

Language Policy for Linguistic Minority Students in Japanese Public Schools and Prospects for Bilingualism: The Nikkei Brazilian Case

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As a result of the recent wave of immigration to Japan, most public schools in Japan are coping with the new challenge of educating the children of immigrant families. I explore the national and local-level responses of the Japanese education system to the problem of language instruction for immigrant children since the mid-1990s. Throughout I focus on the children of one of the largest of the recent immigrant groups, the people of Japanese descent from Brazil. I describe the array of social, structural, and attitudinal factors that have contributed to many of these children entering into a “linguistic limbo” in which they are in danger of not being able to maintain proficiency in Portuguese nor become proficient in Japanese.

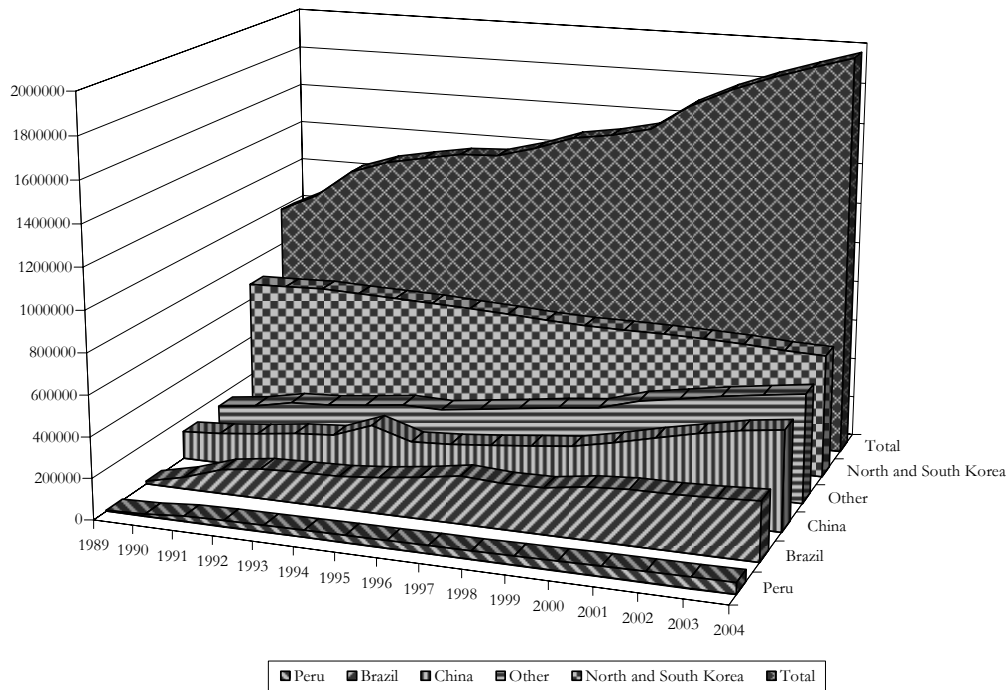
Despite the fact that most Japanese continue to see Japan as an ethnically and linguistically homogeneous nation, the reality is that minority groups have always existed in Japan. In recent years older minority groups have begun to assert their ethnic and linguistic identities. The Ainu, a minority group indigenous to Japan’s northern Hokkaido region, have moved to revive Ainu culture over the past several decades. Their efforts have led to the development of a number of Ainu language and culture programs in Hokkaido (Anderson & Iwasaki-Goodman 2001). The indigenous Ryukyuan culture of Japan’s southern Okinawa islands has also seen a reevaluation in recent years, and attitudes toward and use of Okinawan languages have begun to change (Osumi 2001). Japan’s sizable Korean population – the result of the importation of forced laborers during World War II – is another significant minority group. While there has been strong pressure on this community to assimilate to Japanese society, there have also been concerted efforts to maintain Korean language and culture (Noguchi 2001: 10-11). Today 14% of Korean descendents in Japan receive their education in Korean ethnic schools (Cary 2001: 98), which use a mixed bilingual curriculum in Korean and Japanese (Maher 1998: 123).

Perhaps the greatest challenge to the idea of ethnic and linguistic homogeneity in Japan has come as a result of the influx of immigrant workers since Japan began to enjoy high economic growth in the 1960s and 1970s. The demand for unskilled manual labor to support the demands of Japanese businesses became pressing by the late 1980s (Lie 2001: 10), and Japanese companies were increasingly forced to employ illegal migrant workers from Asia and the Middle East (Linger 2001: 22). The result was a burgeoning constellation of newcomer ethnic groups, led by the Chinese.

With the aim of finding a source of *legal* immigrant labor, the Japanese government focused on the admission of descendants of Japanese living abroad, or *Nikkei*. In 1990 the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act provided for legal admission of Nikkei up to the third generation without restriction. The law allowed Nikkei to live and work in Japan with either a “Long-Term Resident” or “Spouse of Japanese” visa that could be renewed an unlimited number of times. The changes in Japanese immigration law cleared the way for a mass migration of Brazilian and other Nikkei from South America to Japan (Tsuda 2003: 91, 93, 95), and created a large new ethnic group, second in number only to the Chinese (Takezawa 2002: 312). The number of Nikkei from Brazil alone is close to 290,000 (see Figure 1), and the total number that have migrated from South America easily surpasses 300,000, which comprises 20% of Japan’s foreign residents (Hirataka, Koishi, & Kato 2001: 164).

Language is a central concern for all minority groups in Japan, old and new. The most recent immigrants, the Nikkei, share this concern, as they are scattered around Japan (Vaipae 2001: 188) and therefore often find it difficult to maintain their native language and culture. In this paper I will explore the various factors that affect the linguistic development of Nikkei Brazilian children, and I will discuss the national and local-level responses to the

Number of Registered Foreign Residents



	Total	North and South Korea	Brazil	China	Peru	Other
1989	984455	681838	14258	137499	4121	146469
1990	1075317	687940	56429	150339	10279	170330
1991	1218891	693050	119333	171071	26281	209156
1992	1281644	688144	147803	195334	31051	219312
1993	1320748	682276	154650	210138	33169	240515
1994	1354011	676793	159619	281585	35382	263632
1995	1362371	666376	176440	222991	36269	260295
1996	1415136	657159	201795	234264	37099	284819
1997	1482707	645373	233254	252164	40394	311522
1998	1512116	638828	222217	272230	41317	337524
1999	1556113	636548	224299	294201	42773	358292
2000	1686444	635269	254394	335575	46171	415035
2001	1778462	632405	265962	381225	50052	448818
2002	1851758	625422	268332	424282	51772	481950
2003	1915030	613791	274700	462396	53649	510494
2004	1973747	607419	286557	487570	55750	536451

Figure 1. Registered foreign residents in Japan (1989-2004). Compiled from (Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1999; ; Japanese Ministry of Justice Immigration Bureau 2005).

problem of language instruction for immigrant children more generally. I will show how the default policy of linguistic submersion of foreign students in Japanese schools results in serious consequences for Nikkei children's linguistic development and academic achievement.

Immigrant Children in Japanese Schools

Yukawa (1998) attempts to identify groups of children in Japan that are "in need of bilingual education". She identifies three:

- (1) foreign children who have recently come to live in Japan and have not yet acquired Japanese or have limited proficiency in it
- (2) children of long-term foreign residents (such as Koreans) and Japan's indigenous minorities (such as Ainus) and children born to mixed couples, all of whom have Japanese as their first language (L1)
- (3) returnee [Japanese] children whose L1 Japanese needs some improvement for them to be integrated into regular Japanese schools

Nikkei Brazilian children fall into the first category. In estimating the number of children in this category, Yukawa relies on the *Survey on the foreign children enrolled in Japanese schools who need Japanese language education*, an annual survey conducted by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, or MEXT (see Figure 2). This report counts the number of children attending all Japanese public schools who are deemed by their teachers to be in need of Japanese language instruction (MEXT 2005a). After rising dramatically during the 1990s (Vaipae 2001: 187), the total number has increased more gradually over the last few years. In 2004, the total number was 19,678. Nikkei children from Brazil were the largest group in the survey, comprising more than a third of the total number (7,033 students or 35.7%)(MEXT 2005a). Thus while Chinese may be the largest immigrant ethnic group overall (see Figure 1), Nikkei children from Brazil and other countries in South America are the largest linguistic minority (LM) group in Japanese public schools.

These LM students attended 5346 public schools in Japan. Two thirds (13,307) of students attended public elementary schools, a quarter (5097) attended public junior high schools, and about 6% (1204) attended public high schools (MEXT 2005a). These figures likely reflect several realities: the young age of children of immigrant families, the high rate of school absenteeism of foreign children, and the difficulty of passing high school entrance examinations for children with limited Japanese skills.

Almost two-thirds of the students (63.6%) attended schools in the conurbation extending from the greater Tokyo metropolitan area to the Kansai area¹, but students were present in every prefecture in Japan. Brazilian Nikkei children too were concentrated in this area, with the most children living in Aichi and Shizuoka prefectures (MEXT 2005b).

Almost half of the schools counted in the survey (48.7%) reported having only one student who was not a native speaker of Japanese. Over 80% of these schools had 4 or fewer foreign students (MEXT 2005a). These figures underscore the scattering of

Number of Students in Japanese Schools by Language

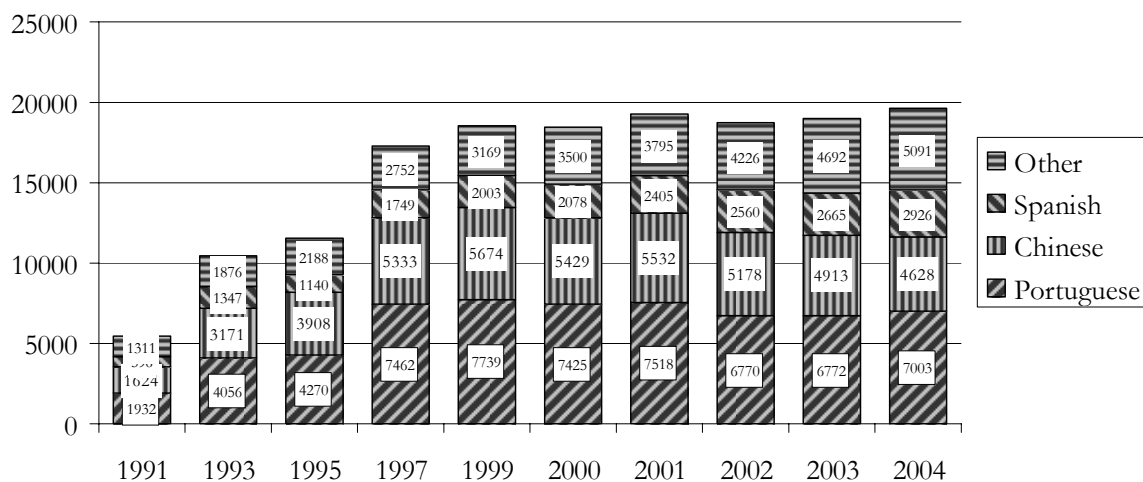


Figure 2. Students needing Japanese language instruction in Japanese public schools. Compiled from (MEXT 2000) and (MEXT 2005a).

immigrant worker families around Japan, and the relative rarity of foreign students in most schools in Japan.

While these figures are useful for getting an idea of the number of foreign children with limited Japanese proficiency attending Japanese public schools, they are by no means definitive. Vaipae (2001: 185, 189) levels two important and interrelated criticisms at the report. First, since the phrase “children in need of Japanese language instruction” is not strictly defined, children who have conversational ability in Japanese are generally not included. Second, judgments of children’s Japanese ability are subjective: it is left to individual teachers, most of whom have no training in second language teaching or assessment.

Since foreign children in Japan are not required to attend school (see below), there is also estimated to be a significant number of foreign children who do not attend school at all, public or otherwise. While the government does not keep statistics on this problem, the overall percentage of absenteeism among foreign students has been estimated to be 28% (as of 2000). Nikkei Brazilian children are estimated to have even higher rates of absenteeism, possibly more than 40% (cited in Sekiguchi 2003: 47). Even this may be a conservative estimate: Ninomiya (2002: 253) reports that Portuguese language newspapers in Japan have put the number of Brazilian children under 15 years of age in Japan at 40,000. The actual number of Nikkei Brazilian children in Japan, then, may be more than five times the numbers attending school, as reported by MEXT.

The Education of Linguistic Minorities at the National Level

For the Japanese government, the education of linguistic minorities seems to be a peripheral issue (Sekiguchi 2003: 53). Although the public educational curriculum of Japan is

standardized at the national level, there is no national policy on the education of linguistic minorities (Vaipae 2001: 198). In fact, as recently as 1996 a Japanese Ministry of Education “Study Group” advised school administrators:

There is no difference in enrolling foreign students... Teaching should be done according to the Japanese curriculum. There is no need for their native language education. It is desirable for educational considerations that an appointment of a teacher who understands the student’s native language should be made as long as possible (Ministry of Education Study Group, cited in Vaipae 199).

This comment underscores the strong desire of education officials to apply the national curriculum as far as possible to all students. Native language education here is understood to be necessary only as long as it helps students catch up to their peers. Yokoi (2000: 135-136) quotes a Ministry of Education official from 1992 who echoed this sentiment, but further flatly stated:

Japanese school education is for the purpose of educating Japanese citizens. Therefore to go as far as giving consideration to foreign children after their return to their home countries and set aside time for native language education for foreign children in addition to the Japanese curriculum would be impossible [my translation].

It is clear, then, that education officials are guided not just by the demands of the national curriculum, but also by their understanding of for whom education in Japan is intended.

In fact, foreign children are not legally required to attend school in Japan (Vaipae 2001: 198). The Japanese constitution’s provision for education for all is interpreted as not providing such a requirement. As a result, education for foreign children is considered a privilege they may enjoy to the extent that schools can provide it (Yokoi 2000: 131-132). However, as Sekiguchi points out, this runs directly counter to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Japan has ratified. In particular, it violates Article 28, which specifies that States will “make primary education compulsory and available free to all” (UNICEF 2004). The Committee of the Rights of the Child has even issued a warning to Japan that it is in violation of this provision (Yokoi 2000: 52).

Japan's approach to LM students is what Ruiz calls the default setting of "language as problem" (Ruiz, cited in Vaipae 2001: 198), with the consensus response of educational authorities oriented toward linguistic assimilation (Ando 2001: 181). In practice, foreign children generally experience "submersion" (Cummins 2003: 4): they are either kept in regular classrooms throughout the school day, sometimes with the aid of a teacher's assistant, or "pulled out" for a limited amount of Japanese-as-a-second-language (JSL) education for a specified time during each week (Vaipae 2001: 199).

Yokoi lists the measures that the Japanese Ministry of Education reported that it had taken with regard to LM students until 1999. These included creating JSL textbooks, offering JSL training seminars, and codifying a JSL curriculum for foreign children (Yokoi 2000: 134), reflecting the government's focus only on Japanese language education. In 1999, however, the government began the funding of foreign language counselors for LM students. The job of these counselors is to help foreign students adjust to school and life in Japan and to act as a go-between for children's parents and their schools (Yokoi 2000: 134). In 2003, these counselors served in 34 of Japan's 47 prefectures (MEXT 2004). In addition to listening to students' and parents' concerns, these counselors often end up reviewing school material with the students in their native language, so that students may obtain some rudimentary bilingual education in Japanese public schools.

The Ministry of Education has compiled a number of reports related to the issue of foreign students in public schools. Vaipae cites several reports from the early 1990s that were compiled from the reports of schools that participated as "schools cooperating in research on the education of foreign children". Vaipae criticizes the reports as focusing too much on the problems the schools faced as a result of the presence of foreign students, and

not enough on the “sociocultural and educational support” that foreign students required (Vaipae 2001: 191).

Vaipae also describes a large scale survey the Ministry of Education sponsored in 1991 on Japanese language ability of LM students in elementary and junior high schools. Teachers were asked to rate their foreign students’ abilities in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Teachers rated almost one half of their students as having sufficient listening and speaking skills to benefit from academic instruction at their grade level. Only a fifth, however, were deemed to have sufficient reading and writing skills (Vaipae 2001: 191-192).

These impressions contrasted sharply with a survey conducted by the *Daily Yomiuri* newspaper in 1997 on LM students’ opinions of their own Japanese skills. Only 31% felt their skills were enough to participate fruitfully in their classes in all subjects. More than 41% said that they were only functional or less in conversation skills (Vaipae 2001: 192-193).

Local-level Responses to LM Students

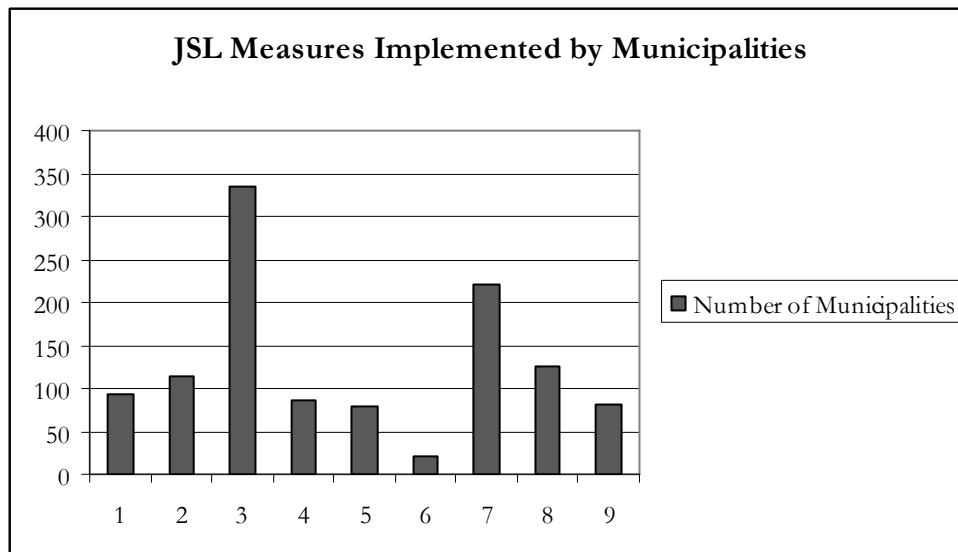
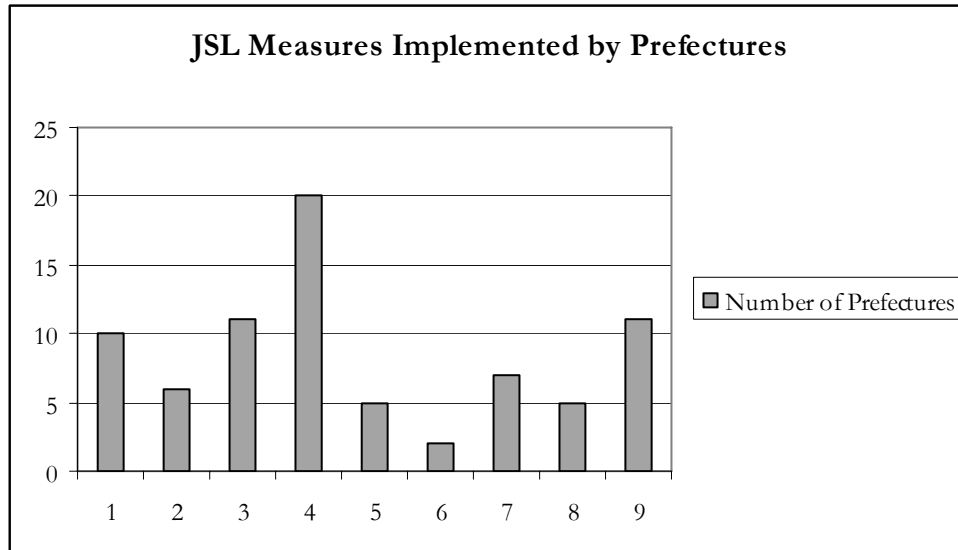
Because compulsory education is not considered a right of foreign children in Japan, parents must take the initiative to have their children enroll in Japanese public schools. If the number of Nikkei Brazilian children estimated by the Portuguese-language press is accurate, the reality is that many Nikkei children – perhaps even the majority – are not enrolled in school by their parents. This state of affairs is facilitated by the fact that local school districts are not required to keep track of the attendance or non-attendance of foreign children. In particular, in areas where foreign children are not concentrated, local governments reportedly do not even keep track of the number of foreign children living under their jurisdictions (Sekiguchi 2003: 48).

It may well be, as Maher and Nakayama contend, that the national government's less-than-adequate policies with respect to foreign children in Japanese schools are at the root of the "confused" situation in local education administration (2003: 135). Nevertheless, many prefectures and municipalities are trying to cope with the problem within the limits of their budgets and the curricular restrictions imposed from above.

MEXT's *Survey on the foreign children enrolled in Japanese schools who need Japanese language education* lists the types of measures being taken in prefectures around Japan to educate LM students and the numbers of prefectures and municipalities implementing each (Figure 3). The most common measures taken by prefectures in 2004 relate to arranging Japanese language instruction, either by employing regular teachers and aides or training current teachers (Items 1, 3, and 4 in Figure 3). Municipalities arranged for similar measures, but teacher's aides and simply establishing ways for parents to address questions about the education of their children were the most common undertakings (Items 3 and 7 in Figure 3).

One striking aspect of this list is that it does not include a category representing attempts at bilingual education, nor does it mention any form of minority language support other than the employment of native language counselors. It would appear that such measures have not yet been implemented in Japanese public schools.

The numbers of prefectures implementing any one of these measures are still low when compared with the dispersal of foreign children around Japan. Because each prefecture and municipality is attempting to cope with LM children in its own way, the education available varies greatly. Sekiguchi observes great differences in educational measures between areas where linguistic minorities are concentrated and where there are few, between schools with many LM children and those with few, between elementary and junior high schools, and between linguistic minorities for whose native language counselors can



- 1 Assigning regular teachers to Japanese language instruction
- 2 Dispatching counselors who speak the native languages of the students
- 3 Assigning aides to assist in the instruction of students
- 4 Offering training to teachers responsible for Japanese language instruction
- 5 Arranging for foreign students to attend “base schools” (i.e. schools that accept and enroll foreign students from outside the school district so that students can receive Japanese language instruction) and “center schools” (i.e. schools that accept and enroll foreign students from other schools in the same school district so that students can receive Japanese language instruction)
- 6 Establishing regional schools to cooperate with research
- 7 Establishing a contact to address questions about the education of foreign children
- 8 Creation and distribution of “guidebooks” for the parents of foreign children (how to enroll children in school, etc.)
- 9 Other

Figure 3. Types of JSL measures implemented in Japanese public schools. Adapted from (MEXT 2005a) and (MEXT 2003).

more easily be found and those whose native language is shared by few adult speakers in the local area. As a result, in schools where there are only one or a few Nikkei Brazilian children, they often do not benefit from any special educational measures at all (Sekiguchi 2003: 49).

It is Vaipae's impression, from interviews with school principals and teachers, that school officials did not grasp the "educational and sociocultural needs" of foreign students. In fact, her impression was that Japanese teachers and administrators wanted to deny that LM students had special needs at all. She cites a 1992 report by the Ministry of Education on LM children in Japanese public schools that asked about what kinds of instruction foreign children received during classes. A vast majority of the schools surveyed emphasized how foreign children were mainstreamed; only 1.9% of elementary and 3.3% of junior high schools reported offering special classes for LM students. While MEXT's most recent survey, cited above, seems to indicate this situation has changed, there still appears to be a strong emphasis on maintaining "equality" in how students in Japanese public schools are treated, regardless of background (Vaipae 2001: 202).

Sekiguchi cites three major factors in the "school context" -- comprising the attitudes and actions of school administrators, teachers, and even classmates -- that affect the educational outcomes of minority students:

- 1) Low expectations for minority children;
- 2) Insensitivity and indifference to racial, national, and ethnic diversity;
- 3) A regular curriculum that does not reflect the linguistic and cultural environment of minority children (Sekiguchi 2003: 51, my translation)

Each of these factors may have at its root the focus on "equality" in Japanese schools, but the educational outcomes they bring about are, obviously, far from uniform. It is not difficult to imagine how these factors converge on a focus on rudimentary Japanese language instruction as a response to the presence of foreign children in the schools.

The State of JSL Education

Despite the Ministry of Education's efforts to create model curricula and texts, JSL education is still relatively new in Japan. As the figures on the numbers of registered foreign residents in Japan (see Figure 1) indicate, it is only within the past 15 years that the problem of educating LM students in Japanese schools has become acute. Still, MEXT claims in its most recent report on Japanese language-needs students that 84% of students who need Japanese language instruction are receiving it (MEXT 2005b). However, the report does not make clear how this figure is calculated. The data reproduced in Figure 3 show that only 21 of 47 prefectures (45%) and 429 of 1156 municipalities (37%) employ full- or part-time Japanese instructors (Items 1 and 3). We must assume that this actually covers 84% of foreign students in Japanese schools. If so, then this is about a 15% improvement over the 1995 figures (Vaipae 2001: 188). At the same time, the MEXT report gives no indication of how often children receive Japanese language instruction; it is likely that this varies greatly according to the available staff in a given area. And no less than 16% of foreign children with Japanese language deficiencies receive no Japanese language instruction. This is likely to be the situation in areas where there are only a few LM students at a school.

Noyama asserts that there is much research that still needs to be done on what materials and teaching methods are well suited to foreign children in Japanese schools (Noyama 2000: 170). In part to address this concern, Vaipae and colleagues actually observed JSL programs for LM students in three large cities in the mid 1990s. In Tokyo there were full-time JSL teachers as well as centralized JSL programs that attracted students from schools where there were only a few linguistic minorities. Vaipae notes that the system was not ideal, with students often having to travel great distances to attend JSL classes and some students unable to attend the classes. Osaka also maintained a centralized "pull-out"

program. However, only students in the fourth grade and beyond were allowed to commute to attend JSL classes. In addition, the Osaka program was designed only to last six months, although students were permitted to continue to attend for longer periods. In Niigata only a few schools had a full-time JSL instructor. As a result foreign students usually stayed “mainstreamed” in regular classrooms without special Japanese instruction (Vaipae 2001: 199-200). One JSL method that Vaipae did not observe but which is mentioned by Noyama is having a teacher attend classes with a student, offering explanation and support as needed (Noyama 2000: 169).

According to Noyama, there are still too few JSL professionals or teachers with JSL training present in Japanese schools (Noyama 2000: 169). Based on her interviews with school authorities and teachers, Vaipae too observed that JSL teachers were often ordinary teachers whose schedules permitted them to teach LM students. Many had little experience with LM students and had received little or no JSL training (Vaipae 2001: 200). Vaipae reports on several case studies of foreign children’s experiences in Japanese public schools. These descriptions do, as she contends, seem to provide evidence that the students’ teachers were not accurately estimating the students’ language proficiency, and this was likely due to their lack of training in second language teaching and assessment (Vaipae 2001: 189, 221-226).

Furthermore, Vaipae and colleagues noted that the focus of the JSL programs they observed was the teaching of basic communication skills (Vaipae 2001: 201). This was despite the fact that most children quickly acquire adequate conversational skills after their arrival in Japan, a fact that is implicit in the survey of teachers’ impressions of foreign students’ linguistic abilities reported above. Perhaps more significantly, a focus on teaching basic communication skills takes time away from instruction toward what is arguably the

greatest barrier to foreign students, the Japanese writing system. The Japanese writing system requires intensive study even for native speakers to master (Vaipae 2001: 201-202). While the first three years of elementary school in Japan are taught through “high-context oral methods”, the later years of elementary school and beyond require mastery of the two Japanese phonemic syllabaries and hundreds of *kanji* characters (Vaipae 2001: 190). In fact, according to Vaipae, elementary school students spend roughly one third of their time learning and practicing aspects of the Japanese writing system.

Vaipae stresses that the focus on communication skills implies that teachers do not draw the distinction, formally proposed by Cummins, between basic interpersonal communication skills and cognitive/academic language proficiency (cited in Vaipae 2001: 190). In the case of Japan this distinction is likely magnified by the difficulty posed by the Japanese writing system for acquiring literacy skills. As a result, unless a foreign student enters the Japanese public school system early in elementary school, s/he will be at a considerable disadvantage in literacy skills (Vaipae 2001: 202), which play a major role in the acquisition of Cummins’ cognitive/academic language proficiency. In a more general sense, this mismatch of JSL curricular focus and students’ academic needs underscores the fact that many schools in Japan are still beginning to adapt to the needs of foreign students.

Vaipae and colleagues conducted a questionnaire survey of teachers involved in JSL education during the mid-1990s. The questionnaire asked about the teacher’s training, the teacher’s assessment of his/her LM students, and the teacher’s perception of the difficulties LM children faced in Japan. A total of 187 teachers responded (Vaipae 2001: 203).

The teachers’ responses to a question on what kind of training they had had to work with LM students support Noyama’s assertion above that there are still not enough teachers with JSL training: 71.6% of those who responded to the question answered that they had

<i>Functioning Level</i>	<i>Listening</i>	<i>Speaking</i>	<i>Skill Reading</i>	<i>Writing</i>
Deficient	8.6%	11.1%	23.4%	23.4%
Minimum	34.5%	34.5%	49.3%	51.8%
Good Enough	56.7%	49.3%	27.1%	22.2%

Table 1. Teachers' evaluation of LM students' Japanese fluency for academic purposes (Vaipae 2001). (*Percentages for those who gave answers.)

<i>Evaluation</i>	<i>Japanese</i>	<i>Mathematics</i>	<i>Science</i>	<i>Social Studies</i>
Above average	2.6%	6.6%	3.2%	4.9%
Average	23.6%	37.5%	17.4%	28.5%
Below Average	48.6%	33.7%	42.6%	37.0%
No Answer	25.0%	22.0%	18.3%	27.4%

Table 2. Teachers' evaluation of LM students' work compared to Japanese students in their class (Vaipae 2001).

had no training (Vaipae 2001: 203).

When asked to rate their LM students on their Japanese language ability for academic purposes, more than half of the teachers responded that their students possessed listening and speaking skills that were "good enough". These responses again contrast with the survey of students' perceptions of their own abilities reported above. They also contrast sharply with their responses when asked to evaluate their LM students' academic work in comparison with other students. Only about one-fifth to one-half were considered to be doing average or above average work. When asked to what they attributed students' below-average achievement, fewer than a quarter of the teachers responded. However, of those who did, more teachers attributed students' academic outcomes to "general intelligence level" or "general attitude toward school life" than to "Japanese language proficiency". In other words -- perhaps reflecting teacher's lack of training in second language teaching -- teachers seemed to focus more on non-linguistic factors than linguistic factors in regard to students' scholastic problems (Vaipae 2001: 205-206).

Finally, Vaipae found that teachers tended to place relatively more weight on the importance of LM students adapting to school life than on cultivating their mother tongue abilities. Teachers apparently were not aware of research showing that students with better first language skills show higher academic performance in second language contexts or the importance of children's native language abilities for communicating with their own parents (Vaipae 2001: 207-208).

Nikkei Brazilian Language Use and Attitudes toward Education

Most Nikkei Brazilians come to Japan to work for several years and save money (Ishii 2000: 139). Because of wage disparities between Japan and Brazil, Nikkei can earn at least five times what they can in Brazil, even as unskilled factory workers (Tsuda 2003: 85). Although over 90 percent of Brazilian Nikkei who migrate to Japan work as unskilled manual laborers, a majority comes from a middle-class background in Brazil. More than 20 percent have attended university, and 65 percent had middle-class occupations before coming to Japan. The large majority of unskilled labor jobs the Nikkei perform are in the manufacturing industry (75%), but many Nikkei also work in the construction and food service industries (Tsuda 2003: 100-101).

Since most Nikkei make the most of opportunities for overtime work, workdays in the factories and elsewhere are long, and many work six-day weeks (Linger 2001: 50-51). This often leaves little time for language study to supplement and reinforce the Japanese language skills of many Nikkei (Linger 2001: 27).

Although most Brazilian Nikkei are raised with a strong ethnic Japanese consciousness (Tsuda 2003: 90-91), this rarely entails learning Japanese as native speakers. In a survey by Hirataka, Koishi, and Kato of 179 Nikkei Brazilians in Fujisawa City,

<i>Language(s)</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>(%)</i>
Only Portuguese	92	51.7%
Usually Portuguese	45	25.3%
Both equally	33	18.5%
Usually Japanese	2	1.1%
Only Japanese	6	3.4%

Table 3. Language used at home in Japan (*N* =178). Table from Hirataka, Koishi, and Kato (2001).

Kanagawa Prefecture, in 1995 and 1996, only 11.9% responded that Japanese was their mother tongue. Furthermore, half of respondents said they had not learned any Japanese at all before coming to Japan (2001: 170-171). As a result, most Nikkei parents' Japanese proficiency is at an elementary level (Ishii 2000: 139).

When asked what language they used at home, more than half of the respondents to Hirataka et al said only Portuguese. Another quarter responded “usually Portuguese” and 20% both Portuguese and Japanese equally (Hirataka et al. 2001: 171). However, their questions do not elicit what language is used in what circumstances.

A survey of 369 Nikkei Brazilian parents of children attending elementary and junior high schools in the Kanto-Koshinetsu area in 1997 conducted by Ishii, on the other hand, reveals that

Portuguese is used in conversations between parents and their children; parents usually speak Portuguese to their children at home and in the community. On the other hand, Japanese is more commonly used when conversations are initiated by the children. Moreover, parents note that equal amounts of Portuguese and Japanese are used when children speak to their friends (2000: 138).

As for contact with other Portuguese speakers, Ishii reports that her respondents had relatively little time for such encounters because of the demands of work. 30% said that they had no contacts with other Portuguese speakers (2000: 138), presumably because they did not live close to a concentration of Nikkei Brazilians.

Ishii also reports that her respondents are exposed to far more Japanese mass media

than Brazilian, and television and videos far outweighed exposure to written media. Nikkei Brazilian children, in particular, reportedly had very little contact with written Japanese outside of the school setting (2000: 138).

In sum, then, the linguistic environment of Nikkei Brazilians may not be well-suited for their children to acquire and maintain Portuguese. Nevertheless, Ishii's survey indicated that Nikkei parents have high expectations that their children will maintain and develop their Portuguese and that they will become proficient bilinguals. Despite the lack of bilingual education programs for Nikkei Brazilian children in Japan, they hope that their children will develop a well-balanced proficiency in Portuguese and Japanese by speaking Portuguese informally at home and using Japanese in school contexts. The parents had mixed responses to the following statements in Ishii's survey:

- "Children may not be able to use either Japanese or Portuguese effectively if, after losing Portuguese, they can manage Japanese only to a limited extent"
- "It will take more than 5 years for children to be able to effectively read, write, and understand instruction in Japanese after they are able to manage daily conversation in the language"

Ishii concludes that Nikkei Brazilian parents are not aware of the implications of their linguistic environment for their children's linguistic development. Furthermore, Nikkei parents in general were not certain how they should go about making sure that their children develop into proficient bilinguals (2000: 141-142).

Background, Home Environment, and Academic Problems

Despite socioeconomic and ethnic marginalization, many Nikkei Brazilians appear to be settling permanently in Japan. The prospects for Nikkei Brazilian children's adaptation to Japanese society, however, are not uniform. Tsuda notes that children in the later years of elementary school and middle school face greater challenges for integrating into Japanese

society than do children in the early years of elementary school. Most of these older children face the challenge of learning Japanese from the beginning, and if they are to further their education in Japan, acquiring proficiency in reading and writing Japanese – all at an accelerated pace. They are also faced with a national curriculum that sets very high academic standards and an examination system designed to separate students based on academic merit very early on. Because of their age, these children face great social pressures to conform from both adults and their peers, and as a result they tend to experience social alienation. Tsuda notes that many of these children face “identity diffusion”, where they tend to identify with Brazilian culture but are faced with a completely Japanese social milieu, which they cannot reject as easily as their parents can (Tsuda 2003: 393-394). Many of these older children either long for Brazil or resign themselves to the kind of work their parents do in manufacturing and construction.

For the younger children of Nikkei parents, Tsuda contends that the situation is much brighter. He notes that these children’s abilities to acquire a new language are still at their peak, and they enter the Japanese educational system before their peers have learned too much in the way of reading and writing. They also enter the system at a time when it places the greatest emphasis on being a part of a group, rather than competing as individuals academically. While the pressure to assimilate may be great still, younger children are generally motivated to adapt. Younger children quickly orient to Japanese cultural norms, and some come to see themselves as completely Japanese, no different from other Japanese children born and raised in Japan (Tsuda 2003: 391).

While Tsuda’s predictions are intuitive, Sekiguchi reports that the reality is often different. She reports cases where Nikkei Brazilian children attend Japanese elementary schools seemingly without problems, but go on to middle school and begin to show a

pattern of absences or even drop out of school altogether. In many of these cases, the children were either born in Japan or attended Japanese elementary school from the start, and their skills in Japanese outstripped their skills in Portuguese. However, these children usually will not have had exposure to the more abstract language used in the higher grade levels. In addition, their parents speak little Japanese and cannot support their studies at home. What's more, they are not in the habit of studying either Portuguese or Japanese at home, which Ishii's survey results also hint at. As a result, both their Portuguese and Japanese remain at a conversational level, while their Japanese peers are developing the reading and writing skills that they will need in the higher grades. Teachers have confessed to Sekiguchi that, based on their experiences, they believe that Nikkei Brazilian children born in Japan or who arrive at a young age are at an even greater academic disadvantage than those who arrive later (Sekiguchi 2003: 49).

Sekiguchi reports the results of a 2000 survey of the types of problems affecting the academic performance of foreign students in schools in Hyogo Prefecture. Among children with Portuguese, Chinese, Spanish, and Vietnamese as their native languages, an average of two thirds (65.7%) were reported by their teachers as fitting the statement, "As a language for academic study, Japanese is not well-established, making basic academic achievement difficult". Thus the problem of acquiring Japanese as an academic language is shared by all of the largest groups of immigrants to Japan. However, Nikkei Brazilian children were by far most often cited as fitting this statement, at 87.5% (Sekiguchi 2003: 49).

Close to half of all students (45.7%) also fell into the category, "Home study is insufficient (difficulty gaining the cooperation of parents)", while 41.9% were rated as fitting the statement "Difficulty with *kanji* study". However, again the percentages for Nikkei

	Issue	Total %	Portuguese	Chinese	Spanish	Vietnamese
1	As a language for academic study, Japanese is not well-established, making basic academic achievement difficult	65.7	87.5 (1)	47.1	58.8	68.2
2	Difficulty finding instructors or sufficient time for individual instruction	50.5	46.9	41.2	64.7	59.1
3	Home study is insufficient (difficulty gaining the cooperation of parents)	45.7	59.3 (3)	17.6	35.3	77.3
4	Few texts appropriate for the individual learner's pace	43.8	53.1	29.4	47.1	50.0
5	Difficulty with <i>kanji</i> study	41.9	71.9 (2)	2.9	58.8	45.5

Table 4. Issues for the Instruction of Foreign Children in Hyogo Prefecture (2000).
Source: Human Rights Education Division, Hyogo Prefecture Board of Education (2000).
Table from Sekiguchi (2003).

children were greater than for other groups, at 59.3% and 71.9%, respectively (Sekiguchi 2003: 49).

It is clear that immigrant children with different backgrounds face different academic challenges. It is the Nikkei Brazilians in Japan, however, who seem to face the greatest challenges.

While the Japanese educational response to Nikkei Brazilian children has been anemic at best, it seems that the home environment of these children also plays a significant role in their linguistic development and academic achievement. One problem Sekiguchi cites

is the high mobility of Nikkei Brazilians, who move often with the changing demand for unskilled labor. On a more long-term scale, the parents of many Nikkei families waver between staying in Japan permanently and returning to Brazil. As a result, Nikkei children often do not see it as worth their while to study or attend Japanese schools. What is worse, this instability has resulted in schools not developing a plan for how to educate foreign children over the long term (Sekiguchi 2003: 49).

Many Nikkei Brazilian children – especially those who arrive early in their elementary school years – acquire conversational Japanese and quickly begin to adapt to school life (Sekiguchi 2003: 49). However, the long days at the factory for both parents often leaves them with little time to interact with their children. This may result in a steep decline in children’s ability to maintain Portuguese -- especially, as mentioned above, given that many Nikkei Brazilian children do not have opportunities to interact with other Brazilians. Particularly in cases where parents do not know when or if they will return to Brazil, their children may not only begin to forget Portuguese but also refuse to study it or use it in the home (Ninomiya 2002: 255).

While Nikkei Brazilian parents in general hope that their children will become fluent bilinguals in Portuguese and Japanese, a lack of an emphasis on education in Nikkei Brazilian homes seems to result in children’s study habits not being developed. Cases have been reported where parents have their older children stay home to take care of younger children while they work, or want their older children to begin to work in order to save more money before returning to Brazil (Sekiguchi 2003: 50).

On the other hand, Ninomiya notes that Portuguese language education has continued to be a concern of Nikkei Brazilians in Japan. A direct result of this concern was the establishment of distance education programs that make possible the fulfillment of

Brazilian curriculum requirements. The Ceteban Project for Distance Education, for example, allows Nikkei children to take Brazilian examinations to obtain graduation-equivalency credentials from middle schools and high schools. Actual schools offering Brazilian education have been established as well. The most well-known schools are those of the Pythagoras group, which maintains schools for Brazilians in countries around the world. Thus far, however, only several hundred Nikkei Brazilian children around Japan are attending these schools (Ninomiya 2002: 255-257).

Linguistic Outcomes

It should not be a surprise that Nikkei Brazilian children in general have not been successful in Japanese schools. As was mentioned above, only a quarter of Nikkei children may be attending school, and of those many drop out during junior high school or before. As a result, Sekiguchi notes, in areas where there are high concentrations of Nikkei Brazilians, school-age Nikkei children have become conspicuous outside of school during school hours (Sekiguchi 2003: 49). Since the Japanese government and local school districts do not keep statistics on foreign children, it is hard to estimate how many actually continue to the high school level. Ninomiya reports that a number of Nikkei Brazilian children have attended “desirable” high schools with tougher entrance examinations, but he does not cite any official statistics (Ninomiya 2002: 252). And since standardized testing is not common in Japan outside schools’ entrance examinations (Vaipae 2001: 205), it is hard to gauge the performance of LM children in relation to their Japanese peers.

Teachers and administrators in Japanese schools may have a tendency to attribute the lack of success of LM children in school to non-linguistic factors, but as the research done in Hyogo Prefecture on the sources of academic difficulties of foreign children

suggests, the greatest obstacle facing children may be linguistic proficiency. Unfortunately, however, little research has been carried out in Japan on the trajectory of bilingual proficiency of children of immigrant families, including the Nikkei Brazilians (Ikeda 2000: 1).

The only study I was able to obtain regarding the linguistic proficiency of Nikkei Brazilian children was Ikeda (2000). For this reason, and because it gives a glimpse of the diversity of Nikkei Brazilian children's language, I will report on it in detail. Ikeda analyzed essays written in both Portuguese (L1) and Japanese (L2) by 12 Nikkei Brazilian students in Aichi Prefecture. Her aim was to test the interdependence hypothesis of Cummins.

Cummins hypothesized that in the case of bilingual children with different home and school languages, linguistic proficiency in the school language may be dependent on proficiency in the home language. When faced with the task of succeeding academically in the school language, children in this situation will do better if they have a strong foundation in their home language (Cummins, cited in Ikeda 2000: 1). The students in Ikeda's study ranged in age from 10 to 16, and had lived in Japan for between 3 and 8 years. They were asked to write two essays – one in each language – describing their best friend (Ikeda 2000: 3-4).

Ikeda analyzed each pair of essays in terms of amount of writing, lexical diversity, overall organization, essay content, and usage errors. With respect to the amount each student wrote in each language, Ikeda found that the students who wrote more in one language also wrote more in the other, and vice versa. Thus the students showed quantitative similarity in their essay output, which Ikeda argues may be evidence of the interdependence of L1 and L2 (Ikeda 2000: 4-5, 14).

Each of the other factors Ikeda analyzed was qualitative. Lexical diversity relates to the number of different words each student used in his or her essays: the greater percentage of different words used, the greater lexical diversity a student was concluded to have shown.

Ikeda found a generally similar amount of lexical diversity between each pair of essays, and furthermore that the most prolific writers maintained a similar percentage of different words in both languages even as they wrote more (Ikeda 2000: 5-6).

Ikeda evaluated the organization of each student's essays based on whether students answered the additional questions about the student's best friend posed in the essay task description, or whether they showed evidence of coherence in the structure of their essays. She found that the structure of the students' two essays for the most part mirrored each other. Ikeda analyzed the content of each student's essays according to whether or not they adhered to the given topic, and whether they included "psychological description" (Cumming, cited in Ikeda 2000: 9). With respect to both of these criteria, she found that students wrote very similarly in both essays. Thus, she concluded that both essay organization and essay content showed strong indications of L1 and L2 interdependence (Ikeda 2000: 9, 11).

The last area Ikeda analyzed was usage errors in the students' writing, including grammatical, lexical, and orthographic errors. Grammatical errors consisted of verb conjugation errors, particle usage errors in Japanese, and gender and number agreement errors in Portuguese. Students produced lexical usage errors in both languages, but only in Portuguese did they use Japanese words directly. Orthographic errors were mostly errors with *kanji* characters in Japanese, and spelling errors in Portuguese. Overall, Ikeda found far more mistakes in Portuguese than in Japanese. In particular, there were three students who had 40% more errors in their Portuguese essays, showing a large gap in written proficiency. As might be expected, these children had been in Japan the longest, and had had the least contact with Portuguese in their daily lives. Ikeda concludes that, unlike with amount of

writing, lexical diversity, and essay organization and content, usage errors at best show only weak evidence of the interdependence of L1 and L2 (Ikeda 2000: 11-12).

Ikeda goes on to focus briefly on the difference of written proficiency between 2 particular students. The first student, “F”, came to Japan at 11 years of age, had been in Japan a total of 4 years, and was continuing distance education in Portuguese while she attended Japanese junior high school. The second student, “K”, came to Japan at 6 years old, had been in Japan for 8 years, but was not receiving any supplementary Portuguese language support. F’s essays were the most similar of all the students, while K’s essays clearly showed that Portuguese was dominant. As might be expected because of the length of education received in Brazil, F’s Portuguese was superior to K’s. However, while it might have been expected that K’s Japanese was superior to F’s, this was not the case. Specifically, K’s essay was much shorter and included more repetition of words than F’s. Ikeda argues that this indicates that the students’ L2 proficiency may be linked less to the length of their stay in a particular environment and more to their already-acquired proficiency in L1. As Ikeda notes, if this result can be verified in a larger sample of students, the conclusion might be drawn that continued support for foreign students’ L1 has a positive influence on their literacy skills in Japanese, and further that the degree of support they receive for their L1 will influence their acquisition of Japanese (Ikeda 2000: 13-14).

Conclusion and Recommendations

In this paper I have attempted to present an overview of the problem of language instruction for the growing number of foreign students, in particular Nikkei Brazilian students, attending Japanese public schools. In discussing the educational responses of the Japanese public school system and the home linguistic environment of Nikkei Brazilian

children, I have tried to elucidate the many variables that may contribute to the acquisition and maintenance of L1 and L2 by LM children in the Japanese context.

Studies such as Vaipae and Sekiguchi are admirable attempts to provide a holistic picture of the difficulties faced by LM students in Japanese schools and their educational outcomes. Unfortunately, while they stress the importance of linguistic proficiency in both L1 and L2 in determining the course of foreign students' progress in Japanese schools, they do not aim to analyze the linguistic problems and progress of these students in detail. Ikeda's study is apparently one of only a few that have been carried out on this issue in Japan. As a result, we still know little about what foreign students such as the Nikkei acquire and maintain, and how their background, the school response they receive, and other factors affect their progress.

Longitudinal case studies of the linguistic progress of immigrant children would likely go far in illuminating these issues. Only by close examination of all the relevant factors – social, psychological, and linguistic – for the maintenance and further development of their L1 and the development of communicative competence and academic readiness in their L2 will it be possible to begin to tease apart the various factors affecting foreign students' linguistic proficiency, and how the educational setting can be ameliorated.

Ideally, a large-scale study involving multiple schools and, for example, Nikkei students in various geographic locations and of various socioeconomic backgrounds should be conducted. An outstanding model for such a study is the four-year research initiative conducted by the Bilingual Study Group in Miami, Florida, in the late 1990s (Oller & Eilers 2002). These researchers compared the linguistic outcomes of more than 700 Spanish-English bilingual elementary school students who participated in Two-Way and English immersion programs in schools in the Miami metropolitan area.

This study was remarkable both because of its careful methodology and its research goals. The researchers explicitly set out to measure the effects not only of the particular instructional methods of schools with bilingual students, but also the effects of socioeconomic status and the language spoken in students' homes. Therefore, the study carefully matched schools and individual students on method of instruction, socioeconomic status, and language spoken at home, and compared students' proficiencies in both English and Spanish oral and literacy skills.

As the researches note, most studies of bilingual education in the United States only compare bilingual children's acquisition of English to that of their monolingual peers. Such an approach is bound to miss the fact that much of linguistic knowledge may be distributed across a bilingual's languages, since the languages are usually not used for the same functions in daily life (Oller & Eilers 2002: 10-12). As a result, it is crucial to get a handle on bilingual children's progress in acquiring and maintaining both languages.

It is worth considering what a similar study conducted on a population of foreign or immigrant children in Japan would look like, as this is very much the type of research that is needed to fully grasp the linguistic situation of LM students in Japan. Since there is currently no established bilingual education program for LM students in Japanese public schools, unlike the south Florida Bilingual Study Group project, such a study could not focus on evaluating particular bilingual education methods. Still, socioeconomic status and language spoken at home could be maintained as independent variables. One additional independent variable would be relative social isolation: the linguistic trajectories and outcomes of children in areas with large concentrations of particular linguistic minorities to children who are more isolated, in more rural areas or areas where fewer fellow language speakers have settled,

should be compared. This is a major issue for the Nikkei Brazilians, many of whom, as I have noted, are dispersed in relatively isolated locations around Japan.

The method of evaluating LM children's linguistic proficiency should be chosen with the same goals as the researchers in south Florida – namely, to measure the proficiency of children in both of their languages, not just their progress in acquiring Japanese. Ideally, the same types of standardized tests would be administered – the Woodcock-Johnson battery and the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test. A difficulty might arise in adapting the Woodcock-Johnson battery for Japanese and the other language involved, Portuguese, Chinese, etc. However, there have been attempts to develop measures of bilingual proficiency that might be used -- for example, the Bilingual Verbal Ability Tests (BVAT) (Munoz-Sandoval, Cummins, Avadero, & Ruef 1998). Other tests to evaluate children's acquisition of specific linguistic differences between Japanese and the other language would also need to be administered.

This type of linguistic research would benefit both policymakers and teachers in Japan, many of whom, as I have described, are currently resigned to low achievement by the immigrant children in Japanese public schools.

With respect to prospects for bilingual education in Japan, it is not the case that school administrators and teachers are not interested in bilingual programs. In fact, MEXT has recently reformed the Japanese school curriculum to allow time for English language education in Japanese elementary schools, and planning is underway to introduce further English education in the future. Experimental English programs are also underway, albeit in senior high schools (MEXT 2002). The problem is the narrow focus on the teaching of English with the intent of developing the foreign language abilities of Japanese students.

The needs of foreign children in Japanese public schools continue to be downplayed, subordinated, or ignored.

The result, for foreign children who remain in Japan, is monolingualism, at first glance no different from their Japanese peers. Unfortunately, in many cases, as Ikeda's research hints and anecdotal evidence supports, this particular flavor of monolingualism is not enough to keep up in the highly educated Japan of today. I am hopeful, however, that more research will be conducted on this problem, and that this research will provide the necessary insights to improve the language instruction of immigrant children in Japan in the future.

Note

¹ Saitama, Chiba, Kanagawa, Shizuoka, Aichi, and Hyogo prefectures, Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka cities.

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