDS	35.5	38.2	42.9
6. Sexual Desire/Sexual Behaviour	7.5	32.9	26.2
7. Masturbation	10.8	21.1	11.9
8. Sexual intercourse	25.8	32.9	28.6
9. Contraception	6.5	40.8	47.6
10. Abortion	5.4	30.3	35.7
11. Gender	28	18.4	16.7
12. Sexual diversity	18.3	21.1	31
13. Relationship	18.3	28.9	38.1
14. Dating DV/Love	6.5	21.1	38.1
15. Marriage/Family	12.9	18.4	21.4
16. Internet dating site/telephone club	4.3	15.8	7.1
17. Prostitution	1.1	10.5	11.9
18. Sexual harassment	4.3	10.5	21.4
19. Sexual abuse	18.3	13.2	23.8
20. Sexual information	14	21.1	11.9
21. Others	4.3	6.6	7.1
	n = 82	n = 57	n = 29

Next, we consider the contents of SE (Table 3). The question was ‘Which topics do you teach in SE classes?’ The topics often covered are ‘Change of body at puberty/Menstruation/Ejaculation’, ‘Reproduction and birth of new life’ and ‘Sexual organs/private zone’. According to school stage, the Nos.1, 2 and 3 topics—‘Sexual organs/Private zone’, ‘Reproduction/Birth’ and ‘Change of body at puberty/Menstruation/Ejaculation’—appear at a high rate in both elementary school and junior high school. The Nos.6, 7 and 8 topics—‘Sexual desire/Sexual behaviour’, ‘Masturbation’ and ‘Sexual intercourse’—and the No.16 and 20 topics—‘Internet dating site/telephone club’ and ‘Media literacy’—are also covered well in junior high school. The Nos. 4 and 5 topics—‘STIs’ and ‘HIV/AIDS’—are covered in senior high school. I compare this with ‘The junior high school investigation’, which investigated SE in only junior high school. In that study, the topic ‘Sexual diversity’ was covered in only 6.8% of the schools and ‘Sexual abuse’ in only 3.1% (n = 703). In our results, ‘Sexual diversity’ was covered in 21.1% of the schools and ‘Sexual abuse’ in 13.2%. A reason for this large difference may be that the subjects of our investigation are members of CESHS. They are more likely to obtain new information than other teachers.

In response to ‘Do you use textbooks or other materials for SE teachings?’ (n = 166), 91.6% answered ‘Yes’; 39.0% of responders use textbooks and more than 50% use dolls and models, DVD and video. Picture books are also used in many cases (49.4%).

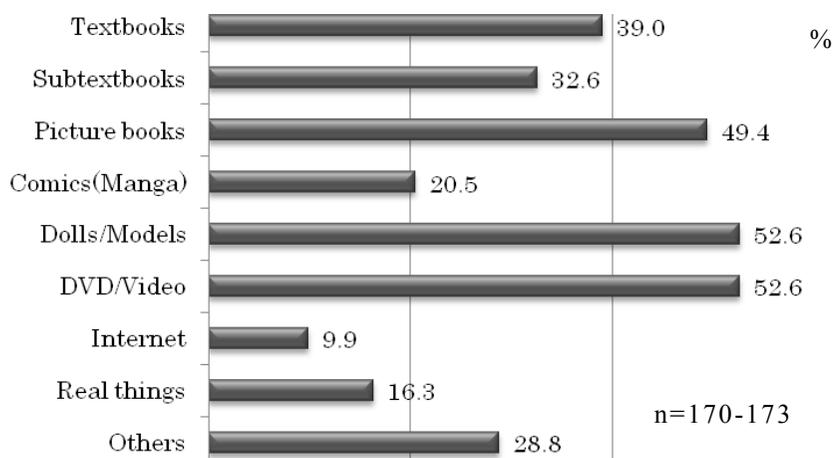


Figure 3. Materials (multiple answers)

In response to ‘Do you arrange an opportunity for student interchanges (e.g. group discussion) to occur during SE teaching?’ (n = 179), 14.5% answered ‘Every time’ while 43.0% answered ‘Sometimes’.

Regarding whether the genders were mixed or separated in SE class (asked only

in gender-mixed schools), 74.1% of teachers teach all topics under SE in gender-mixed classes, 23.2% teach some topics in mixed classes and 9.3% teach all topics in separate classes. We then asked the ‘Partially mixed’ group, ‘What topics are taught in separate classes?’ The answer ‘Menstruation’ appeared most (70.7%), because it is often the case in Japan that the lessons under menstrual medical treatment in an elementary school are intended only for girls. There is also the background of partially mixed classes in junior high school and senior high school, where some classes are separated into males and females, but only when health and physical education is taught, because it is taught separately from the beginning.

We have already mentioned this, but SE has no definite place in Japanese school education. Despite this, many teachers work hard to teach SE. We then asked ‘Why do you teach SE?’ (multiple answers, n = 187), and the responses were ‘It’s essential for students’ (79.1%), ‘There was a necessary (problem) situation for students’ (47.8%) and ‘There were fellow workers to teach together’ (26.5%).

In response to ‘What are the benefits of teaching SE?’ (multiple answers, n = 180–183), ‘Own knowledge and understanding about sexuality deepened’ accounted for 84.7%. Of these responses, ‘Students came to take sexuality seriously’ and ‘Students were able to understand sexuality as an important thing that was relevant to them’ accounted for about 60%. Moreover, 58.2% of those asked replied that ‘Relationship of mutual trust with the students deepened’.

3.4 Cooperation

Regarding cooperation in SE, in response to ‘Do you cooperate with other teachers on SE?’ (n = 181), 74.3% answered ‘Yes’. We then asked the ‘Yes’ group, ‘With whom do you cooperate?’ and 62.0% of them answered ‘Class teachers’. This is a reflection of there being many Yogo teachers in our investigation. In other words, most Yogo teachers help class teachers in teaching SE. The form of cooperation involved is ‘Team teaching’ with 76.5%, followed by ‘Interchange of information and materials’, with 58.7% and ‘Making a teaching plan’ with 44.9% (multiple answers, n = 136–137).

Regarding ‘Cooperation or connection with the percents’, 74.6% replied ‘Yes, I do’ (n = 173). The percentage of Yogo teachers responding ‘Yes, I do’ was 82.3%, higher than that of other teachers. Regarding the type of cooperation, 71.8% responded ‘Tell about the SE class after doing it’, and more than 50% responded ‘Tell about the SE before doing it’ and ‘Show the SE class’ (multiple answers, n = 142–143).

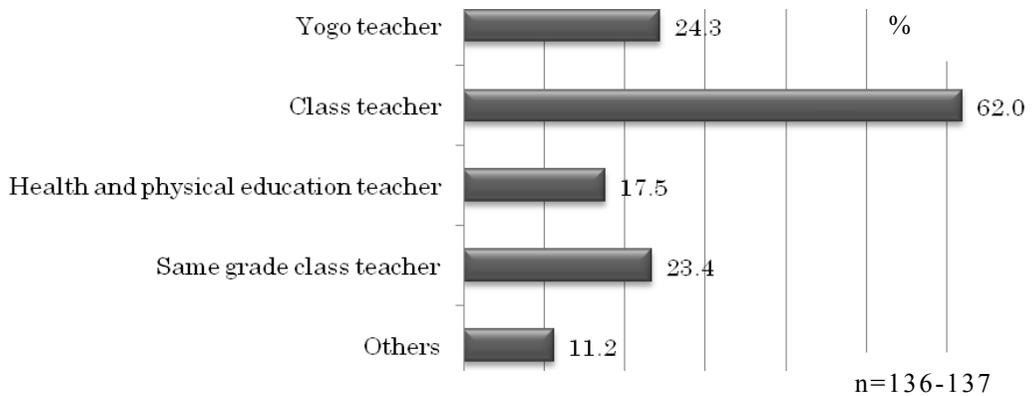


Figure 4. With whom do you cooperate? (multiple answers)

3.5 Training

About training for SE, we asked ‘Did you attend the training courses for SE organised by the Board of Education from 2007 to 2008?’ (n = 328). Although most of the respondents are interested in SE, only 18.6% answered ‘Yes’. We then asked the ‘Yes’ group, ‘Were the training courses useful for you?’ ‘No’ accounted for 56.0% and ‘Yes’ for 44.0% (n = 50). We asked the ‘No’ group, ‘Why did you not attend?’ The majority answered ‘We didn’t get new information’ (54.8%) and ‘Didn’t match the actual situation of the students’ (58.1%).

On the other hand, for the question ‘Did you attend training courses for SE by the Council for Education and Study on Human Sexuality from 2007 to 2008?’, ‘Yes’ accounted for 78.2% (n = 330).

Then the same question was asked of the ‘Yes’ group: ‘Were the training courses useful for you?’ and 99.2% answered ‘Yes’ (n = 243). Furthermore, we asked the ‘Yes’ group, ‘What kind of points were useful to you?’ (n = 241). ‘They have new information’ accounted for 92.5% of the responses, ‘They were able to make good use of it for SE class’ for 36.1% and ‘It matched the actual situation of the students’ for 26.7%. These results will be helpful to deduce what kind of information teachers need.

3.5 For promotion SE

The question, ‘What is necessary to promote SE at school?’ is important because our subjects are eager to promote SE. About 80% answered ‘Common understanding of SE’ (multiple answers, n = 230–234), while ‘An actual situation and the needs of students’ accounted for 70.9%, ‘Evaluation of the SE of students’ for 53.4%, ‘Training in own school’ for 54.9% and ‘Training out of school’ for 60.3%. Conversely, we asked ‘What are the obstacles when you promote SE?’ (n = 230–234).

Nearly 70% answered ‘To find enough time for SE is difficult’. ‘The lack of an opportunity for training’ accounted for 39.2%, ‘Difficulty of cooperating in the school’ for 35.7% and ‘Worry about the criticism of SE’ accounted for 25.1%. This reflects the situation surrounding current SE in Japan.

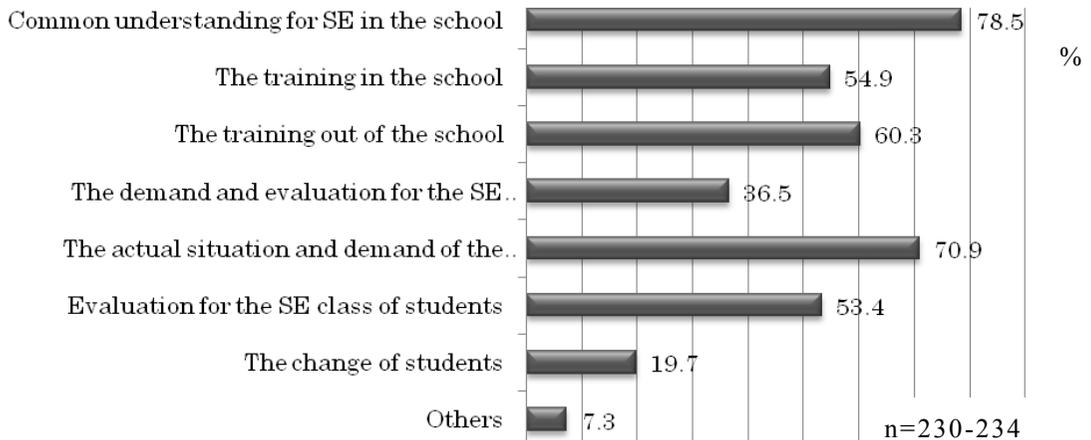


Figure 4. With whom do you cooperate? (multiple answers)

4. Conclusion

On the basis of the results and discussion presented above, we now introduce some arguments about the problems of SE in Japan.

First, teaching hours for SE in Japan are far from sufficient, and it is difficult to find enough time. On the other hand, most teachers think that SE is very important and necessary for students. We must devise a way to secure the necessary time for SE. Actually, according to the results of this investigation, each teacher makes a considerable effort to teach SE. However, it is desirable for students to be safe and secure in the entire school. This will make it possible to teach SE in every subject and every grade.

Second, in connection with the above problem of time, we must also devise the contents and methods of SE. This investigation revealed that, in practice, one grade for SE requires only around 3 hours on average. In addition, the division of the contents of SE differed according to the school. Of course this reflects the course of study and the contents in each subject, but teachers’ selection of what knowledge and information are necessary for students in each stage should also be reflected. It is important how we choose the contents and methods that students really need in a limited number of hours. Thus, the teacher’s identification of students’ needs is important.

Third, the information that the teacher has reflects the contents of SE. Teachers

who are eager to teach SE need new information that matches the actual situation of the students. These findings show that the teachers among our survey subjects find it easier to obtain information for SE, in comparison to other teachers, because our survey subjects are members of CESHS. It is clear that the contents of SE are affected by both whether information is provided and from where we obtain information. Actually, in the junior high school investigation, only 6.8% of teachers taught about ‘Sexual diversity’. However, this investigation found that 21.1% of teachers teach it. This large difference occurs because the contents of ‘Sexual diversity’ are available in the information shared by members of CESHS. In contrast, the general teachers’ opportunity to study and know ‘Sexual diversity’ is limited. Therefore, it is important to spread new information to help teach SE positively. This will influence the motivation of teachers.

Fourth, the actual situation, that a woman teacher is keener on SE than a man, became clear in our investigation. In addition, many teachers teaching SE are Yogo teachers. This means that the contents of SE tend to emphasise the aspect of reproduction. As a result, boys do not have much interest in the contents, and SE for boys is apt to be inadequate. On the other hand, SE is mostly taught in the subject of health and physical education, which is taught mainly by male teachers. Therefore it will be an important task to promote SE conducted by male teachers.

Lastly, we emphasise that cooperation is important in SE. In this investigation, about 25% answered ‘There were fellow workers to teach together’ as the reason to teach SE. Also, Yogo teachers are key persons in SE in Japan. Their cooperation with other teachers, especially health and physical education teachers, is very important in determining the quality and quantity of SE.

We have already noted that school SE was attacked by neo-conservatives in Japan after 2000. Even now, such attacks are sometimes observed. However, it is necessary for everyone, not only the children, to learn about sexuality, sexual health and sexual rights. Such a recognition of SE is important because many Japanese have a wrong image of sex, sexuality and SE, as a result of the influence of pornography.

I think that the conservative people who attack SE are unable to distinguish SE from pornography, and that SE is necessary for adults in Japan.

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