

# Transnational Migration between Brazil and Japan: Implications on Brazilian Children's Education in Japan

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The migration between Japan and Brazil commenced in 1908 with the Japanese emigration from Japan to Brazil. Except during World War II this emigration continued until the beginning of the 1970s. In the mid-1980s, motivated by the Japanese labor shortage in the manufacturing sector and by the economic recession in Brazil, a reverse movement of Japanese-Brazilians to Japan began.

Throughout the 100 years of migration between these two countries, this movement has promoted economic, political and social interactions, leading the migrants to settle in each country and develop their communities. The Japanese community in Brazil, considered the largest outside Japan, is estimated at 1.5 million and can be considered to be part of the Japanese diaspora around the world. In Brazil, the Japanese community maintains strong connections with the Japanese culture, yet most of the young members neither speak the Japanese language nor have they been to Japan. In Brazil there are many Japanese associations, such as music, art, sport, dance and Japanese language schools, developed with the aim of keeping and passing on to younger generations the “Japanese culture” – a culture made and idealized in Brazil.

Originally, the term diaspora was applied to Jews, Greeks and Armenians (Shuval, 2000), but today the connotation of this term encompasses several groups of people living away from their place of origin, e.g., political refugees, alien residents, guest workers, immigrants, expellees, ethnic and racial minorities and overseas communities (Shuval, 2000, Safran, 1991). The term diaspora applied to international migration movement emphasizes the connections to homeland and the desire to return, known as the “myth of return”. In this sense, here I consider the Japanese community in Brazil to be part of the Japanese diaspora although its members lack any desire to return permanently to Japan.

On the other hand, the Brazilian movement from Brazil to Japan started in the mid-1980s, and increased considerably after the reform of the Japanese Immigration Control Law in 1989, which became effective in June, 1990. This reform permitted

Japanese descendants (Nikkeijin) up to the third generation to enter Japan and reside for an extended period. The second-generation Nikkeijin were granted the “Spouse or Child of Japanese National” visa and the third generation the “Long Term Resident” visa, both with no limitations on their activities in the country, including working in unskilled jobs.

In 2008, the 312,000 Brazilians in Japan were the third largest foreign population in Japan, behind the Chinese (655,000) and Koreans (590,000). However, today (2013) as a consequence of the world economic crisis, when many lost their jobs and more than 100,000 returned to Brazil, they are the fourth.

In this paper I will focus on the policies that Brazil and Japan promoted regarding the movement of Brazilians to Japan, with special attention to the education of Brazilian children. For instance, in 2000 the Brazilian government recognized the Brazilian Schools in Japan for the first time in the history, and through Brazilian consulates it is possible for Brazilians to apply for the examination to receive their fundamental education diploma (elementary and junior high school) and high school diploma. Those who wish to apply for this examination are required to study independently through long distance education.

Focusing on the Japanese side, local governments introduced various educational programs targeted at helping children who encounter difficulties with the Japanese language. Examples are, creating special classes to teach the Japanese language, and providing bilingual instructors (part-time) and counselors at elementary and junior high schools possessing high concentrations of foreign students. Also, there are several volunteer groups composed of university students, Japanese language instructors, NPOs (Nonprofit Organizations) and civil groups composed of Japanese and foreigners, helping both inside and outside of the school system.

In addition, I will discuss the meaning of bilingualism among the Brazilian children in Japan and its influence on their educational performance based on information acquired from interviews with young Japanese-Brazilians who advanced to universities in Japan.

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