

# Necessity of Language Instruction for Immigrants in Japan - through Comparison with Canada's Policies

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to discuss issues related to immigration policies in Japan. The country is now facing a shortage of labor force due to declining birthrates and a rapid increase of the aged population. The government and many companies are aiming to survive in such an aging society by accepting more immigrants. Japan, however, has been criticized as politically and culturally closed, historically speaking, and people are not very accustomed to co-inhabiting with foreigners. As a result, there is lack of measures, or consideration, to promote immigrants' comfortable living. This paper analyzes the situation of immigrants in Japan, comparing with the one in Canada, one of the most popular nations for immigrants. The paper also discusses the possibility of improving quality of circumstances in which immigrants are currently set in. The findings suggest that we need to provide immigrants with some help, such as language programs, to encourage them to become better members in Japanese society.

## 1. Introduction

It has been said that Japan is a single-race nation in which people speak and understand the same language. However, this preconception may have to be changed since people in Japan now have more chances to live closer to foreigners. There has been fierce controversy about whether Japan should positively accept immigrants<sup>1</sup> or it should regulate immigration. As Kinoshita (2016) suggests, the main argument of those who are favorable to immigration is that it may help us survive in the aging society. Immigrants are large work force which Japan now lacks. On the other hand, people who are against increasing the number of immigrants insist that Japan will no longer be a safe country if we accept more immigrants (Mitsubishi, 2017). They claim that immigrants will bring more crimes into Japanese society. The Japanese government seems to support the former. According to Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

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<sup>1</sup> An immigrant is a person who moves into a country other than that of his or her usual residence for a period of at least a year (United Nations Statistics Division, 2017).

(OECD), Japan accepted 340,000 immigrants during the year of 2014, which is the 5th largest number in the world. There are now 1,080,000 foreign workers in Japan (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, 2018), and the number will continue to grow according to the estimate.

Sakanaka and Asakawa (2007) explain that human beings instinctively have two contradictive attributions; the one that they hope to move to a new place seeking better circumstances, and the other one that they try to exclude newcomers to protect their own vested rights. The first one frequently occurs among people in developing countries, and the second in developed countries. If this is true, there seems to be no means to stop people from coming into Japan trying to find a better job and life. Are Japanese people, however, really ready to accept those people as neighbors? Are they truly able to share cultural and racial diversity? What are effective supports regarding immigrants' successful settlement? To answer these questions, I will seek for possibility by observing cases in Canada, one of the most successful immigrant countries. As Furutani (2005) reports, there is a critical view that Canada has segregated its immigrants, who commonly do not jump over their social classes but stay within the same one, into the poorer and the elite groups. Canada is still considered to be a significant model, however. One of the primary reasons is, as Onozawa (2012) points out, that Canada has kept growth of its population since 1950's although low fertility is a common phenomenon among developed countries in recent years<sup>2</sup>. There should be much that Japan could learn from Canada's demographic status. In the following sections, I would like to analyze Canada's immigration policy and points systems of both Japan and Canada. I will also discuss Japan's immigration policy and some suggestions to support immigrants' successful settlement.

## **2. History of Canada's Immigration Policy**

### **2.1 Canada's Immigration**

Canada's history is a history of immigration. People who were unsatisfied with the government's policies on religion first came to Canada from the United Kingdom in order to establish a utopia. In 1867, they peacefully gained independence, without blood, from the UK. According to Yoshida (1993), it first aimed to establish "a white Canada" accepting only Caucasians as immigrants. Soon Canada, however, suffered a shortage of labor force. They needed a large number of workers who would engage in mining, building railways, fishing, and forestry. The government began to permit Asians, including Chinese and Japanese, to move into Canada. Although the Canadian government, during World War II, started an anti-Asian campaign by passing the regulation which restricted entry of immigrants from Asia, especially Japanese as their enemy, the discriminatory policy was abolished after the war. As the world trend changed,

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<sup>2</sup> Canada's birthrate: 1.61 as of 2012 (Statistics Canada, 2018)  
Japan's birthrate: 1.39 as of 2010 (Kinoshita, 2016)

people became more politically-alert and aware of importance of humanitarianism. Furthermore, Canada needed to supply more labor force for a rapid economic growth. By that time, as Ooka (2012) outlines, the number of newcomers from Europe had been decreasing year by year, which made them start to accept more people from other parts of the world. Canada, in 1962, finally became an open country to all the people who hoped to move in.

## **2.2 Canada's Multiculturalism**

As Canada accepted immigrants from many areas in the world, it began to respect cultural diversity. Furutani (2005) explains that it is because Canada attempted to culturally separate itself from the United States, whereas the US expected its immigrants to be Americanized. Canada vowed never to forget their racial acts during the World War II and, as Ide reports (2014), became the first country that adopted "multiculturalism policy" in 1971. The purpose of this policy is to preserve various ethnical cultures and encourage people to understand each other. The country also demonstrates a strict attitude against racism. Canadian citizens are now very proud of themselves being "a mosaic", not "a melting pot," which means the country respects every single minority group as Canadian citizens instead of trying to assimilate them to the majority. Shinohara (2003) describes that the majority in Canada, the British group, is only 13% of the whole population. Being different from other people is their everyday life and sharing various ethnical cultures is Canada's biggest characteristic.

## **2.3 Language Education for Immigrants in Canada**

One of the most important factors for immigrants to successfully settle into a new place is the language. According to Ooka (2012), the Canadian government introduced a language education program called LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada) in 1992. In this program, free language classes (English or French) are offered to immigrants who are 18 years old and over. There are eight levels which applicants are divided into by language testing. Students can also learn various topics, such as cultures and customs, history, social services, financial and banking systems, politics, medical welfare, and native Canadians. These are obviously very practical and useful for newcomers to better understand the nation and make themselves feel more comfortable in the new circumstances.

# **3. Points System for Immigrants**

## **3.1 Canada's Points System**

In 1967, the Canadian government introduced "the points system" to judge immigrants' eligibility fairly. There have been several changes and the newest points system revised in 2002 is indicated in Table 1. There are six criteria: age (10pts), education (25pts), language (24pts), job experience (21pts), arranged employment (10pts), and adaptability (10pts). All of them make a

full score of 100. Applicants must have at least 67 points to immigrate into Canada. Education and language skills, which account for almost half the full score, are highly required. This supports Shinohara's idea that people who have certain education and work experience generally become well-integrated into new society (Shinohara, 2003). Not all immigrants, however, are proficient in English or French. Therefore, as shown in the previous section, the Canadian government provides those who are in need with language education programs (LINC) after immigration.

**Table 1 : Eligibility Criteria for Immigrants**

<b>Selection Criteria</b>	<b>Score (on a scale of 100)</b>	<b>Those Who Have Full Score</b>
Age	10	21-49 years old
Education	25	Master's or doctor's degree
Languages	24	Proficient in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in English or French IELTS/CELPIP/TEF scores required
Job Experience	21	4 or more years
Arranged Employment	10	Acquisition of a permanent job offer
Adaptability	10	Having relatives or previous work in Canada

Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2017)

### 3.2 Japan's Points System

In Japan, on the other hand, the points system is only applicable to highly skilled foreign professionals. Academic background (30pts), professional career (15pts), annual salary (40pts) and age (15pts) are the main factors to be judged. Applicants must have at least 70 points to be accepted. Those who have acquired N1 in Japanese Language Proficiency Test, which is the highest level, will obtain bonus points of 15, 10 points for N2 holders (Immigration Bureau of Japan, 2018).

### 3.3 Similarities and Differences

Both systems highly evaluate applicants' academic and educational background and it seems that younger generations are preferable. There is no wonder since the young are anticipated to bear the future of the nations. Japan seems to emphasize individual assets while Canada greatly appreciates language proficiency, either English or French. That is why Canada supports language instruction for immigrants by offering programs such as LINC. In Japan, contrarily, Japanese proficiency is not a must although they generate bonus points.

## **4. Immigrants in Japan**

### **4.1 Foreign Laborers in Japan**

As described by Sakanaka and Asakawa (2007), Japan strictly restricted entry of foreigners before World War II while encouraging people to emigrate to other countries to obtain a better job. After the war, its population continued to grow and Japan even suffered from overpopulation. During the rapid economic growth which started in the middle of 1950's and lasted until the early 1970's, the country had a huge scale of job opportunities to feed almost all citizens. There was no idea of having immigrants within the country. As a result, immigration issues had not been discussed until late 1970's when the economic growth slacked off its pace. During the period of the bubble economy, a labor shortage hit Japan again. Consequently, in order to secure sufficient labor force, Immigration Control Act was revised in 1989 to expand entry of foreigners by easing permission to stay in Japan (Watado and Suzuki, 2007). Since then, the number of foreign laborers has been growing. At present, foreigners working in Japan are divided mainly into the following groups.

#### **1: Technical intern trainees**

There are approximately 230,000 trainees, engaged in the industries such as manufacturing and agriculture. The largest ethnic group is Vietnamese, followed by Chinese and the Philippines (Mitsuhashi, 2017).

#### **2: Workers in the national strategic special zone**

In 2014, the national strategic special zones were first designated by the government to boost the international competitiveness and promote global economic activities by giving priority to advancing structural reform of the economic system. Foreign workers are engaged in the fields such as urban revitalization and healthcare, and some are opening their own offices.

#### **3: Highly skilled professionals**

Skilled workers (e.g. IT engineers, managers of international corporations such as automakers and pharmaceutical companies) are living in urban areas.

#### **4: Foreign students who work part-time**

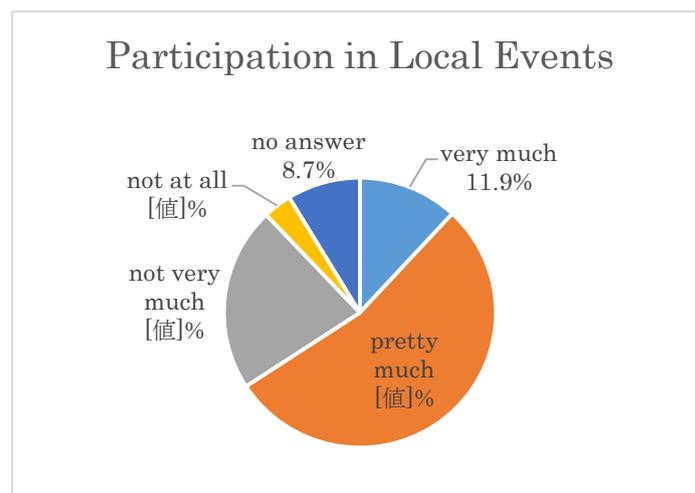
According to Shiho (2015), about 210,000 overseas students are working as part-timers, such as those at convenience stores or family restaurants. The largest national group is Chinese, followed by Vietnamese and Nepalese (Ministry of Health, Labor and Wealth, 2018).

### **4.2 Demand for Interaction between Immigrants and Local Residents**

Now, how do people in community feel about living with foreigners? The survey conducted by Himeji City in 2015 may be useful to understand the situation. The result indicates that both local residents and foreign people<sup>3</sup> demand interaction with each other (Himeji City Cultural and International Division, 2018). The survey first asked people in community<sup>4</sup> whether they would like foreigners to participate in events such as local festivals. People who answered “very much” were 11.9%, followed by “pretty much” (53.9%), “not very much” (22.1%), “not at all” (3.4%), and no answer (8.7%). It seems that community lacks people who are in charge of events and they need hand. The survey also asked whether they would like to study about Japanese and other foreign cultures with immigrants. People who answered “very much” were 10.2%, followed by “pretty much” (44.4%), “not very much” (34.1%), “not at all” (2.7%), and no answer (8.6%). It indicates that more than half of the locals are eager for cultural exchange. The results are shown in Charts 1 and 2 below.

**Chart 1**

Q: Would you like foreigners to participate in local events?



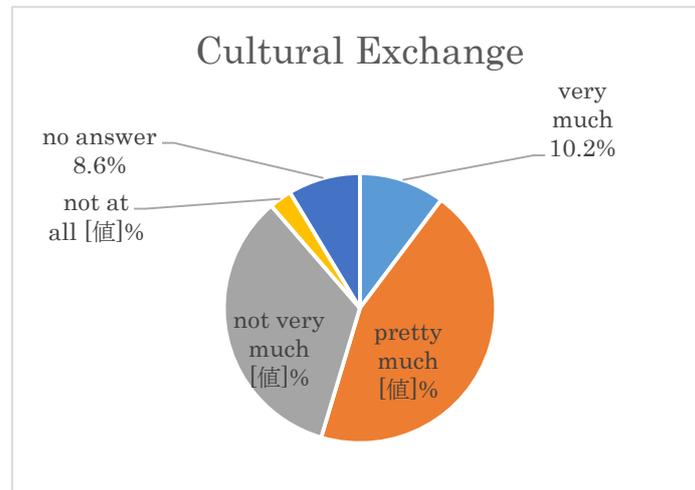
Himeji City Cultural and International Division (2018)

<sup>3</sup> There are approximately 10,350 foreign people living in Himeji (Himeji City Cultural and International Division, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> 710 local residents answered the questionnaire (Himeji City Cultural and International Division, 2018).

**Chart 2**

Q: Would you like to study about Japanese and other foreign cultures with immigrants?



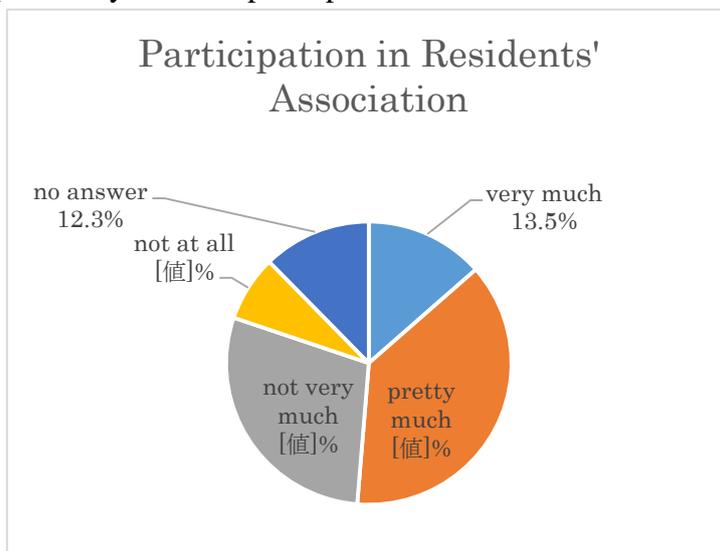
Himeji City Cultural and International Division (2018)

The survey next asked foreigners<sup>5</sup> whether they would like to take part in the residents' association. People who answered "very much" were 13.5%, followed by "pretty much" (37.8%), "not very much" (28.9%), "not at all" (7.5%), and no answer (12.3%). The result is shown in Chart 3 below. It is surmised that the lack of language skill might have reduced the percentage of people who are willing to participate in the local association. With competence to communicate in Japanese more freely, more immigrants may want to cooperate with local residents regarding activities of autonomous association.

<sup>5</sup> 563 foreign people answered the questionnaire (Himeji City Cultural and International Division, 2018).

**Chart 3**

Q: Would you like to participate in the residents' association?



Himeji City Cultural and International Division (2018)

#### 4.3 Importance of Language Instruction for Immigrants

Yonese (2006) argues that corporations and community must secure foreigners' right to live using their mother tongue; otherwise they have an obligation to offer opportunities to learn Japanese to support immigrants' comfortable living in Japan. In fact, some companies provide their trainees with language education by outsourcing it to language institutions. Under the prolonged recession, however, it is unavoidable that many Japanese classes have been closed due to budget reduction. Language is not only a tool of surviving but also one of communicating with local residents. Lack of Japanese speaking ability will cause many disadvantages such as friction or isolation in a local community. Through the language, both local people and immigrants could come closer and have a chance to understand each other.

As mentioned above, Japan is now facing declining birthrates and increase of the aged population which have resulted in the decreasing number of production-aged people. To compensate the lack of labor force, more immigrants will definitely continue to come in, whether we like it or not. It is necessary to meet immigrants' demand for active contact with society by offering language instruction programs.

### 5. Discussion

The fact that high language skills are effective for newcomers to make themselves adapted to new society is common understanding. Language instruction programs are practiced in various areas. It is instructive to take the case in Australia. Sakanaka and Asakawa (2007) report that the Australian government offers Home Tutor Scheme to educate immigrants. Volunteers who are given language instructing training visit students' homes and teach English once or twice a week. The biggest advantage of this program is that people who are very busy can also get chances to learn English in their free time instead of attending classes in regular times. Moreover, their "tutor" is a first Australian friend and immigrants can learn about new cultures talking about matters in everyday life. This is expected to help immigrants settle down in the new community speedily. In Japan, many volunteers are engaged in giving language instruction as well. According to data, however, the number of foreign learners is only about 30,000 (Yonese, 2006), which is far less than what is expected. Such voluntary work is of course playing a significant role in our society. However, we should recognize that volunteers are limited in terms of both the number and expertise. The problem is that there is no governmental program to give immigrants language instruction. The central and municipal governments should be more responsible for immigrants' orientation. It will be beneficial for both immigrants and local community if the government offers complimentary language classes which are similar to ones in Canada and Australia. Language instruction is necessary for Japan's bright future with immigrants.

## 6. Conclusion

In this paper, Japan's immigration policies were discussed through comparison with Canadian systems. There is no doubt that language abilities are the most essential factors for immigrants' successful settlement. However, Japan lacks language supports which are of great importance. It is predicted that investment in language education will result in ensuring Japan's future. "Fostering" immigration policy will promote immigrants' adaptation to society or their permanent residence in Japan which will consequently lead to the increase of future human resources. The Japanese government need to be more responsible for immigrants' successful living and at the same time, people in community should respect foreigners and treat them as friends. Communication and understanding will make local residents feel more comfortable about inhabiting with foreigners and developing language instruction programs and other cultural training seems the first step to take for this aim. In order to examine feasibility of this plan, more studies and researches must be implemented from political, economic, and educational points of view.

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