

# Issues Facing Instructional Consultation in Higher Education

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*This paper reviews issues of instructional consultation in higher education. Instructional consultation is a type of faculty development program; however, there are not many universities that provide instructional consultation in Japan. It is helpful to organize the issues surrounding this program for disseminating instructional consultation in higher education which does not provide it enough. This paper includes several issues with instructional consultation as a result of reviews: (1) human resources available for instructional consultation are not sufficient in Japan, (2) instructional consultation is a time-consuming process, and (3) the assessment is insufficient. This paper also includes a process and model for instructional consultation. The factors for why instructional consultation is a time-consuming program are considered by analyzing those models. These findings suggest the need for efficiency, assessing the program's effects, and attractive elements for faculty members to instructional consultation in Japan.*

*Keywords: Faculty Development, Higher Education, Instructional Consultation*

## Introduction

Instructional consultation is a type of faculty development program utilized in higher education, and faculty members can ask for an instructional consultant to support them. Instructional consultation is a process that assesses the improvement of teaching skills, and an instructional consultant observes an instructor's class, collects data, and provides feedback to an instructor based on data from the observation (Brinko, 2012a). An instructor (a faculty member) is a client within instructional consultation, and an instructional consultant supports the client's instructional improvement. A client and an instructional consultant try to solve teaching problems cooperatively, individually, and continuously (Sato, 2009). Instructional consultation is one way to successfully and radically change teaching in higher education (Brinko, 2012a), making it the "most rewarding and effective" (Lewis, 2001, p. 3).

In Japan, since 2008, conducting faculty development in higher education has been obligatory, although instructional consultation is not common. The Central Council for Education in the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) expected that universities attempted to enhance instructional consultation to evaluate teaching and provide advice by request to instructors because the content of faculty development programs was not practical for individual instructors' needs (MEXT, 2008).

This paper aims to describe issues with instructional consultation in Japanese higher education and issues at North American universities in which instructional consultation has been a common program. As there are few universities that provide instructional consultation in Japan, it is helpful to organize these issues and factors for the dissemination of instructional consultation in higher education.

## Methods

Literature searches were conducted by using the search word “instructional consultation” in the field of higher education through both English and Japanese search sites. References in the articles from the research results and related articles were checked. Moreover, reports by the MEXT were also checked. This paper reports the key findings because further research is still ongoing.

## Results

Searching using CiNii (<https://cir.nii.ac.jp/>), a search engine for Japanese articles, with the search word “instructional consultation (in Japanese)” resulted in 28 matches. Searching using ERIC (<https://eric.ed.gov/>) with the keyword “instructional consultation” by using “Higher Education” as a descriptor resulted in 154 matches. Both sites were accessed on July 10th, 2022. There were several issues in Japan and North America regarding instructional consultation. This paper discusses those findings.

### Issues with Instructional Consultation in Japan

In North America, institutions of higher education have provided faculty development programs to improve teaching methods since the early 1970s (Brinko, 1990), and instructional consultation is a common program (Brinko, 2012a). One of the issues with instructional consultation in Japan is that only a small number of universities provide instructional consultation within their faculty development programs. Only 5.8% of universities conducted instructional consultation in the 2019 academic year (44 of 763 colleges and universities), whereas 62.1% conducted lectures and symposiums and 52.8% conducted peer observation (MEXT, 2021). Thus, instructional consultation is not the main program used for faculty development in Japan. Looking at its change over time, 3.4% of higher education institutions conducted instructional consultation in the 2013 academic year (MEXT, 2015). Institutions of higher education in Japan that employ instructional consultation have increased slowly; however, instructional consultation is still not the main method of faculty development in Japan.

In addition, 76.9% of Japanese universities had a center or other organization dedicated to faculty development. The universities expected the centers or organizations to primarily improve and enhance course content and instructional methods (MEXT, 2021); however, universities did not provide instructional consultation programs that could directly support faculty members to improve teaching.

Another issue with instructional consultation in Japan is that human resources—such as instructional consultants, faculty developers that conduct instructional consultations—are not sufficient (The Central Council for Education, 2008). In the 2019 academic year, 59.2% of colleges and universities (452 of 763 institutions) brought in an extramural lecturer as an expert or a workshop lecturer according to their needs, whereas 27.5% of colleges and universities (210 of 763 institutions) utilized their own faculty and staff as experts (MEXT, 2021). Faculty development programs are not routinely provided at many universities. In contrast, Yoshida and Kanenishi (2014) suggested the development of a new type of instructional consultation without reliance on an expert because they found that instructional consultants were insufficient. Moreover, even though colleges and universities provided instructional consultation, not so many instructors utilized it (Yasuno, 2011; Yoshida & Kanenishi, 2014). Yoshida & Kanenishi (2014) surmised that the faculty would be hesitant to be observed in the classroom, and also they thought that they were checked and instructed about their own teaching by an instructional consultant. The lack of users of instructional consultation is another issue in Japan.

### Issues with Instructional Consultation in North America

Colleges and universities in North America, where instructional consultation is common program (Brinko, 2012a), also have issues. These problems are that instructional consultation is labor-intensive (Brinko, 2012b) and time-consuming (Lewis, 2001; Piccinin, 1999). Brinko (2012a) indicated that the process of instructional consultation was complex in innumerable ways. The following two models of instructional consultation and roles of an instructional consultant are adopted to show how the process is time-consuming and complex.

Nyquist and Wulff (2001) proposed a model for instructional consultation composed of five steps that adapts a research process. The first step is identification of problem, issue or question. An instructional consultant asks several questions to try to support instructor's questions to be clear at the initial meeting. Through the meeting, the instructional consultant and the faculty member figure out what issues they will try to solve. Collecting data is the second step. An instructional consultant utilizes quantitative research methods, such as surveys at classroom and

student rating data, and qualitative research methods, such as class observation and interview with student and instructor etc. The third step is data analysis. An instructional consultant collects many information to support the data to be "accuracy, completeness, and significance" (p.49). An instructional consultant provides analyzed information instead of raw data. Interpretation of the data is the fourth step. An instructional consultant assists the instructor in understanding the meaning of the data by providing models and frameworks. The final step is data translation. An instructional consultant supports the instructor in translating the identified issues into "goals and strategies for change" (p. 50), which could be to "focus on modifications in curriculum, course structure, instructional methods, or student behaviors or perceptions" (p. 50), by using their expertise.

Brinko (2012b) proposed four phases in instructional consultation composed of "initial contact, conference, information collection, and the information review and planning session" (p.3). In the first phase, the initial contact is a brief meeting in person or over the phone, and the instructional consultant determines whether the consultation will go to the next phase. The conference with broad and various discussion is conducted in the second phase. The instructional consultant tries to figure out "the context of the faculty member's teaching situation, including the goals of the course, the types of students in the course, the syllabus, the instructional aids, the problems encountered, and the like" (p.4). In the third phase, information collection, the consultant collects data relevant to the client's questions. Depending on the kinds of questions, the consultant gathers data from students, an observer who visits the client's class, or instructional materials, among other methods. At the information review and planning session phase, the consultant shows the gathered information to the client. If another problem is specified, the consultant evaluates it and seeks out the solution.

Moreover, researchers pointed out that an instructional consultant has many roles (Nyquist & Wulff, 2001; Lewis, 2001). Nyquist and Wulff (2001) indicated that instructional consultants were "data collectors, analyzers, and interpreters; we are not classroom evaluators" (p. 46). Lewis (2001) indicated that an instructional consultant wore various hats as a data collector, data manager, facilitator, support system, counselor, and information source.

### **Other Issue with Instructional Consultation**

Conducting an assessment is the other issue with instructional consultation. Rohdieck et al. (2012) noted that instructional consultation was "one of the least assessed parts of our profession" (p.177), and Piccin (1999) indicated that there is a lack of research on the elements of instructional consultation that influence teaching. Japanese researchers also pointed out that it is necessary to assess the efficacy of instructional consultation (Sato, 2009; Yoshida & Kananishi, 2014).

To assess the efficacy of consultation, the faculty member needs to implement the new teaching idea or method that the instructional consultant provided in their class. However, Nyquist and Wulff (2001) indicated that clients decide what to implement in their class based on the data collected by the consultant, even if the consultant suggests a solution. The faculty members can decide whether they accept the instructional consultant's proposal or not. Moreover, Brinko (2012a) showed two approaches to instructional consultation; "the prescription model and the collaborative/process model" (p.viii). In the prescription model, "the consultant assumes authority and responsibility for identifying, diagnosing, and solving problems" (Brinko, 2012b, p.5), while the client follows the consultant's suggestion. On the other hand, in the collaborative/process model, "Both the consultant and client may identify, diagnose, and suggest solutions to problems; however, it is the client's prerogative to accept or reject the consultant's contributions" (Brinko, 2012b, p.5).

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Despite the small size of the literature review, several issues related to instructional consultation were identified. Regarding the issue for faculty development in Japanese higher education, this review found that instructional consultation needs to be widely disseminated. There is a need to further develop human resources to compensate for the shortage of experts that conduct instructional consultation. Since instructional consultation requires advanced skills, training programs for instructional consultants need to be developed. Strengthening human resource development for instructional consultants is important to ensuring the quality of instructional consultation. What kind of human resources should be developed can be seen in the model by Nyquist and Wulff (2001) and the four phases by Brinko (2012b) introduced above: those who can conduct complex instructional consultation and those who can perform various roles.

In addition, there is the issue of faculty not taking advantage of instructional consultation services even when they are offered. This may be due in part to cultural factors such as unfamiliarity with these types of programs. The widespread use of instructional consultation is necessary, along with finding ways to promote the expansion of these users. Since it is the faculty member's decision whether to utilize instructional consultation, an attractive instructional consultation

system is required. In addition, it will also be necessary to communicate the advantages, benefits and appeal of instructional consultation.

Articles from North America, where instructional consultation is commonly implemented, found that instructional consultation requires time and great effort. Although the model of instructional consultation is simple, the procedures and tasks for each step are numerous and require a high skill level, which is assumed to be the reason for this process being time-consuming and laborious. Therefore, efficiency improvements are needed to reduce the effort required for instructional consultation. Research and development of instructional consultation tools will be part of this solution.

The lack of research in Japan is likely due to its negligible use of instructional consultation, but even if instructional consultation were a common program, its assessment is not sufficient. Further research on the assessment of instructional consultation is needed. Instructional consultation must be difficult to evaluate because of its complexity. It is also difficult to evaluate it because faculty members decide to accept and implement the suggestions of instructional consultants. It is necessary not only to ask faculty members to cooperate in research, but also to conduct research on what kind of proposals are acceptable. Efficiency, evaluation of effectiveness, and appealing to instructors will be key to solving these existing issues. Balancing and enhancing these three key elements will lead to the successful spread of instructional consultation in Japan.

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