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*Migration, displacement and education:
Building bridges, not walls*

CHALLENGES FOR IMMIGRANTS IN FORMAL AND INFORMAL EDUCATION SETTINGS IN JAPAN

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ABSTRACT

The national system ensures quality education for students as far as they are in school in Japan. The contents of lessons are standardized across the country, and the schools are generally located within walking distance of children's homes. Some of the school facilities and equipment have become old today, but they still provide safe learning environments. This efficient system guaranteed Japan's successful experience in the past, but it targeted only Japanese nationals.

However, the population decline which Japan now faces and the comparative increase in immigrants in Japan are challenging the above story because all the systems have been designed for the increasing nationals in country's history. Although it is difficult to shift to another set of system, the government and industry have started to arrange the present school system and economic activities for their future. The system actually needs more inclusive channels for immigrant students and families, more language supports, data on educational performance of the immigrants, more multi-cultural teacher education, and a more certain public budget.

This paper introduces social change in Japan, reviews the present education system, and illustrates multi-level efforts for more inclusive education for immigrants in the country. The education system in Japan is limited for children who have different backgrounds, compared to other countries, although the national government has developed official channels for them. Beside these formal settings, there are small but strong supporting activities from schools and civil organizations. Teachers accept many immigrants, and technology can also overcome the distance and access issues among them. These informal conditions among schools and communities are also shown in this paper.

INTRODUCTION

High rates of non-attendance, low progression rates, and low academic achievement are among the problems facing immigrant students in the world. Japan has a small but increasingly visible immigrant population, especially in the context of a declining native population and an increase in the population of non-Japanese children. This chapter explains the general backgrounds of social change and education for immigrants, illustrates the history of people's mobility and formal educational system, and shows school's and people's responses to the needs of new citizens for the sustainable future in Japan. The country is not fully ready for integrating migrants into the formal education system and economic mechanism, partly because the past successful experience seems to hinder the social shift.

The purpose of this work is to elaborate on the challenges of the educational system in Japan considering the formal and informal education settings for immigrant students. Schools and communities face challenges such as allocating supplementary resources of teachers and language support for non-Japanese students. There are, however, increasing examples of the sharing of education practices among schools and civil organizations with the support of local governments.

1. BACKGROUND CONTEXTS FOR IMMIGRANTS IN JAPAN

1.1. Population decline against sustainable economic development

The population of Japan has decreased to 126.6 million in 2017 from its peak of 128.1 million in 2008. The average age today is 46.8, as the children of the first baby boomers born in the 1970s tend to have fewer children themselves. The portion of the aged population has comparatively increased. Meanwhile, the foreign population is increasing. For example, 1.3 million foreign people were registered (1.02% of the total population in the country) in 2000; this number and proportion rose to 1.5 (1.17%) in 2005, 1.6 (1.25%) in 2010, and 1.7 (1.34%) in 2015.¹The latest number of registered foreigners, mainly from Asian countries, in Japan is 2.47 million (1.95%) as of June 2017 (Table 1). The demographic trend is something Japan has never experienced in the history.

¹ Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication (2015). *Heisei 27 nen Kokusei Chousa* [2015 Census] <http://www.stat.go.jp/data/kokusei/2015/kekka/kihon1/pdf/gaiyou1.pdf>

TABLE 1: REGISTERED FOREIGNERS IN JAPAN BY REGIONS²

		(%)
Asia	2,050,909	82.98
Latin America	247,938	10.03
Europe	73,151	2.96
North America	69,875	2.83
Africa	15,143	0.61
Oceania	13,854	0.56
No nationality	588	0.02
Total	2,471,458	100

During the economic boom in the 1970s and 1980s, a labor shortage appeared and short-term labor, including illegal immigrants, was accepted across the country. This ‘successful’ history makes a quite number of politicians and company owners believe that the foreign workers would still want to come to support the Japanese economy in the future. We must remember, however, that good economy attracted foreign workers and they were not the cause for the good economy in the past. As the economic growth is not expected due to the decrease of domestic market, this aging country needs to develop a new approach because the past experience could hardly become a meaningful reference. Therefore, importing many laborers from the rest of the world is one answer, as like many other industrialized countries have been doing for decades. Policies on education and training have strong relationships with this choice in Japan. Here focus go to an official training system as well as international student policy.

To keep legal labor with the estimation of rapid population decline, the government has set up education/training programs for foreign people who can work for small industries in Japan for a time and then use their knowledge and skills after they return back home. One such system is the Technical Internship Trainee Programme [*Gaikokujin Ginou Jisshuu Seido*] launched in 1993. Through this system, foreign workers can work in Japan in almost the same employment channel used by low-skilled foreign workers in agriculture, fishery, construction, food manufacturing, textile, machinery and metal, and other industries. This official program allows Japanese small- and middle-sized private companies to employ short-term foreign workers for three to five years, as a part of international cooperation for technology transfer to developing countries. Workers, expected to learn about Japanese business practices and technology and bring those experiences back to their home countries, are from Vietnam (38.6%), China (35.4%), the Philippines (9.9%), Indonesia (8.2%), Thailand (3.2%) and others (4.7%).³ Most of them stay in remote cities and villages. As of 2016, the 230,040 workers stayed in Japan (Figure 1). These technical trainees are cheap workers for the industries, working long hours and receiving lower than the minimum wage, according to the recent media reports.

² Ministry of Justice (2017). *Zairyuu Gaikokujin Toukei* [Statistics of Registered Foreign Population]. http://www.moj.go.jp/housei/toukei/toukei_ichiran_touroku.html and Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication (2018). *Jinkou Suikei* [Population Trend]. <http://www.stat.go.jp/data/jinsui/pdf/201804.pdf>

³ <http://www.moj.go.jp/content/001228761.pdf>

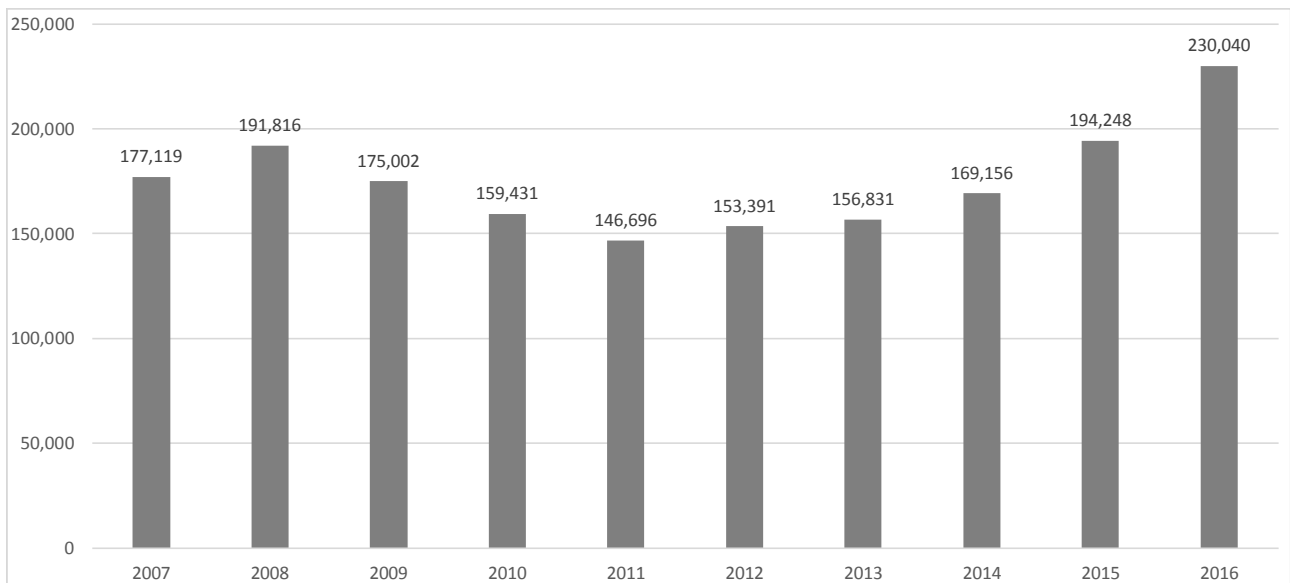


Figure 1: The number of trainees⁴

International students are potential laborers in future Japan. Green (2017) points out that the government has also been actively recruiting international students, allowing them to work part-time during the academic year and full-time during vacation periods, leading to an increase in international students in Japan, which might be helpful. Between 2006 and 2016, the student share of the overall foreign population rose from 6.3 percent (131,789 student visas) to 11 percent (257,739). Thanks to special resource allocation and strong initiative by the Ministry of Education, more international students have come to Japan than previously. The “Plan for 100,000 International Students” was adopted from 1983 to 2000, and an extension—the “Plan for 300,000 International Students”—has been ongoing since 2008 with a plan to meet the goal in 2020. The international student policy generally deals with higher education institutes but soon needs to consider lower levels of education. Both educational institutions and industry face the first problem of losing students and workers, which is why schools began accepting Chinese students and industries have tried to find good labor from other countries. One of Japanese schools in Miyazaki Prefecture, for example, received 167 students from China and 16 from Japan, meaning more than 90% of the students are not Japanese.⁵ This trend will become common soon across the country, if schools want to keep the same size.

Solving a labor shortage problem by education and training system seems to be working for a short term. More structural change and value shift, however, are necessary for the society to keep its sustainability in the future. While international rankings of Japanese universities are falling, keeping the same approach and the same assumption can hardly attract new international laborers and

⁴ Ministry of Justice <http://www.moj.go.jp/content/001228761.pdf>

⁵ NHK News Web (2018/5/11). *Kyuuseishu ha Ryuugakusei?* [Are International Students the Messiah?]. <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/news/html/20180425/k10011416511000.html>

students.⁶ Before checking the new approach, two more points must be clarified in case of Japan: the Japanese returnees and official systems.

1.2. Migration from/to Japan and returnees

Historically speaking, Japan chose to be isolated from the outer world for about 250 years from the 16th to 19th century. When the country opened its borders and made modernization reforms throughout the whole social system, foreign experts were invited to contribute to the society. Japan also sent a lot of people to Hawaii and the west coast of the United States of America as well as Latin American countries from the late 19th century to the 1950s. Brazil received over 234,000 Japanese immigrants. The two world wars drove many people to move from other Asian countries to the mainland of Japan. In April 1952, following the second war, the Koreans and Taiwanese were declared foreigners in Japan, though they would later be called 'old comers' after Japan regained independence with the end of U.S. occupation.

Although the Japanese economy faced labor shortages during the economic boom in the 1960s, the government and private companies did not depend on foreign labor but instead developed mechanical automation in production. The majority of foreign residents were colonial immigrants and their descendants during the economic boom of the 1980s, and the recruitment of *Nikkeijin*, descendants of Japanese emigrants mainly to Brazil and Peru, who were given access to residential status with no restrictions on employment after the 1980s.⁷ The term 'newcomers' refers to foreigners who came to Japan during or after the 1980s, especially these *Nikkeijin*. Because the ministry of education updated the national course of study for internationalization in 1979, the 1980s was the first notable rise of education for international understanding and the *Nikkeijin* issue was dealt with.

When Japan grew as a major economic player in the world due to the rise in the value of its currency, labor shortage, and the development of transnational networks, foreign migrant workers played an important role. The number of people overstaying their visas, who comprised the bulk of immigrant workers, grew from 100,000 in 1990 to 300,000 in 1993, and stood at around 207,000 as of January 2005. These workers mostly came from other Asian countries, such as Korea, China, the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia (Kashiwazaki & Akaha 2006). The 1990 revision to the Immigration Control and Refugee Act excluded unskilled laborers in principle, officially permitting visas only for high-skilled work- and family-based visas. However, by allowing entrance (ostensibly to foster "cultural understanding") to *Nikkeijin* of Japanese heritage as well as their immediate families, the revision opened a significant side door to unskilled labor. The *Nikkeijin* population quickly grew throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, peaking at about 375,000 in 2007, or close to 20 percent of Japan's foreign population (Green 2017).

⁶ Due to MOE requirements for globalization, universities have promoted several international programs including offering English-medium courses within their campus, hiring foreign teaching staff, and developing partnerships with foreign universities. This pull factor calls international students coming to Japan.

⁷ The South American *Nikkeijin* are the descendants of the Japanese who went to South America in the late 19th century and early 20th century, backed by a government policy to alleviate Japan's overpopulation at the time (Tsuneyoshi & Okano 2011: 9e).

Comparing to education for ‘old comers’, the *Nikkeijin* or ‘newcomers’ has become rather common target of international education when their number increased. The former people were more assimilated and successful in their business such as process manufacturer and entertainment industry with their own efforts: the latter sometimes resident together to keep their heritage as they could live in their own community because of globalized communication with their home countries. The ‘newcomer’ children and family became a severe issue for education providers.

1.3. National system for migration and refugee acceptance

The various needs of immigrants have never been filled only through official systems and Japan is not an exception. The present Japanese system for immigrants has many issues comparing with those of other countries. According to MIPEX 2015, for example, the Japanese system has been ranked lower than the average (Figure 2). The MIPEX aims at collecting indicators to compare the policies, legal frameworks and practice for the immigrants in their countries. More specifically, the comparative indicators are labor market mobility, family reunion, education, political participation, permanent residence, access to nationality and anti-discrimination. Sweden has been ranked highest for the series of MIPEX, and Japan has been included in the table for the latest two cycles of study.

Japan received refugees in the 1980s as a national policy. The first group of refugees to Japan was from Indochina due to the Vietnam War. The government decided to officially accept Indochina refugees in 1979 and kept receiving them in 1980s after the war. Many countries also received those refugees. More than 2.5 million Indochinese were resettled, mostly in North America, Australia, and Europe. Five hundred thousand were repatriated, either voluntarily or involuntarily.⁸

In total, 11,319 Indochinese refugees settled in Japan between 1978 and 2005, when the government stopped accepting them.⁹ They opened ethnic restaurants, for example, and worked with the Japanese people, and in the meantime sent their children to school, where they were treated the same as the native students, though with limited supports.

The recent trend of accepting refugees to Japan is inactive very much, comparing the situations in other countries, especially those facing refugee ‘crisis’ in European region. Today the numbers of refugees officially accepted in Japan: 106 out of 7,586 applicants were accepted in 2015,¹⁰ 125 of 10,901 in 2016,¹¹ and the Justice Ministry received 19,628 refugee applications in 2017, the highest number in history and an increase of 80% from 2016, but granted refugee status to only 20, a decrease from 28 in 2016.¹² The official systems are not enough yet for immigrants and refugees in Japan.

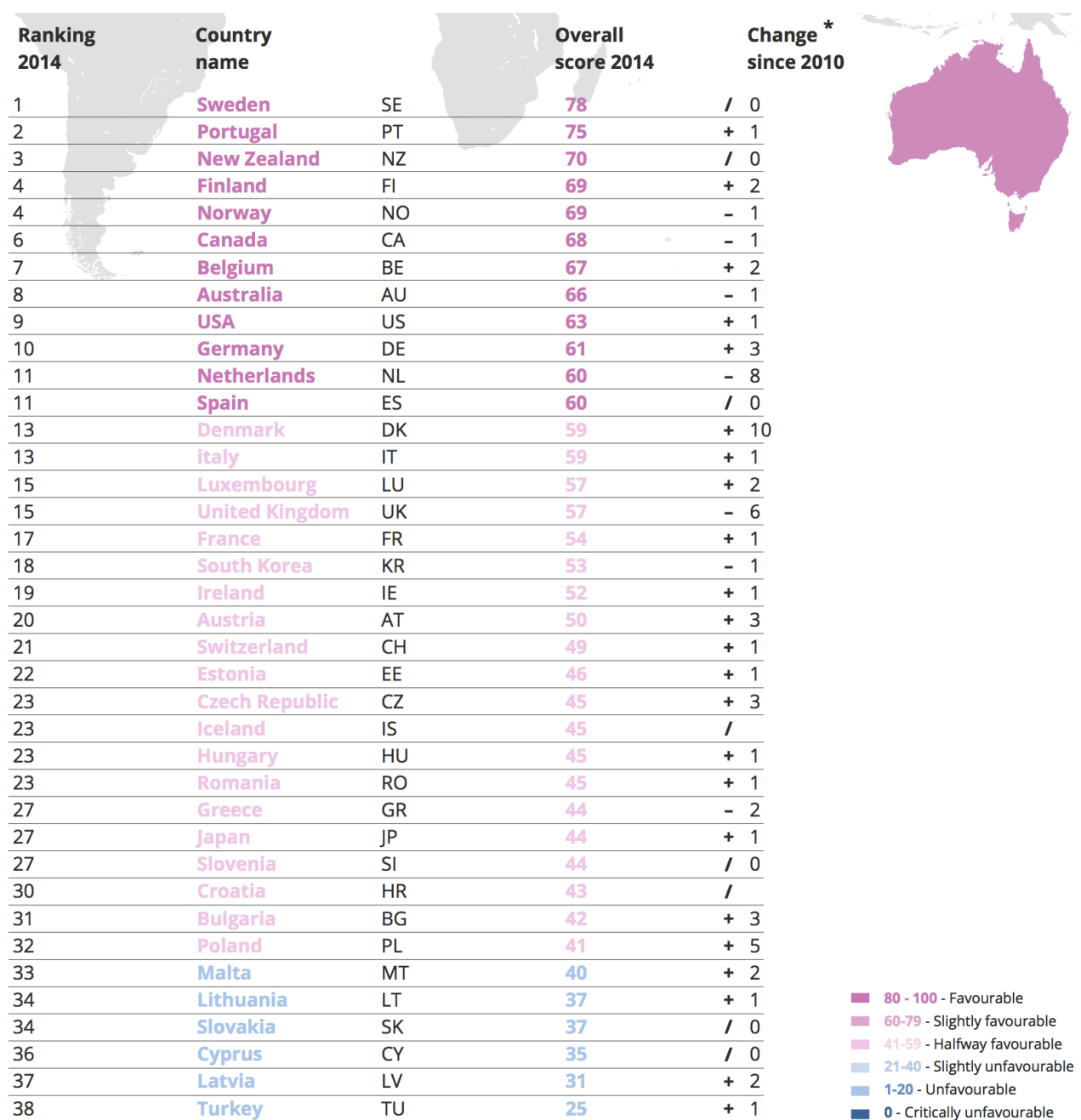
⁸ <http://www.unhcr.org/3ebf9bad0.html>

⁹ <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/nanmin/main3.html>

¹⁰ http://www.moj.go.jp/nyuukokukanri/kouhou/nyuukokukanri03_00111.html

¹¹ http://www.moj.go.jp/nyuukokukanri/kouhou/nyuukokukanri03_00666.html

¹² <https://jp.reuters.com/article/japan-asylum-idJPKBN1FXOU2>



* Without health

Figure 2: MIPEX overall ranking in 2014¹³

¹³ <http://www.mipex.eu/>

2. POLICY CONTEXTS IN EDUCATION FOR IMMIGRANTS AND FORMAL RESPONSES

2.1. Target of formal school education system

The centralized national education system ensures children's access to quality education in Japanese schools, but is not designed for immigrant students. The article 1 of School Education Law defines the schools, and the Constitution and the Fundamental Law of Education set education as the one provided by the schools. The minimum standards for setting up schools are based on the standards of the central Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) Ordinance No.14 (29 March 2002) for elementary and Ordinance No.15 (29 March 2002) for lower secondary school. The standards also cover class arrangements, the number of teachers, equipment, and facilities. The curriculum is regulated by the implementation rules of School Education Law by MEXT Ordinance No.19.

The formal sector and legal framework are not enough to respond to the various educational needs among immigrants in Japan. The country sets compulsory education from elementary school, grades 1 to 6, and lower secondary school, 7 to 9, for its nationals, but not for non-Japanese citizens. Okano (2011) points out the potential misunderstandings regarding the right to school education expressed in the law:

The Japanese constitution, in employing the term *kokumin* (literally, Japanese citizens) refers exclusively to Japanese citizens in relation to education (Article 26)¹⁴, which has led to an interpretation that foreign nationals are not entitled to education and that the government has no duty of provision. Such an interpretation is not, however, conveyed in the English language version of the Constitution provided on the government homepage. This translated version is misleading, in particular in light of recent civil movements that have demanded that the term *kokumin* be replaced with *nanibito* (people) in order to ensure every child's entitlement to education, regardless of his or her nationality. (p.40)

When non-Japanese families come to Japan with compulsory-school-age children and wish to send them to schools, they must submit a request to the local education board because they do not receive official information about the school system,¹⁵ whereas Japanese parents receive official notice from their city office as their child turns seven years old, based on the database of birth records. The information about non-Japanese residents is not always shared with the education sector within local governments.

¹⁴ <http://www.japaneselawtranslation.go.jp/law/detail/?id=174>

Article 26. All people shall have the right to receive an equal education correspondent to their ability, as provided by law. All people shall be obligated to have all boys and girls under their protection receive ordinary education as provided for by law. Such compulsory education shall be free.

¹⁵ This is not the case for residents from South Korea and other Koreans with permanent visas. They receive the same treatment as the Japanese, based on the announcement from MEXT Secretary in 1965.

All newborn babies in Japan must be registered with the government within 14 days of birth, according to the Japanese nationality law. If the parents are international, these children must choose one of the parents' nationalities at age of 22 with the right of 'Paused Nationality [*Kokuseki Ryuho*]' until that age. This registration system, however, allows them to apply for Japanese nationality after choosing the other nationality. Japanese couples living outside Japan must register the birth at their embassy within three months, otherwise, the baby loses Japanese nationality. These children can, however, 're-apply' for Japanese nationality even though the parents did not register within three months.¹⁶

The immigrant children whose parents both are non-Japanese or 'newcomers' need to wait to be accepted by the local education board and compulsory education school. Although they can start schooling, supports for the medium of instruction are not always ready at the initial stage of the academic year, especially when they apply to the board and school after the school year calendar is set up. The Japanese school academic year starts in April and ends in March, and schools generally plan and fix their events and ceremonies in February at the latest. Schools can much more easily arrange for extra supports for immigrant children with the education board, because they all have time to coordinate the available resources, than school and the board set up the next year's plan. The academic calendar in different countries, however, starts at different times and immigrant families may come to Japan on a different calendar. This raises additional questions as to whether the child should be accepted into a grade with Japanese children of the same age, or enroll in a different grade based on language proficiency. When immigrant children are officially accepted at school, they are provided with free school textbooks just as Japanese students are.

Compared with the U.S., which has adopted a multicultural framework at the national level, the Japanese education system has shown relatively little interest in addressing the needs of a diverse student population at the national level. It is the local governments, education boards, individual schools, and communities that have taken initiatives to manage and benefit from diverse communities, particularly in the areas where large minority/ foreign populations live. Prefectural, metropolitan, and municipal government policies for the education of minority groups attest to this (Tsuneyoshi & Okano 2011:14).

2.2. National initiatives in materials and training courses for teachers

The national central ministry of education or MEXT takes a lot of initiatives to lead all education boards and schools because the national standards and curriculum are applied across the country. MEXT receives annual reports about school status and details from the local education boards at the end of each academic year. The education boards of 47 prefectures in the country under MEXT have jurisdiction over public upper secondary schools, and the 1742 cities under the prefectures for public elementary and lower secondary schools. There are 770 cities (44.2% of all the cities) where immigrant children need language support for schooling (NIER 2015). MEXT has conducted surveys about immigrant students and developed a support network for them, because while local cities

¹⁶ This is because Article 2 of the Nationality Law defines Japanese nationals as people with one or more following conditions: i) one parent who is Japanese by birth, ii) father was the Japanese when he died, and iii) both parents are unknown or they have no nationalities as the child at birth.

already have meaningful good practices, they have little mechanism of sharing with other local governments due to less direct communication among each other.

One of the national services started in 2011 for supporting the learning of those who have foreign backgrounds is titled “CASTA-NET (<http://www.casta-net.jp/>)”. School teachers can directly access the system and check or download the learning materials and documents written in multiple languages. The ministry also provided guidelines for accepting immigrant students in 2011.¹⁷ The dialogue-formatted assessment tools for Japanese as second language for immigrant students¹⁸ and the Internet service titled CLARINET (Children Living Abroad and Returnees Internet) were both provided starting in 2014, targeting Japanese children who are abroad, returnees and non-Japanese children in Japan¹⁹. Moreover, professional development courses have also been conducted every year, although they are small size (Table 2). Monitoring and evaluation of these services and training courses is important to identify their effectiveness.

TABLE 2: THE JAPANESE PROFESSIONALS WHO TOOK THE COURSES²⁰

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Administrator Course	40	49	38	44	45
Instructor Course	70	70	70	65	76
Total	110	119	108	109	121

The formal school education system requires cities and private organizations to provide proper buildings, facilities, equipment, budget size, teacher qualifications, etc., as MEXT Ordinance, the regulations and the rules require. It could be said that setting up a new school in Japan is more difficult than in European countries, for example, where an independent school can be set up by a parent group. Maruyama et. al. (2016) comparatively explain how the Japanese system targets the rights to education and learning opportunities for authorization and assurance. The typical examples of unofficial independent schools outside of the formal school system in Japan are Chinese, Korean, and Brazilian schools. The Brazilians established ethnic schools approved by the Brazilian government but not by the Japanese. The main purpose of these Brazilian schools is to provide preparation courses for the Brazilian students to go to upper levels of education institutes when they return to Brazil. The contents of their lessons cover their national curriculum instead of the Japanese curriculum. The Chinese school also arranges for their own school system with their language. The proportion of mother languages spoken by immigrant children in Japanese public school is shown in Figure 3.

¹⁷ [Gaikokujin Jidou Seito Ukeire no Tebiki] www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/clarinet/002/1304668.htm

¹⁸ [Gaikokujin Jidou Seito no tameno JSL Taiwagata Asesumento] www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/clarinet/003.htm

¹⁹ http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/clarinet/main7_a2.htm

²⁰ http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/houdou/28/06/___icsFiles/afieldfile/2016/06/28/1373387_03.pdf

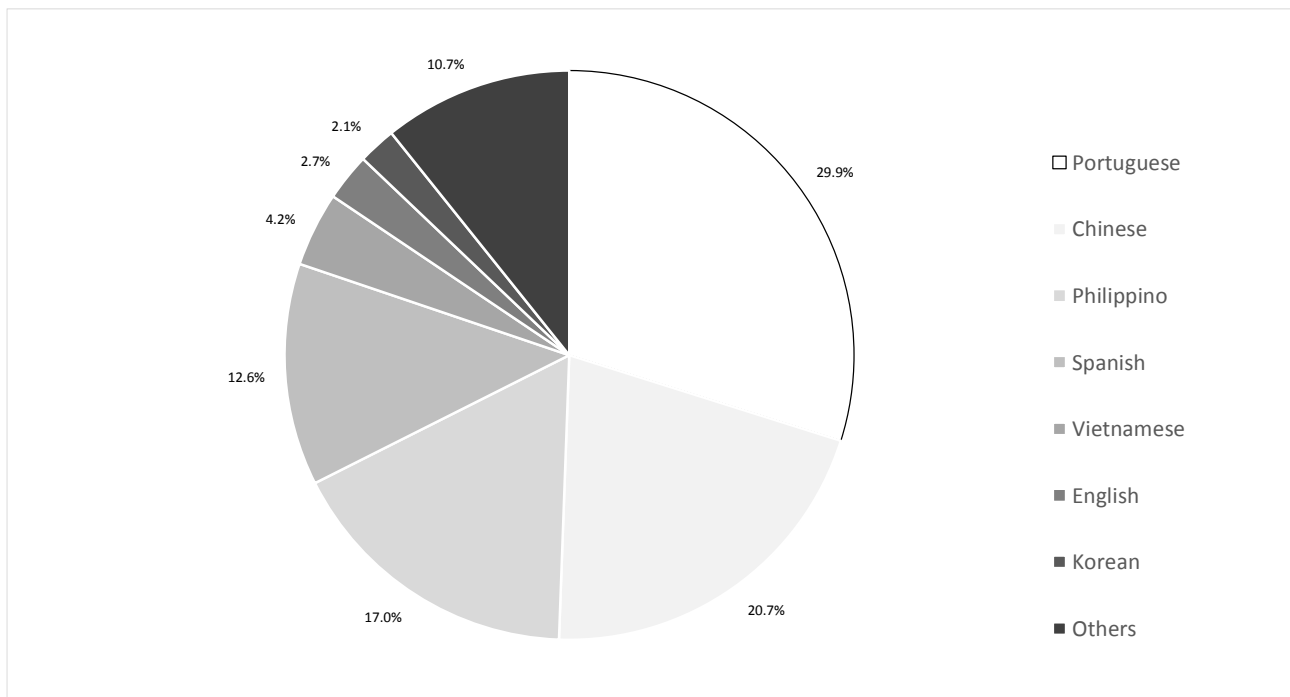


Figure 3: The mother languages of foreign students in schools in 2016²¹

More universities in Japan are open to international students than before, but the lower education institutes are not ready yet as much as universities. There are many problems with immigrant students in Japanese schools, one of the largest issues being the medium of instruction with little integration of approaches for various needs. The recent survey conducted by a non-profit organization (NPO) points out 5% of Brazilian *Nikkeijin* children—double the rate of the natives—are sent to special needs education schools because of language and mental issues. The NPO points out the necessity of coordination among local governments and schools.²²

Another main issue is knowledge about the school system in Japan. High level adaptation by students and their family is expected for language and manners in school. Even Japanese families sometimes have difficulty following a lot of rules set by the schools. For example, everyday announcements from school are printed in Japanese, and immigrant students generally have to translate it into their family language at home. It is of course very hard for early graders to explain the announcements for adults written with difficult vocabulary. There are many group activities such as cooperation for cleaning their classroom every day because it is important for the Japanese values education. The series of the group activities creates the hidden and 'exclusive' environment against those who have something different because being in equal and behaving the same manner have been emphasized in education practice for a long time in Japan. Therefore, the different appearance of immigrant students is often an issue among the Japanese children.

Formal compulsory education, both primary and lower secondary, targets only Japanese citizens so that the curriculum is not generally designed for intercultural educational needs such as mother

²¹ http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/houdou/28/06/___icsFiles/afieldfile/2016/06/28/1373387_03.pdf

²² <https://this.kiji.is/365451063769236577> (2018/5/5)

tongue education and religious education. Its advantage is high standards set for education across country, and a child can go through schooling at the same pace and covering the same contents anywhere in Japan. If, for example, a family moves from Tokyo to Okinawa after winter break, the new school would provide the same curriculum as the old school in Tokyo.

More enhancements to education are necessary in Japan when compared with other countries, as education policy and system indicators for immigrants and their preparedness are below average (Figure 4). MIPEX categorizes education as ‘Are all the children of immigrants encouraged to achieve and develop in school like the children of nationals?’ with the following four aspects:

- i) *Access* - ‘Do all children, with or without a legal status, have equal access to all levels of education?’ (Japan’s score: 25 out of 100)
- ii) *Targeting needs* - ‘Are migrant children, parents, and their teachers entitled to have their specific needs addressed in school?’ (Japan’s score: 40)
- iii) *New opportunities* - ‘Do all pupils benefit from the new opportunities that immigration brings to schools like immigrant languages, cultures, diverse classrooms, and parental outreach?’ (Japan’s score: 10)
- iv) *Intercultural education for all* - ‘Are all pupils and teachers supported to learn and work together in a diverse society?’ (Japan’s score: 10)







































1	 Sweden	77	14	 Denmark	49	27	 Slovakia	24
2	 Australia	76	15	 Luxembourg	48	28	 Iceland	23
3	 New Zealand	66	16	 Austria	47	29	 Japan	21
4	 Norway	65	16	 Germany	47	30	 Romania	20
4	 Canada	65	18	 Switzerland	42	30	 Poland	20
6	 Portugal	62	19	 Czech Republic	38	32	 Malta	19
7	 Belgium	61	20	 Spain	37	33	 Lithuania	17
8	 Finland	60	21	 Greece	36	33	 Latvia	17
8	 USA	60	21	 France	36	35	 Croatia	15
10	 Estonia	58	23	 Italy	34	35	 Hungary	15
11	 South Korea	57	24	 Ireland	30	37	 Turkey	5
11	 United Kingdom	57	25	 Cyprus	27	38	 Bulgaria	3
13	 Netherlands	50	26	 Slovenia	26			

Figure 4: MIPEX Education ranking in 2014²³

Because the education system is centralized here, the suitable structure could be built once the government decides across country. It would take little more time, however, to set and fit the new system for various necessity such as multilingual environment, accreditation of alternative education, and the legal coordination. There have been so far micro level activities by schools and civil organizations, which are described in the next section.

²³ <http://www.mipex.eu/>

3. RESPONSES TO CHALLENGES FACING IMMIGRANT STUDENTS AT SCHOOL

3.1. Efforts by school staff

It is a slight increase of immigrant students among the public schools (Figure 5), and their number and its ratio only small volume. There are 82,000 immigrant students out of 13 million total students, meaning the ratio of immigrant students is 0.61% (Table 3). While the official system lacks the same conditions for the small numbers of immigrant families as those experienced by Japanese, many school heads and teachers at the local level try hard to create learning opportunities for immigrant students, although Japanese school teachers are the busiest across OECD countries (OECD 2014). More importantly, the latest problem is in rather isolated areas where few teachers have experience in working with immigrant students, while MEXT produced some learning materials in major foreign languages such as Chinese, Portuguese, Spanish, and Tagalog, targeting cities in which ethnic groups concentrate. The local school staff have developed their own responses to educational needs because the newcomers suddenly came into their local communities without notice prior to the academic term.

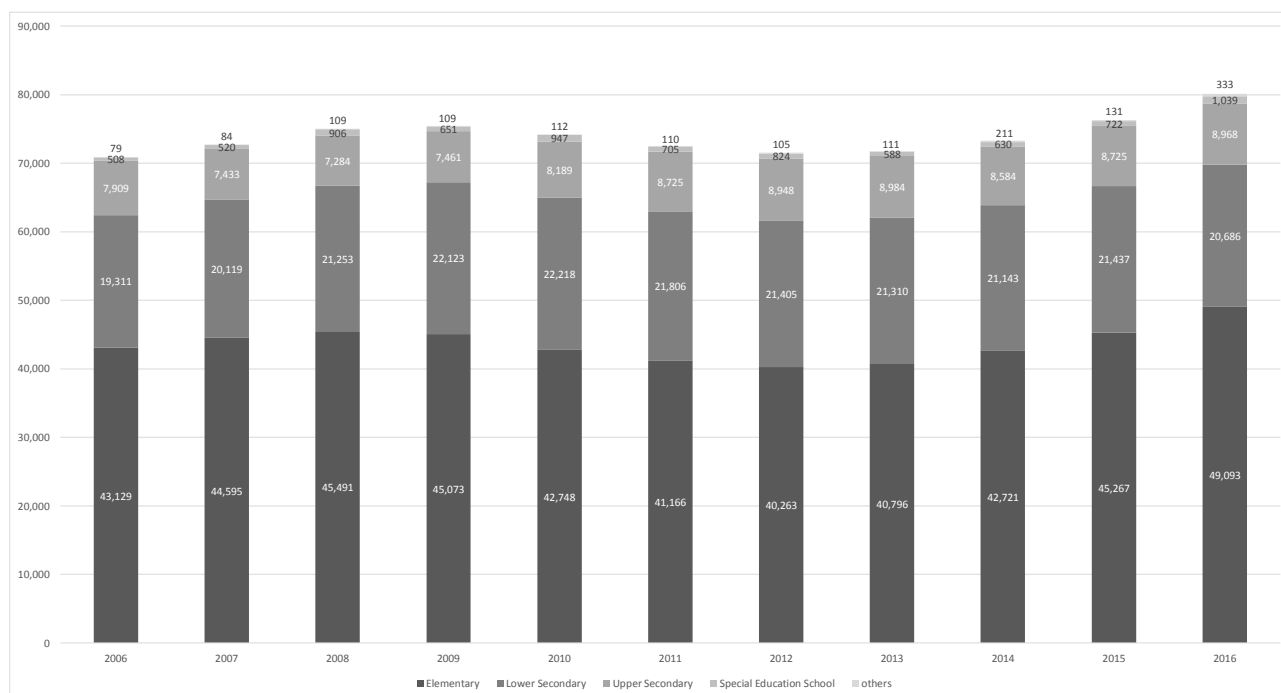


Figure 5: Foreign students in public schools²⁴

²⁴ http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/houdou/29/06/_icsFiles/afieldfile/2017/06/21/1386753.pdf

TABLE 3: FOREIGN STUDENTS AND THEIR RATIO TO THE JAPANESE STUDENTS IN SCHOOLS IN 2015²⁵

	National	Public	Private	Total	Rate (%)	Japanese
Elementary	39	45,267	415	45,721	0.70	6,543,104
Lower Secondary	47	21,437	797	22,281	0.64	3,465,215
Upper Secondary	30	8,725	4,224	12,979	0.39	3,319,114
Secondary Education School	17	131	36	184	0.57	32,317
Special Education School	10	722	2	736	0.53	137,894
<i>Total</i>	<i>143</i>	<i>76,282</i>	<i>5,474</i>	<i>81,901</i>	<i>0.61</i>	<i>13,497,644</i>

There are strong needs for language supports for those who are accepted by schools (Figure 6). Support mechanisms in schools in remote areas where very few immigrants come to live are lacking, because these schools prepare only for the Japanese children and families. Maruyama (2015), however, reports on a possible supporting mechanism employing new technology in a remote area that successfully prepared a student for the high school entrance examination. The mechanism provided supplementary lessons to a Thai immigrant student in grade 9 at a public junior high school over the Internet video chat, delivered by a subject instructor and a Thai interpreter. The student developed his knowledge and skills in mathematics and language for the entrance examination to public high school, and he finally passed the examination. Ninety-eight percent of Japanese students go to high school,²⁶ and thus, it is hard to find a job without a graduate certificate from high school.

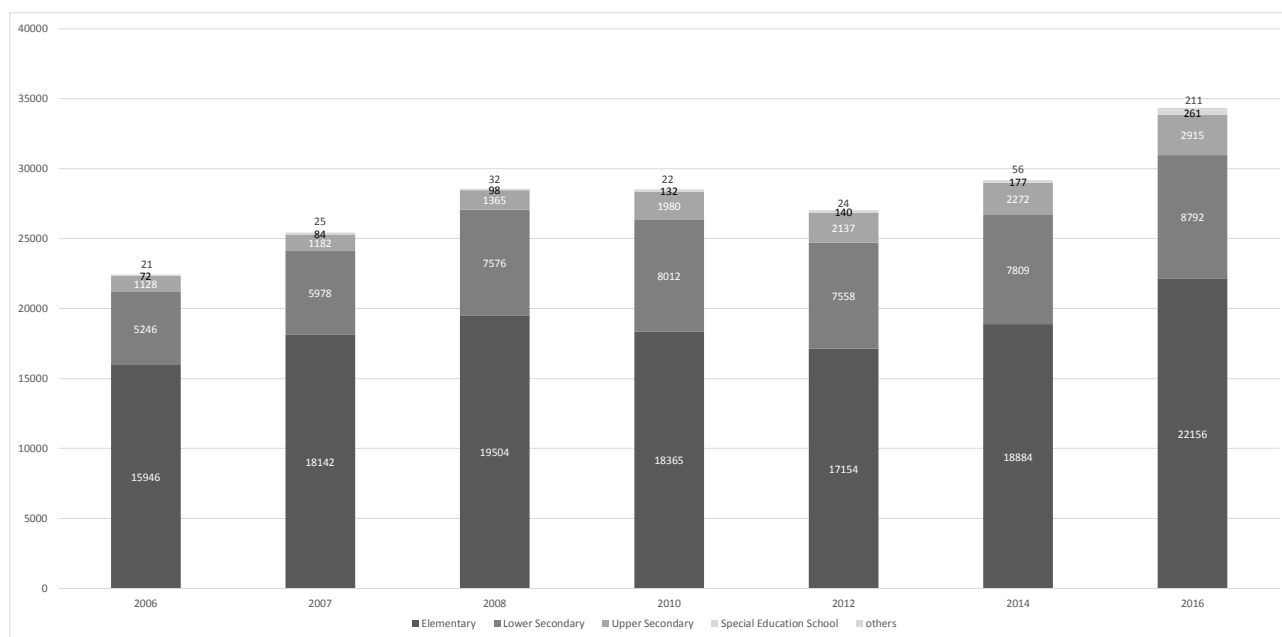


Figure 6: Foreign students who need Japanese supports after acceptance in schools²⁷

²⁵ http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/houdou/28/06/___icsFiles/afieldfile/2016/06/28/1373387_03.pdf and http://www.mext.go.jp/component/b_menu/other/___icsFiles/afieldfile/2016/01/18/1365622_1_1.pdf

²⁶ http://www.mext.go.jp/component/a_menu/education/detail/___icsFiles/afieldfile/2011/09/27/1299178_01.pdf

²⁷ [Nihongo Shidou ga Hitsuyouna Jidou Seito no Ukeirejoukyou tou ni kansuru Chousa (Heisei 28 nendo) no Kekka ni tsuite] http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/houdou/29/06/___icsFiles/afieldfile/2017/06/21/1386753.pdf

3.2. Civil initiatives

The school's efforts could be more effective with civil cooperation. In fact, the civil initiatives are more flexible and suitable to the needs in reality. There are many small and community-based non-governmental/non-profit organizations (NGO/NPO) assisting the non-Japanese children after school and out of school, but the problem is very little information is shared among these groups. One of them, which the author interviewed in September and December 2017, is located in central Tokyo where a lot of immigrant residents live, and the area is quite famous as Korean town in Tokyo. Although the local government allocates little money to those organizations, this NPO could actually access networks such as local ethnic communities, direct information from immigrant groups, and possible subsidies from the local governments.

The main purpose of this NPO's activities is, however, to help immigrant students catch up academically with the contents of lessons. The NPO focuses on how students can pass the entrance examination to high school and later graduate from a higher education institute in order to become skilled residents, because low-skilled immigrants have a very difficult time obtaining official resident visas in Japan. The organization also works for Japanese students who are poor academic performers because the same approach used with immigrant families sometimes helps these students as well. The organization also points out problems among immigrants and Japanese living in poverty are rooted in the same causes: Both of them are regarded as a minority group and often devaluated as a social loser so that the majority Japanese or winners in academic competition ignore their needs. The NPO overcame the difficulty in coordinating with public authorities to set up the office, received public subsidies, and kept good relationships with the authorities.

The local government in Tokyo, on the one hand, has been trying to promote supports for immigrant children, but their coordination of these supports hasn't gone well because of different budget sizes and political priorities. On the other hand, civil organizations also have difficulty working together on the issue. Some organizations have a long history of these activities based on their good will, while others see educational assistance as a new social business opportunity. The former focus more local and individual assistance, the latter often focus on those who comparatively have more resources. As a result, immigrant families with the least resources and most limited networks often don't receive assistance. But new technologies and a small amount of remote assistance can solve slightly more than before. In the case Maruyama (2015) reports on, discussed in the previous section, the method of assistance depended on a tablet and the internet. The face-to-face communication via tablets in three locations could connect the isolated immigrant student, a subject teacher, and a volunteer interpreter, who was an international student from a university in large city. This remote individual supplemental language and academic assistance improved the student's academic performance and his self-esteem to keep schooling.

Civil organizations have been publicly recognized since the earthquake in Kobe-Awaji, Western Japan, in 1995 and East Japan Great Earthquake and the nuclear crisis in 2011 (Maruyama 2018). Today many NPOs are active in educational supports for children in difficult conditions. In urban areas, there are more groups and organizations offering assistance to refugees and immigrants than ever before.

CONCLUSION

The Japanese official education system is not following the trends of growing diversity yet, comparing with other countries, because it is designed only for Japanese nationals and the majority of Japanese people still believe the country is homogenous. The systems have an assumption that target population always increase in education in the Japanese history. The society is aging with rapid population decline and rise of multicultural needs, meaning the system needs to be updated. The schools have already started to see changing dynamics among cultures from a variety of children and their families. Teachers and school heads are open to immigrant students, while the government and legal situations have not actively arranged for the coordination of services yet. Some teachers have started to develop and practice citizenship education, and schools take a more inclusive approach for both majority Japanese and minority immigrant students. In addition, technology has helped to overcome distance and improve access to learning opportunities among immigrant children. School education is an important channel to develop both the native and immigrant children in Japan. In order to implement coordinated policy, more research and assessments to understand the situations are necessary.

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