



Perspective

Homogeneity, Ethnicity, Gender and Language in Schooling among Latin American Immigrant Children in Japanese Schools

Genaro Castro Van*

Department of Education Leadership, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

Received date: 24 December, 2021, Manuscript No: er-22-55063;
Editor assigned date: 27 December, 2021; PreQC No. er-22-55063(PQ);
Reviewed date: 07 January, 2022; QC No er-22-55063;
Revised date: 17 January, 2022, Manuscript No. er-22-55063(R);
Published date: 24 January, 2022, DOI: 10.14303/2141-5161.2022.231.

***Corresponding Author:** Genaro Castro Van, Department of Education Leadership, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore,, E-mail: genarocastro@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

While Japan is often characterized as an ethnically homogenous country, it is an important destination for immigrants, specifically from other Asian countries. Though the Japanese government does not use the term “immigrant” when describing the foreign population in Japan and does not have a social integration policy, many immigrants are making Japan their permanent home, building communities, forming families, and raising children. As Japan experiences multi culturalization from below, the topic of migration and education has received critical attention. Immigrant children are diverse in terms of nationality, ethnicity, class, gender, language, religion, generation, status of residence, place of residence, and family composition. Some were born in the homelands such as China, Brazil, and the Philippines and later migrated to Japan. Others are second generation immigrants, born and raised in Japan; a growing population today. Some grew up in families created by international marriages, such as those consisting of a Filipina or Chinese mother and a Japanese father, while others are raised by immigrant parents. They often struggle with cultural, linguistic, and academic adjustment but are also finding ways to fit in a new land.

An ethnographic study conducted between 2003 and 2006 followed three children from Latin America attending three

different public Japanese primary schools. The investigation concerned a Japanese-language tutoring programme for foreign children, which was evaluated by participant observation and a set of in-depth interviews with officials, school principals and teachers. The programme appeared to be ineffective because of the influence of a strong assimilation policy, homogenous and standard teaching, and ethnic and gender assumptions at the schools.

About 28 years after the amendment of the law, the immigrant population has increased in size and diversity.³ There has been a 25% increase in the number of immigrant children and youth in Japan in the last ten years (Miyajima 2017). In Tokyo, one in eight new adults (who turned or will turn 20 in 2017-2018) have a foreign background (Yoshida 2018). As of December 2015, the number of foreign children under 19 years old was 288,749 or 12.9% of the total registered foreign population (Ministry of Justice 2016). This statistic does not include immigrant children with Japanese nationality such as those who are naturalized or who have a Japanese parent and a foreign parent (called *hafu*), often an invisible group.⁴ The nationality of children has become more heterogeneous, and includes those originating from countries in South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. In 2015, the top ten foreign nationalities of children under 19 years old were Chinese (90,123), Brazilian (40,727), Korean (38,967), Filipino

Citation: Van GC (2022) Homogeneity, Ethnicity, Gender and Language in Schooling among Latin American Immigrant Children in Japanese Schools. *Educ. Res* 13:1.

(31,420), Vietnamese (17,640), Peruvian (11,911), Nepalese (5,940), American [USA] (5,323), Indian (4,575), and Indonesian (4,516) (Ministry of Justice 2016). This paper first introduces the Japanese education system and the national policies on immigrant students and examines their educational challenges and successes by taking into account these students' differences. Then, it explores the various local responses towards immigrant students, including those of local governments, non-main stream schools and Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs) and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), in providing educational support for immigrant students. Lastly, it concludes with the challenges and possibilities of education for immigrant students in Japan and provides implications for future educational policies and practices

JAPANESE EDUCATION SYSTEM AND POLICIES TOWARD IMMIGRANT CHILDREN

As the Constitution and the Basic Act on Education (kyoiku kihonhou) state, the national government does not enforce nine-year compulsory education for immigrant students who do not have Japanese nationality.⁵ Though Japanese children have the "right" to receive education and their parents are mandated to send their children to schools, education for immigrant children is excluded from this requirement and is only acknowledged as a "favour." Sometimes, immigrant parents do not receive any notice of their children's school enrolment from the local board of education, which could result in school non-attendance (fushugaku). Based on the principle of equal treatment, if desired, immigrant students can however attend Japanese schools and receive free education (free tuition, free textbooks, and financial support). In 2016, 80,119 registered foreign children attended Japanese public schools. When immigrant students with Japanese nationality are included, this number increases. In parallel with the long history of an assimilative approach on education for minorities such as Zainichi Koreans (Motani 2002), there is a lack of a "multiculturalism" approach, an idea that "diversity is an accepted feature of the society as a whole, including all the various ethno cultural groups" (Berry 2005, 706) in education policies toward immigrant students. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) has offered remedial education such as adaptation instruction (tekioushidou) and Japanese language instruction (nihongo shidou) to immigrant students since 1989. Education policies were modelled after those of returnees (kikokushijo), Japanese children who lived and had education abroad due to their fathers' job transfers and aimed to assist these students assimilate into Japanese schools. MEXT considers that the educational issues of returnees and immigrants are similar, including difficulties in learning the Japanese language and adapting to Japanese school culture, which has meant that the International Education unit (kokusai kyoikuka) under MEXT is in charge of education for these

two groups together. Some of their policies are providing funding to place Japanese language teachers in schools with Japanese language learners, offering seminars on Japanese language instruction, developing Japanese as a Second Language (JSL) curricula (integrating Japanese language instruction and subject teaching), creating guidelines and Japanese language textbooks for schools.

EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES OF IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

Scholars, policy makers, educators, and community organizers have discussed educational problems of immigrant students since the 1990s. Rather than acknowledging these students as "assets" or "strengths" who could contribute to developing a multicultural society, a "deficit" view of these students is still prevalent (Tokunaga 2017b). In the early years when a number of students with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds entered Japanese schools, their adaptation and language problems became critical issues (Shimizu and Shimizu 2001). The Japanese education system was not well prepared to receive these students, and local governments, scholars, and educators reported many cases of intercultural conflict and tensions between immigrant families and schools. There was much focus on how to instruct immigrant students to adapt to Japanese school culture, including learning school rules and mannerisms, and teach them Japanese language, both communication skills and academic language. In the early 2000s, as immigrant students grew older and increased in size, high rates of non-attendance (fushugaku), low progression rates to high school, high dropout rates in high school, and other educational problems received critical attention. In the absence of government-led nationwide surveys on the educational attainment of immigrant students, local governments which were members of the "Council of Cities with a Large Foreigner Population" (gaikokujin shujyu toshi kaigi)⁸ conducted their own surveys, often with researchers and NPOs, and reported their findings. According to research conducted in Kani city in 2003-2004 (where many Nikkei Brazilians reside) in Gifu prefecture led by Yoshimi Kojima, in collaboration with the local government and NPOs, one out of 14 school-aged children were not registered and did not attend any type of schools. The research also revealed that many of the non-attendance students dropped out of Japanese public schools and engaged in unskilled work (Kojima 2016). This finding led MEXT to conduct a survey of non-attendance students (2005 to 2006) in twelve local governments with a large population of Nikkei from South American countries as part of a project supporting non-attendance students. Sakuma (2006) critically stated that immigrant students are structurally excluded from the society, such as the law that does not mandate compulsory education to non-Japanese citizens.

Citation: Van GC (2022) Homogeneity, Ethnicity, Gender and Language in Schooling among Latin American Immigrant Children in Japanese Schools. *Educ. Res* 13:1.