

**Integration of Latin American Immigrants to the Local
System of Education in Japan**
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CONTEXT AND PROBLEM

In accordance with the report of the Department of Justice of Japan “Statistics of the foreigners registered at the end of the fiscal year 2007” published in June 2008, the number of foreigners is 2,152,973. Considering that the Japanese population is 127.77 million (Ministry of Public Management, Home Affairs, Posts and Telecommunications Statistics Bureau) foreign residents represent 1.69% of that total. The majority groups of foreigners living in Japan are as follows: Chinese (28.2%), North and South Korean (27.6%), Brazilian (14.7 %), Philippines (9.4 %), Peruvians (2.8 %) and Americans (2.4%). The four cities with the highest foreign population concentrations are: Tokyo, Aichi, Osaka and Kanagawa.

It is well known that foreign residents face a number of problems due to the differences in language; culture and customs. Although there are many initiatives and activities faced to the support of the foreign residents in general, it is important to know what is happening specifically in the educational field. Many foreign children are attending the Japanese schools, some of them have integrated to the local system of education but others have not had success.

OBJECTIVES AND METHOD

To carry out this investigation it was selected the prefecture of Aichi, because the majority of Latin Americans that live in Japan are concentrated there (Brazilian and Peruvian). Inside Aichi, was selected Toyokawa city.

This study had as general objective to determine what factors facilitate the integration of the Latin American immigrants to the local systems of education in Toyokawa city and as specific objectives were to identify the factors of the school that promotes and facilitates the integration of the Latin-American children to the local Japanese system, describe the type of relationship and communication process between Latin-American parents and the school, know the opinion of Japanese school members and support staff of the Board of Education regarding integration of Latin American children to the local system of education and finally know the opinion of Latin American parents and students regarding to the Japanese school.

The target population were Latin American students attending one Japanese junior high school in Toyokawa city, school members and support staff of the local Board of Education and Latin-American parents. The sample was selected by convenience sample. Data were collected primarily using in-depth interviews with parents, children, school members, support staff of the local Board of Education and participatory observation in the classes attended by Latin-American students. The method developed by Dr. Jiro Kawakita (KJ) was applied to analyze the data.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

A. School Members Interview

In order to know about the school environment and the factors that facilitate the integration of Latin American

students, the interviews were conducted with 20 school members. The interview responses were divided into three categories: Students educational aspects, relationship and communication with parents and multicultural education. Regarding to the first category the teachers said that this issue depends on each student and is not possible to generalize, but the academic performance of Latin American students is usually low. For example, in the Japanese language classes, social studies and science, it is essential they understand the explanations, read and write kanji, but if they not do this, logically can not have a good result. In the second category their responses showed that some, but not all parents are involved in school activities because they are busy with their work. Some of them participate in activities such as sports day of the school and the most common is to attend meetings of parents who are held usually twice a year. In the third category their responses showed that very few teachers have read on their own initiative and interest on multicultural education, most do not participate in such seminars because only participates in these activities the teacher in charge of Japanese classroom as a representative of the school.

B. Latin American Students Interview

In order to know the opinion of Latin American students regarding to the Japanese school, the interviews were conducted with 8 Brazilian and 3 Peruvian students. The responses from the interviews were divided into three categories: Educational aspects, relationship and communication with classmates and teachers and expectations for the future.

Regarding the educational aspects, most students mentioned that the most difficult thing is to understand the classes of Science, Mathematics, Social Studies and Japanese Language. They also mentioned the difficulty to read and write kanji in those same areas. Some mentioned the fear of asking the teacher in the classroom because his classmates speak ill of them. Regarding with relationship and communication with classmates and teachers there are different opinions. Some say that now they are taken well with all but that in the past they have had problems. Others say that they don't have problems because they have many Japanese and foreigners friends in the school. Some students say that their relationship is not good and for that reason having looked for foreign friends in other grades because in their class it has not been possible to have Japanese friends. On the other hand, some students said that their relationship with the professors is good, but there was others students in spite of having said that there was not problem, they also said that they never speak with them neither they ask them in the class because they don't have trust of making it. Finally, about the expectations of the future most half of the students they want to finish the secondary and to work, others they want to finish the secondary school and also to go to the university.

OUTSTANDING ISSUES

Analysis of the results has not been completed. It is still necessary to analyze the responses from interviews of support staff of the Board of Education and the following step will be to carry out a focal group with parents in Toyokawa city. After this activity the results will be analyzed and will make possible have a broad perspective of the situation of Latin American immigrants in the Japanese junior high school in this community. As stated in the objectives of this study, the aim is to identify factors that facilitate the integration of the student population and to take concrete actions at the school for the benefit not only students but also the educational community in general.