ФИЛОЛОГИЯЛЫҚ БІЛІМ БЕРУДЕГІ ЗАМАНАУИ ТӘСІЛДЕР
СОВРЕМЕННЫЕ ПОДХОДЫ В ФИЛОЛОГИЧЕСКОМ ОБРАЗОВАНИИ
MODERN APPROACHES IN PHILOLOGICAL EDUCATION

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Trends and issues of distance education of adults in Japan

This paper examines the present situation of the development of distance education in Japan, particularly concerning adults. In Japan, the term “lifelong learning” has become widely used and is central to educational policies that actively address critical subjects occuring in a wide range of education in a rapidly changing society. Japan's higher education system is suffering from a steady decline in the number of high school graduates as a result of declining birth rates. One way to tackle this problem is to attract new demographic groups of students, such as adults and international students. Besides, the growing number of older adults has led to an increased demand for educational programs. On the other hand, there are numerous issues to be addressed in order to promote adult education in Japan. The COVID–19 pandemic revealed problems in the education system, showing serious gaps both in the principles of organizing lifelong learning and in the implementation of educational programs in this aspect. While online distance education is a strategic instrument that Japanese institutions may adopt to achieve a competitive advantage, it is under-represented in comparison to its global counterparts. In this article, the factors that influenced the development of distance education in Japan, as well as the reasons that hindered its spread have been considered. The authors have analyzed the features of adult education within the Japanese lifelong education system. Also, we examined the organizations providing distance education (including online) in Japan and the measures taken by the government to further develop distance education for adults amid the pandemic.

Keywords: distance education, Japan, lifelong learning, adult education, COVID–19 pandemic, online learning, distance learning.

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Introduction

The process of globalization, the formation of the information model of development, the emergence of new challenges and threats make the lifelong education of people vital. The methods and technology of distance learning have a special role in its implementation. At present, the modern society is experiencing dramatic socio-economic changes with dynamic growth in high technology. The paradigm of education is changing from “education for life” to “lifelong education”. Within its framework, there is a search for the new forms of learning process. According to scientists, one of the most promising forms is a distance education.

The crisis, caused by a new dangerous coronavirus, has required urgent measures to reduce the risk of infection spread in different areas of human life. In terms of education, it was the shift of academic process

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into a distance format. Due to the coronavirus, as of March 26, 2020, schools and universities were closed in 165 countries, which directly affected more than 1.5 billion students, or 87 % of the world's student body [1]. Pandemic has thrown down major challenges to the educational system. It has exposed the problems that researchers revealed earlier. On the basis thereof, the assessment of a current situation is of particular interest in terms of how much transformations under way are effective.

Despite the technology leader's reputation, Japan has faced many challenges in its transition to distance learning [2]. In Japan, there have been discussions for a longtime about the necessity of further development of distance education. In this article, we considered the factors that influenced the development of distance education in Japan, as well as the reasons that hindered its spread. We have analyzed the features of adult education within the Japanese lifelong education system. Also, we considered educational establishments, distance curricula, courses (including online), and the measures taken by Japanese government to develop distance education for adults amid the pandemic. Although adult education can take many forms, this article focuses on learning that takes place in formal settings because information on activities that occur in these settings is readily available.

Experimental

The study is descriptive as it determines the specifics of distance education of adults in Japan. The leading research method is content analysis of original publications in English and Japanese. The purpose of the article is to identify the role of distance education in the lifelong education system in Japan (using the example of adult education). The article was prepared based on materials from Japanese official sources, data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan, scientific publications on the research topic.

Results and Discussion

To begin with, we need to clarify some terminological aspects. Tsai and Machado describe distance learning as a two-way process at a distance in which tutors not only provide learners with learning materials, but also fully engage with them, receiving feedback [3]. Online learning is considered as a learning process through various devices with Internet access. Students can learn and engage with professors and other students from anywhere (independent) in these environments [4]. As for e-learning, some researchers consider it as a learning process using computers and interactive networks synchronously [5]. Distance education is defined as a method of teaching where the student and teacher are physically separated. It can utilize a combination of technologies, including correspondence, audio, video, computer, and the Internet [6].

Nowadays, the process of informatization has become one of the most significant global processes. Informatization is inevitable to Japan and one of the conditions for a successful socio-economic development. A priority area is the informatization of education, which creates a methodological basis for development of the new forms of education. Distance education is one of the forms of the lifelong education system that can satisfy the needs of people who want to learn, but do not have such an opportunity for some reasons (lack of time, a distance barrier, etc.).

The term “new normal” was coined to describe the dramatic economic, cultural, and social transformations that resulted in precariousness and social unrest during the 2008 financial crisis, influencing collective perceptions and individual lifestyles [7]. This term was used again during the COVID–19 pandemic to emphasize how the pandemic had altered fundamental aspects of human life. The instructions for a “new normal” contain recommendations for preventing the coronavirus: “Although there had been little progress in implementing online education prior to the COVID–19, as Japan attempts to adjust to the new normal, the process of switching to online education is expected to accelerate” [8].

Japan's higher educational system has seen a gradual reduction in the number of high school graduates as a result of lower birth rates. One way that universities around the world have responded to the dwindling pool of potential university freshmen is by reaching out to new populations of students, such as adults. Online distribution has been the preferred delivery technique globally in order to reach these students and provide a comfortable study schedule. However, while online distance education is a strategic instrument that Japanese institutions may adopt to achieve a competitive advantage, it is under-represented in comparison to its global counterparts.

The history of remote learning in Japan begins with “lecture notes” developed at Waseda University in the late nineteenth century for non-matriculated students. As the earliest version of correspondence education, those who could not travel to Tokyo used these notes at home and took on-campus tests to obtain certi-

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fication. The Ministry of Education granted formal recognition to correspondence or remote learning schools in 1950. Since then, the Ministry has maintained two independent accrediting schemes, one for on-campus education and the other for distance learning. While the majority of early distant education was centered on the delivery of print-based materials, the Ministry permitted the use of videoconferencing and loosened face-to-face criteria in the pursuit of degrees in 1998. In 2001, Internet engagement was authorized, and for the first time, bachelor's degree could be earned without ever having to visit a campus. Distant graduate programs (Master's level) were also recognized in 2001, followed by doctoral distance programs in 2003. Although distance school reputation has improved over time, there was still a perception that face-to-face degrees were somehow superior [9].

Japanese researchers have identified three reasons for the increase in the number of universities offering distance education: the speed and accessibility of information and communication technologies; the decline in the number of young people has led to increased competition between institutions and the spread of adult education through distance learning and finally, public policy has given universities more freedom to grant degrees without visiting classrooms [10].

However, since 2005, online distance learning in Japan has remained stagnant or declined. According to the literature, logistical issues and perceptions have a detrimental impact on the attractiveness and success of online learning. Low e-readiness, negative student perceptions / attitudes, poor institutional implementation and poor alignment with student learning styles are all cited as causes for online distance education's failure. [11]. Increased and more effective use of online distance education is one strategy to reach out to different age groups, geographies, and demographics.

Adult education is regarded as an element of lifelong learning in Japan. With the passage of the Act for Adult Education in 1949, Japan entered a new phase of adult education. The Act established adult education centers in Japan, and it provided local governments with a partial government subsidy to help them carry out its provisions [12].

The concept of lifelong learning was later developed in Japan in relation to adult education. In 1971, the government released a report emphasizing the value of adult and lifelong education in a changing society. To reflect an emphasis on individuals as agents of their own learning, the concept of lifelong education was eventually re-conceptualized as lifelong learning [13]. With the passage of the Law Concerning the Development and Promotion of Lifelong Learning in 1990, steps were taken to formally implement lifelong learning [12]. This law established the Lifelong Learning Policy Bureau to coordinate and promote lifelong learning policies. Lifelong learning in Japan was traditionally pursued for “intellectual curiosity, enhancement in quality of life, or fun and pleasure” rather than for professional qualifications. The relative lack of access to higher education among Japanese, the inability to transfer credits, and the emphasis on school name value had a negative impact on adult learners [14].

Higher education in Japan is still mostly for young people around the age of 20, with the majority of high school graduates pursuing their academic careers. While Japan's young population is predicted to continue to fall, a number of universities is continuously expanding. Universities are more interested and involved in providing 'adult education' in such a situation, which can be described as 'oversupply' of higher education, if the market seeks only young high school graduates.

Adult education options are provided by universities, for example, by accepting adults into formal curricula (including those given via remote education, via correspondence or broadcasting) as non-traditional students pursuing degrees, accepting adults as students in official curriculum who are not pursuing degrees, providing adult education programs and establishing the sections solely responsible for providing adult education / lifelong learning opportunities (these sections are frequently referred to as “lifelong learning centers”, “centers of research and education for lifelong learning”, “community colleges”, “extension centers”, “open colleges”, “senior colleges”. It is also often observed that universities, in collaboration with local governments, implement educational programs for adults, or that university teachers and researchers are invited to teach in public adult education courses. While universities in Japan have traditionally focused on academic education, in recent year, they have become more involved in providing opportunities for adult professional development through “professional graduate schools” and various in-service training programs for working people.

While universities have made progress in admitting adult students to the formal curriculum, the percentage of adults actually enrolled in Japanese universities is still much lower than in Europe and North America. Several measures have been proposed and implemented since the early 1990s allowing more adults to study, such as granting adults an exemption from the entrance examination [15].

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In recent years, Japanese society has been faced with such problems as the progressive “polarization of forms of employment” (reduction in full employment and an increase in temporary employment with worse working conditions), a growing economic gap and the stabilization of such a division by generations. There is also a strong social need to provide adults with educational opportunities for relearning, career change and training. It might be argued that Japan's current societal predicament motivates the government to prioritize adult education in universities.

On the other hand, there are numerous issues to be addressed in order to promote adult education at Japanese universities. For example, universities have not yet developed a system to assist adults who want to learn at a higher level. As a result, they are unable to meet the latent needs of these potential students. While it is true that financial support systems for university students in Japan are generally underdeveloped, adult students, in particular, face additional challenges, such as a lack of scholarships. Adult students need more financial support so they can focus on their studies during their academic years. It is also critical to address the issue of overcoming fundamental barriers to learning for adult learners, such as long working hours and the lack of understanding they face in the workplace. In this regard, not only the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT), but also other ministries and governmental bodies should collaborate to take concrete steps to ensure that adults, particularly those who work, have the right to learn [15].

Despite the Japanese government's strong support for lifelong learning, adult learners in Japan have little chance of earning advanced degrees later in life. This lack of reward has contributed to a lack of demand among adults in Japan, who prefer to study for personal fulfillment, which is clearly a less effective motivator. The fulfillment motivator, no doubt in combination with other “adverse” factors, appears to have resulted in a relative distance education scarcity.

According to a survey by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, the factors mentioned by the working adults who have not retrained are as follows: too high expenses (37.7 %); lack of time due to long working hours (22.5 %); no interest / no need (22.2 %); no curriculum that meets my requirements (11.1 %); the place of study is far away (11.1 %) [16].

The organizations providing distance education for adults in Japan

The main organizations providing distance education for adults in Japan are correspondence universities. Though a correspondent education was considered as the most suitable learning for adults, it has always been subordinated.

Correspondence study is common all over the world. This category includes the majority of distance education courses in Japan. Students conduct independent research using print media, submit reports via surface mail, and receive corrected reports. Although some universities have begun to use ICT tools such as e-mail, surface mail — the primary mode of communication. In Japanese distance education, the combination of independent study and face-to-face activities is unique. This combination has both benefits and drawbacks. The benefits are that students meet each other in the classroom, they become acquainted with one another and encourage one another to continue their studies. The disadvantage is that all students are required to come to campus and take vacation days. For some students, this requirement is difficult to meet due to their work environment or physical distance. Students who study by correspondence must maintain a high level of motivation and determination, but the graduation rate is not particularly high.

As of 1979, there were 12 correspondence universities with 87.630 students on a regular basis. Forty years later, by 2019, the number of correspondence universities has increased up to 44 with 162,533 students attending regular courses. In addition, as of 1979 — 19,112 students learned in 9 schools while in 2019 — 18,058 students attended 11 schools [17]. Thus, the number of correspondence university students has not increased considerably in the long run. Among the correspondence universities, there have been some, which give all credits required for obtaining a degree through online classes without attending the university.

Another type of distance education is a broadcasting study. The Open University of Japan (OUJ) is a typical example of broadcasting study and the largest distance education university in Japan. This university helps working people develop the key competencies and obtain certificates for their career progression. The Open University of Japan applies a model of mixed learning — the combination of online classes and in-person lessons. According to the statistics for 2019 — 56,993 people out of 162,547 correspondence university students studied at the Open University of Japan, which accounts for 35.1 %. In 2019, this university had 968 people out of 3683 correspondence postgraduate students (26.3 %); 58 people out of 233 PhD students (24.9 %). Thus, the Open University of Japan plays an important role as a host organization for working people [18].

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Some universities have offered technology-enabled, new online distance education courses since the university regulation changed in 1998. Students who participate in media classes, such as video conferencing, are not required to attend school, according to the new regulation. Japan's first online university, Cyber University is an example of a university offering the online baccalaureate four-year programs. All credits, required for their graduation, can be obtained via online-classes. There is also an example of e-school like the School of Humanities at Waseda University (founded in 2003), which offers all classes online along with correspondent learning. Tokyo Online University, established in 2018, is also one of the online universities where all lessons are held through the Internet. While traditional correspondence colleges send texts and instructional materials by mail for students to study them independently, to write reports and take exams, these online colleges use video lessons. Online learning differs in that that it provides two-way learning through communication with the use of tools such as email and video conferencing. Now, these online universities have the status of "marginal" distance education, while online universities in Europe, USA and Asia have already occupied their niche and attracted many students.

Due to the spread of coronavirus in March 2020, all Japanese universities had to switch to online classes. This transition generated many problems. Time will tell how the pandemic will affect the development of online Japanese education in the future. Then it will become clear whether online universities will remain marginal or not.

Universities have begun to provide their courses via the Internet, give opportunities for academic activities, assess learning outcomes as necessary and issue a certificate of completion. These are the so-called Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) that have rapidly spread since roughly 2012.

In Japan, the courses are organized by the Japan Massive Open Online Education Promotion Council (JMOOC). As of May 2019, the number of courses was 340, the number of enrolled students was about 660,000, while the total amount of students exceeded 1 million. Among its students, university graduates accounted for 51.3 percent, and dividing by age, students in their 40s were 21.7 %, in their 30s — 20.2 %, in their 20s — 17.1 %, and in their 50 s — 15.8 %, 57.7 % of total aged 30 to 50 years old [19]. Looking at this, it can be said that the MOOC contributes to retraining working people.

Beginning in fiscal year 2015, the MEXT Minister began certifying practical and specialist programs offered at universities and other institutions that meet the needs of working adults and companies, designated as "Brush up Programs for Professionals (BP)". Their goal is to empower working adults to develop the skills required for their profession through hands-on programs. This program is carried out through experienced teachers' lessons, two-way discussions, practical classes, and company-sponsored trainings. The purpose of the course is to meet the needs of working people and companies. Consequently, the weekend / evening lessons, intensive classes and e-learning courses have been organized. There are mixed courses, for example, the combination of e-learning and weekend courses, but these are not many [20].

The coronavirus has shown that the primary and secondary education in Japan is not ready for online learning in a substantial way. Online education does not substitute in-person lessons. It can become valuable only if it is originally developed, optimized, combined with in-person instruction and implemented in a well-balanced way.

It is necessary to mention the cultural specificity of Japan, which is reflected in the field of education, where students are treated as members of a group who know their place and perform their functions, and not as individuals. The goal of education in Japan is to form a harmoniously developed personality, and the designated tasks are the acquisition of not only knowledge, but also high moral qualities, the development of a healthy body and spirit, respect for traditions, and culture, patriotism, hard work, justice, responsibility, civic spirit, social benefit, etc. Probably, Japanese educational institutions decided that raising a citizen online was not the best idea, and chose not to rush into introducing as yet little-studied innovations. It is possible that the notorious inability of the Japanese to act in unforeseen situations played a certain role in this.

In response to the "New Normal Lifestyle", the government will encourage telework and work to improve lifelong learning by developing online content for at-home learning. Remote and online learning, educational training benefits for working people, and human resource development support grants for business owners will all be promoted by the government, and these programs will be expanded at universities. The government will strengthen practical programs that strengthen alliances and ties with business communities in various fields and will promote e-learning so that people are not hampered by the digital divide.

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Conclusions

In recent years, a number of adult university and postgraduate students has not boosted in Japan. We have considered traditional university correspondence courses, OUJ, online universities, MOOC and the BP program as the organizations to retrain working people. We may conclude that excluding online universities, online distance education is implemented only partially. Online education is developing in Japan too slowly compared to other nations. This is not connected with online education itself, but with a limited possibility of the higher education to implement online education quickly, which has been revealed during the coronavirus pandemic. Japan should facilitate the implementation of online education, which is a revolutionary innovation to retrain workers. The pandemic has given an opportunity to reflect upon how ICT influence education. Whether distance education, which has always been considered marginal, will turn into online education and join the mainstream of education in Japan, time will tell. However, companies and non-university organizations that are aware of the strengths of remote work, online teams and efficient production, can take advantage of the situation. The new online educational services created by these organizations can satisfy the need for lifelong learning.

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Жапониядағы ересек адамдарды қашықтықтан оқыту үрдісі мен мәселелері

Мақалада Жапонияда, әсіресе ересек адамдарға қатысты қашықтықтан білім берудің қазіргі жағдайы зерттелген. Жапонияда соңғы жылдары «өмір бойы білім алу» термині кеңінен қолданыла бастады. Ол қоғамдағы білім беру бағдарламаларының кең ауқымында туындайтын маңызды тақырыптарды белсенді түрде қарастыратын білім беру саясатының өзегі болып табылады. Авторлардың айтуынша, Жапонияның жоғары білім беру жүйесі бала туу көрсеткішінің төмендеуінің нәтижесінде орта мектеп бітірушілер санының тұрақты төмендеуінен зардап шегуде. Бұл мәселені шешу әдістерінің бірі — ересектер мен шетелдік студенттер сияқты жаңа студенттік демографияға қол жеткізу. Сонымен қатар, Жапонияда қарт адамдар санының өсуі ересек адамдар арасында білім беру бағдарламаларына сұраныстың артуына әкелді. Алайда, Жапонияда ересектерге білім беруді ілгерілету үшін көптеген мәселелерді шешу керек. COVID–19 пандемиясы білім беру жүйесіндегі көптеген мәселелерді анықтады және өмір бойы оқуды ұйымдастыру принциптерінде де, осы тұрғыда білім беру бағдарламаларын іске асыруда да елеулі олқылықтарды көрсетті. Жапондық білім беру ұйымдары қашықтықтан онлайн білім беруді стратегиялық құрал ретінде пайдалана алатын болса да, бұл мемлекетте қашықтықтан оқыту басқа дамыған мемлекеттерге қарағанда онша дамымаған. Осы мақалада авторлар Жапонияда қашықтықтан білім берудің дамуына әсер еткен факторларды, сондай-ақ оның таралуына кедергі болған себептерді қарастырған. Жапондық үздіксіз білім беру жүйесінде ересектерге білім беру ерекшеліктерін талдаған. Сонымен қатар қашықтықтан білім беретін ұйымдарды (оның ішінде онлайн режимінде) және пандемия жағдайында ересектерге қашықтықтан білім беруді одан әрі дамыту үшін Жапония мемлекеті қабылдаған шаралар зерттелген.

Кілт сөздер: қашықтықтан білім беру, Жапония, өмір бойы білім алу, ересектерге білім беру, COVID–19 пандемиясы, онлайн оқыту, қашықтықтан оқыту.

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Тенденции и проблемы дистанционного образования взрослых в Японии

В статье рассмотрена текущая ситуация в развитии дистанционного образования в Японии, в частности, в отношении взрослых. В Японии термин «непрерывное обучение» стал широко использоваться и занимает центральное место в образовательной политике, которая активно затрагивает важнейшие темы, возникающие в широком диапазоне образовательных программ в быстро меняющемся обществе. Система высшего образования Японии страдает от неуклонного сокращения числа выпускников средних школ, что следует из снижения уровня рождаемости. По мнению авторов, один из способов решения этой проблемы — привлечение новых демографических групп студентов, таких как взрослые и иностранные студенты. К тому же растущее число пожилых людей привело к увеличению спроса на образовательные программы среди взрослых. С другой стороны, существует множество вопросов, которые необходимо решить, чтобы продвигать образование взрослых в Японии. Пандемия COVID–19 выявила проблемы в системе образования, продемонстрировав серьезные пробелы как в принципах организации непрерывного обучения, так и в реализации образовательных программ в этом аспекте. Хотя дистанционное онлайн-образование является стратегическим инструментом, который японские учебные заведения могут использовать для достижения конкурентного преимущества, оно недостаточно представлено по сравнению со своими мировыми аналогами. В настоящей работе авторами рассмотрены факторы, повлиявшие на развитие дистанционного образования в Японии, а также причины, препятствовавшие его распространению. Проанализированы особенности образования взрослых в японской системе непрерывного образования. Изучена деятельность организаций, предоставляющих дистанционное образование (в том числе в режиме онлайн), и обсуждены меры, принятые правительством, для дальнейшего развития дистанционного образования для взрослых в условиях пандемии.

Ключевые слова: дистанционное образование, Япония, непрерывное обучение, образование взрослых, пандемия COVID–19, онлайн-обучение, дистанционное обучение.

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