

# A Study of Versatile Tutor Training Programs for Universities in Japan

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**Abstract:** This research reports on the creation of online tutor training programs for learning support centers in Japanese universities. As this topic is relatively new in Japanese higher education institutions, there is a lack of practical training programs that can serve as references. To address the issue, we have opted to develop programs based on a framework established in the United States. The programs were planned in accordance with two core concepts: “usable by any university” and “to be self-learning materials.” The primary objective was to create training programs that can be universally used in Japanese universities, allowing tutors to learn independently even without a lecturer. In conclusion, it can be affirmed that the programs serve as versatile tutor training resources. While some cultural differences may have emerged due to the adoption of a US-based framework, it is believed that these variances can be partially resolved by making adjustments during on-site programs.

**Keywords:** tutor training program, learning support center, online learning materials

## 1. Introduction

The main propose of this research is to develop training programs for tutors based on a framework used in the United States and to validate the effectiveness of the programs for Japanese universities. There are two primary reasons for undertaking this research. First, the necessity of a learning support center (LSC) in higher education has been recognized in Japan since around the latter half of the 2000s (The Japan Association for Developmental Education, 2012). In this research, a LSC is defined as an organization that assists students with their learning outside of classroom (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2010). In light of this need, the importance of training programs for tutors working at LSC has gained attention recently. However, there are currently no authorized and established tutor training programs in Japan, despite individual institutions implementing their own programs. Several LSCs appear to require more information on tutor training. The creation of such programs is expected to improve the situation better.

Second, there is a significant disparity between the abundance of tutor training materials available in the United States compared to Japan. While these resources can serve as valuable references, it is challenging to adopt them directly without modifications. This is because the requirements for academic support in Japanese universities are perceived to differ from those in the United States. Thus, it becomes necessary to adapt the materials to suit the Japanese context. Therefore, we made the decision to design our own tutor training programs referring to the research of The College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA). CRLA is known for issuing certifications for international tutor training programs, making it suitable for our purposes. This paper will present the contents of the tutor training programs we have developed and examine their effectiveness.

## 2. Method: Creating tutor training programs

Two key concepts guided the creation of the tutor training programs in this research: one is “usable by any university” and the other is to be “self-learning materials.” While it is undeniable that each university, faculty, and department has its own study styles and learning contents, it is unlikely that a single teaching method would be universally suitable for all subjects. However, we believe tutoring skills aimed at supporting tutees can be developed regardless of the differences between universities, instead of focusing on teaching methods for specific subjects. Tutor training programs that we aim to develop should adhere to these principles. Secondly, it is important to note that not all universities in Japan with LSC have a lecturer who can train tutors. The reasons for this absence may vary depending on the university, such as budget constraints, lecturers being occupied with other responsibilities, and/or a lack of understanding of training needs. In order to make the situation better, providing self-training materials can be an effective solution. Thus, we have decided to develop materials that can be utilized for both collective and individual learning.

Based on the aforementioned principles, we have selected the article “Standards, Outcomes, and Possible Assessments for ITTPC Certification” by CRLA as basic reference. ITTPC stands for “International Tutor Training Program Certification,” which was established to provide “recognition and positive reinforcement for tutoring program’s successful work from an international organization,” and it also requires “set an internationally-accepted standard of skills and training for tutors” (The College Reading and Learning Association, 2018). The article presents ideas on tutoring skills that are applicable internationally, rather than specific to particular fields of study. We anticipate that it will be well-suited for our intended purpose. While our research does not aim to develop programs by which the certification can be acquired, the standards can be a good example what tutors are required at higher education.

Five researchers, including myself, have actively participated in the research. We engaged in extensive discussions and evaluations of the contents of ITTPC and of our programs, then we were assigned to topics and made each of them, and brought them in for further discussion. One of the distinguishing features of the programs is that they were designed as online materials, allowing for easy accessibility and reference. Consequently, we refer to these online tutor training programs as “OTT.” Each topic of OTT consists of a short video, a note containing key sentences, and a worksheet with assignments. These assignments consist of both individual and multi-person tasks. The note with key sentences and the worksheet with assignments are provided as downloadable PDF files, allowing for easy access and use.

## 3. Result

Tutor training at Otemae University was conducted even before the existence of OTT, during which a diverse range of materials were utilized based on the identified necessary topics. However, compared to that time, the implementation of OTT brings several advantages. First, having a single set of training materials enables both tutors and lecturers to adhere to a consistent policy, providing a sense of stability and security. The establishment of OTT has indeed resulted in increased reliability, which is believed to be associated with the reliability of ITTPC. Tutors have also provided feedback stating that the expectations placed upon them have become clearer through the use of OTT.

Second, tutors use worksheets with assignments to help them in preparing their workshops during the training. Those materials can be valuable resources for tutors, assisting them in organizing specific segments of tutor training. Third, the availability of online materials has made it easy for tutors to work on preparation and review, and create-up work for absent students is easier than when there were no such materials available.

Although the benefits of OTT have been highlighted above, some challenges have emerged. OTT’s universal design occasionally caused confusion among tutors as certain descriptions did not align with their specific LSC contexts. Moreover, misunderstandings of assignment intent led to workshops being perceived as ineffective. These issues currently

pose negative aspects of OTT. Another challenge lies in the widespread dissemination of OTT to Japanese universities.

#### 4. The effectiveness of OTT

To sum up, topics offered by ITTPC serve as an effective framework for tutor training at Japanese universities. The existence of such programs has been helpful, allowing students to develop their skills and awareness through the use of OTT. The well-designed framework serves as a valuable reference for tutors. Even if a lecturer does not use OTT directly for their own tutor training, presenting the topics of OTT as a guide to the required skills and competencies of tutors can still be effective. It is worth noting that OTT is available in Japanese, further enhancing its accessibility and relevance in the Japanese context.

Nonetheless, the impact of cultural differences on the use of OTT cannot be completely ignored. In the case of Otemae University, a topic “Adult learners” was a notable example. In Japan, the majority of university students enroll immediately after graduating from high school, resulting in a limited number of mature students. For instance, at my university, there are only one or fewer mature students per grade level who utilize the LSC. Thus, the topic is not used in tutor training at Otemae University as an opportunity to take advantage of is really rare. This situation is not unique to Otemae University but is common among many universities in Japan (e-Stat, 2021). Another case is “Supplemental Instruction.” While the instructional method is explained in the material, it is not typically organized or utilized in the context of Japanese higher education institutions. Therefore, at Otemae University, Supplemental Instruction is also omitted from tutor training due to its limited applicability in the typical Japanese educational setting.

Hence, it is evident that not all content in OTT is invaluable to a specific university. This limitation arises from the nature of versatile programs. However, it is expected that this issue can be addressed through the way individual implementation and operation of OTT by each university. Overall, it can be concluded that the objective of creating versatile tutor training programs using the ITTPC framework has been achieved, and significant results have been obtained.

In the future, we have plans to improve the content by addressing any aspects that may lead to misunderstandings among tutors. Besides, as OTT is a freely accessible online resource, we aim to collaborate with educational societies to promote its widespread use. While we have only presented the practices of one university in this study, our intention is to gather operational data from multiple universities and conduct future comparisons.

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