

論 文

Listening to their voices:

Examining the experiences and perceptions of language learning support teachers
at Japanese public elementary schools

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Abstract

This study investigated the experiences and personal perceptions about the provision and practice of learning support for ethnic minority school children (*hereinafter referred to as "EMC"*) aged between 6 to 12 years of age currently enrolled in public elementary schools in a city located the Kansai region (*hereafter referred to as 'City M'*) of Japan. 40 to 60-minute one-on-one interviews were conducted with 9 participants consisting of officials from boards of education, Japanese language support teachers and senior management from public elementary schools, as well as language support volunteers in the city. This study attempts to generate theories emerging from the collected data in order interpret the voices of these participants and hope to therefore offer an explanation behind the disparity and disconnect between the providers and receivers of additional Japanese language learning support for ethnic minority school children.

Keywords: ethnic minority children, additional Japanese language support, provision, disparity, disconnect

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Introduction

This chapter will examine the voices of Japanese language support teachers, language support staff and principals at public elementary schools in regards to

the practice and provision of Japanese language support for ethnic minority school children in a particular city in the Kansai region (*hereinafter referred to as "City M"*). The experiences and perspectives that were shared by

language support teachers, volunteer interpreters, mother-tongue language supporters, as well as the principals of three public elementary schools located in particularly different areas of the city. These schools' history, backgrounds and current situations are varied and unique. It is important to take into account the differences of the schools' demographics when trying to understand in what ways the experiences and perspectives of each support teacher is different from one another.

A growing diversity

Up until recently, Japan was one of the only advanced industrialized nations in the world that did not openly invite migrant workers in large numbers into the country due to many factors, with one major one being having a strong emphasis on protecting ethnic homogeneity and social harmony. However, the country's declining population and shortages of unskilled labour has led Japan to open its doors to migrant workers in order to help sustain the country's declining labour shortage. The Japanese government has been revising its immigration laws since the 1990's and has been loosening immigration restrictions to allow more foreign migrants to enter the country. The rising number of foreign nationals in Japan has brought an increase of ethnic diversity to Japanese society, and as a result, a steadily growing number of ethnically diverse children enrolled in Japanese public schools. Transnational tendencies, international marriage and overall globalization of the country,

resulting in the creation of a super-diverse ethnic population in Japan creates many challenges for both multicultural families in Japan. One of the biggest challenges for their children is their education (Tsuneyoshi, 2010; Gordon, Fujita, Kariya, 2010; Zhou, Bankston, 2016). In the past 25 years, research on ethnic minority children and Japanese language and learning support has been conducted in the Kansai area, especially in prefectures where there are dense populations of them (Ishikida, 2005, Shimizu & Bradley, 2014). According to recent statistics, the number of ethnic minority children in City M, however, seem to be sporadic and are fewer in comparison.

Methodology

This is an exploratory study that seeks to examine the trends and challenges of the provision and practice of learning support for ethnic minority school children (*hereafter referred to as "EMC"*), enrolled at public elementary schools in City M who require Japanese language support. The research design for this study follows a qualitative approach being exploratory, descriptive and predictive in nature. This study adopted qualitative methods for data collection and analysis. The researcher preferred to gather experimental data rather than statistics or measurements, in the attempt to examine phenomena that impacts the lives of individuals and groups of a particular cultural and social context. She placed a considerable amount of value on the understanding of the individual voices and experiences of

the participants.

Reasoning for choosing Qualitative Research for this study

According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), qualitative research is ‘any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification. It can refer to research about persons’ lives, stories, behavior, but also about organizational functioning, social movements, or interactional relationships (p.17). Qualitative research can be understood as ‘a research strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data’ (Bryman, 2016: 11). The research design for this study follows a qualitative approach being exploratory, descriptive and predictive in nature.

The goal of this research has been to examine the current trends and challenges of ethnic minority children who require language learning support. The present research focused on the “actors” whose role is to provide support for these children in City M, where services in additional language instruction, interpreting, cultural and linguistic enrichment are offered. Approximately 43 semi-structured interviews were conducted in City M. All interviews were transcribed from digital recording either by the researcher. Interviews were conducted by the research either in Japanese or English. Most of the interviews with ethnic minority families, government-affiliated organizations, public school teachers, principals and learning support volunteers took place at local

school sites, public venues and personal homes. Each interview lasted between 40 to 70 minutes. The interviews focused on the ways that additional Japanese language support is offered and its efficacy. Interviews with parents, community volunteers, and some governmental-affiliated groups tended to address similar issues only from the perspective of what they thought was missing in support for both ethnic minority children’s learning, as well as support for community volunteers who come into the schools to offer support to children.

Participants of this study

The group of participant interviews to be analyzed in this chapter includes the following members:

- 1) In-house Japanese language support teacher staff at public elementary schools

Teachers employed by the City M Board of Education (*hereafter referred to as the “BOE”*), to specifically provide Japanese language support to children who require support in Japanese. Depending on the school, the support teacher provides support in meeting their specific language needs (from basic “survival Japanese” level to “elementary Japanese” level) (*Gaikokujin jidouseitou ukeire no tebiki, 2019, p.27-28*). In-house Japanese language support teachers works with the child either on a one-on one basis, or teaches a group in a designated class for Japanese language support. The background of these two teachers vary in their years

of experience and know how in teaching Japanese to children needing additional Japanese language support.

2) Volunteer interpreters
Registered volunteers who are dispatched by the City M Board of

Table 1

List of 9 participants who are categorized under language support teacher (employed at public school employed by the Board of Education, volunteer interpreters, mother-tongue language supporters (dispatched by BoE), and senior management at public elementary schools in City M

Participant No.	Job Title	Interviewee category	Job description/Role
#30	Japanese language support teacher at Public elementary school N	(g) Japanese support teacher employed by City Board of Education	Teaching Japanese language for ethnic minority students who require additional support
#35	Principal at Public Elementary School Principal A	(h) Public Elementary School	Principal
#37	Principal at Public Elementary School Principal I	(h) Public Elementary School	Principal
#38	Principal at Public Elementary School Principal B	(h) Public Elementary School	Principal
#39	Japanese language support teacher at Public Elementary School A	(g) Japanese support teacher employed by City Board of Education	Teaching Japanese language for ethnic minority students who require additional support
#2	Volunteer Interpreter/MTLS (Mother-Tongue Language Support)	City Board of Education	Dispatched by City M BoE to provide interpreting services and/or mother-tongue language support for school children and/or their parents
#1	Volunteer Interpreter/MTLS (Mother-Tongue Language Support)	City Board of Education	Dispatched by City M BoE to provide interpreting services and/or mother-tongue language support for school children and/or their parents
#18	Volunteer Interpreter/MTLS (Mother-Tongue Language Support)	City Board of Education	Dispatched by City M BoE to provide interpreting services and/or mother-tongue language support for school children and/or their parents
#41	Interpreter (<i>also a Japanese language support teacher for BoE</i>)	City Board of Education	Dispatched by City M BoE to provide interpreting services for school children and/or their parents

Education, these volunteers to provide interpreting services for children and their parents at public schools (interpreting either in the mother-tongue of the child, or a language most familiar to them). The volunteer's years of experience in providing these services vary. Volunteer interpreters are supporting EMC who require assistance in understanding what is being taught in the classroom and well as support with understanding the instructions of the teachers, and textbook explanations and assigned homework. (*Gaikokujin jidouseitou ukeire no tebiki, 2019, p.60*)

3) Mother-tongue language supporter (hereafter referred to as "MTLS")

Registered staff dispatched by the City M Board of Education to provide services mother-tongue language support to children at public schools. Their years of experience and expertise in providing these services vary. Mother-tongue language supporters assist EMC who do not possess a sufficient level of Japanese language ability and require assistance in their mother-tongue in order to understand what is being taught in the classroom (in particular, student who have just come to Japan recently and have newly enrolled in the school.) This support is usually one-one-one support with the student (*Gaikokujin jidouseitou ukeire no tebiki, 2019, p.60*).

4) Principals of public elementary schools in City M

Principals from three different public elementary schools in City M in different regions of the city. Each school has unique demographics, school cultural backgrounds and varied levels of experience in providing learning support at their schools.

As mentioned in Chapter 3 (Methodology) it should be noted that some codes do appear to overlap in description - this is because many of the statements made in the interviews may have been allocated to a number of codes. Table 2 shows the text of the indicators taken coded from the initial interview analyses, and based on saturation of the indicators and overlapping themes, were then categorized into concepts. It also must be noted that some of the participants interviewed held more than one type of job title such as participants #1, #2 and #41.

From my interviews with learning support teachers and language support staff, I found common threads in their conversations. The common threads are noted below as indicators. I have compiled the indicators and from their content have examined their interconnecting meanings and have developed concepts representing their meanings.

Indicators and concepts

From my interviews with Japanese learning support teachers and language

Table 2
List of Indicators and developed concepts

Identifiers (participants)	Indicators	Concepts
#1, 2, 18, 30, 39, 41	providing language support is much more than just teaching the language	Supporting EMC at schools
#1, 2, 18, 30, 29, 41	many different expectations of roles and responsibilities	
#1, #2, #18, #39, #41	infrequency of support at schools	
#1, #2, #18, #39, #41	feel the need to act as an academic advisor for parents	
#1 #2, #18, #39, #41	acting as a child counsellor for students	
#2, #18, #30, #39, #41	need for a support network to exchange knowhow and expertise with fellow language supporters at other schools	
#1, 2, 18, 41	not feeling heard nor supported by school or board of education	
#1, 2, 18, 39, 41	feel that they are the only voice to represent children and their parents when communicating with school	Lack of effective communication between language supporters, school and BoE
#1, 2, 18, 37, 39, 41	teachers at the school don't have enough knowledge or know how in interacting or supporting EMC	
#2, #37	schools do not know how to interact with EMC	Schools' lacking knowhow and expertise in interacting with and supporting EMC and their families
#1, 2, 39	feelings of ignorance and apathy within school community about ethnic minority children learning needs	
#1, 2, 18, 30, 37, 39, 41	lack of access to resources to receive mother-tongue language support for languages other than English	

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noted that some of the participants (such as participants #1, #2 and #41) held more than one type of job title and therefore have been included in other participant groups discussed in other chapters of this research paper.

From concepts to categories

From the indicators and abstract concepts, I created 5 categories in order to start the process of analysis. In the following sections I will provide a processual narration for each of the categories, examining and analyzing excerpts of interviews which express themes embedded in the categories.

- **Quality, quantity and varieties of learning support needed**
- **Expertise and know how in supporting EMC learning needs**
- **Disconnect between EMC, parents, support staff and school**
- **Review and revision of current policy and system**
- **Training for in-service teachers**

Quality, quantity and varieties of learning support needed

I conducted interviews with school leadership staff and Japanese support teachers at three different public elementary schools in City M. Depending on the school's historical background, experience in providing language support and overall expertise and know how, there is a disparity in the quality and quantity of language support offered at public schools.

Participant #30 is a Japanese support

teacher employed at “*School N*”, a public school in an area of the city near a national university where many academics from abroad come to conduct research. It is in this area where many of reside in together with their families. A large number of children of these foreign researchers are enrolled at School N. This particular public school is known not only for the number of EMC, but also as a school that provides sufficient language support for foreign children who do not have any prior knowledge or skills in Japanese language or culture. According to Participant #30, depending on the time to the year, an average of 5-10 foreign children are enrolled at this school annually, and they usually stay at the school between 1-3 years.

MEMO: 2018. 07. 14

When I visited this school for the first time, I noticed signage around the hallways (for example, the bathroom, or the teacher staff room) written in different languages (Chinese, Korean and English), and learned that it was not the teachers, but the students themselves who made the signs. Participant #30 recalls that the younger students created and posted these signs up for a project some of the classes were taking part in a few years ago, but could not recall about the specific purpose. (July 14, 2018)

Participant #30 talks about the class that she is responsible for teaching and how it supports her school's ethnic minority students:

I am teaching a special class called Nihongo Gakkyu (Japanese language studies) where I teach first-time basic Japanese (shoki Nihongo) to students; teaching style ranges from teaching small groups of children to one-on-one instruction. I also teach children who are pulled out from their regular classes to join in this special class. Nihongo Gakkyu class is held in the International Classroom (hereinafter referred to as "IC"). We hold this class 3 to 4 times a week. (Participant #30)

Participant #30 talks about being the Japanese support teacher at the school:

I'm not just teaching the language to these children; since many of them do not know nor understand Japanese culture or its rules, it is also my role to teach them about culture, common school rules and many things other than just language. Therefore, there are a lot of things that I need to check up on, investigate and inquire when working with these children. (Participant #30)

Language support teachers find themselves not just supporting the students in language instruction. They also are teaching them about visible culture, such as daily Japanese etiquette and customs, as well as invisible culture such as unspoken rules in daily school life and in society. This additional role takes increased preparation time on top of preparing the Japanese language class content.

Participant #41 talks about what she

does in supporting those newly enrolled EMC who do not understand the Japanese language:

I sit beside them in class and try to help them understand what is going on in the class, what the teacher is saying and what the other classmates are talking about. I try to explain to the student the teachers' instructions and their explanations in the textbook. However, I do not know how to clearly explain about the lesson. It is just not enough to translate solely from Japanese into English. The job and role of the volunteer translator is also to explain the cultural background behind the meanings. (Participant #41)

Despite School N having a comparably low number of foreign children needing language support, this school has made the efforts to create a space called the International Classroom (IC Room) with a full-time support teacher on duty, as well as employing a staff member to do translation of school documents for parents into English, as well as interpreting services for parents. The reason for this school's extensive efforts may be because of their academic status of the children's parents. Having adequate educational services for their children might be an incentive for hailing world-renowned academics and researchers to come to the university. Beneficial for the reputation of the university and also for the city itself in its aims to become known as a growing hub for top academic researchers.

Participant #18 is a mother-tongue language support staff and interpreter

volunteer in the city. The participant explains about what their roles and duties are:

Not only do I have the roles of mother-tongue language supporter and volunteer interpreter, I also feel that my part of my role is to try to help the children process with their feelings of anxiety and insecurity about being an ethnic minority in Japan. I am a source of reassurance to them; a kind of counsellor providing psychological care to these children and their parents. (Participant #18)

Determining the quality and quantity of learning support

Participant #37 is a principal at “School O” which was established in City M approximately 88 years ago. I learned from the participant that the school is located in an upper-class neighborhood where 30 to 40 percent of the parents of the school highly skilled professionals (such as doctors, and university professors). When asked about the EMC enrollment at the school, the participant replied that while on average there is at least one student per class who is identified as an ethnic minority student, they may not especially require additional Japanese language support:

Up until now, we did not need to request Japanese language support from the Board of Education, but recently, we have had a few cases where children enroll for a short period to our school and need language support. It at this time that we started to request a couple of times in the past year. The support teacher usually

comes 2-3 times a week, but since the students' Japanese ability seemed to be improving (as children acquire a foreign language very easily...), we decided to decrease the number of times for the support teacher to come to the school. We believed that the support was no longer needed so frequently. (Participant #30)

When asked whether or not they felt that the child would have benefitted more by receiving more language support, the participant was quick to say that the school decided that offering more support was no longer necessary, since the student “seemed to be getting along well”. It is curious to ask how the principal and the homeroom teacher came to the conclusion that further language support was no longer needed. What benchmarks or systems were in place and that was passed by to let the leadership team make the decision to decrease the amount of time the child was receiving learning support? What authority or expertise does the school leadership team have in order to make the decisions regarding to language learning support of foreign children at their school?

Expertise and know know-how in supporting EMC learning needs

Participant #39 is a language support teacher with over 30 years of experience in providing Japanese language support both in Japan and abroad. She was currently employed by the city's board of education. She explains her job and role as a language support teacher at a

particular city public elementary school:

I work at five different public elementary schools, four which are primary level and one school that is junior high level. I work with many children from many different backgrounds: those who cannot speak any Japanese and require first year beginner language instruction, as well as children who were born in Japan but require Japanese language support.... their nationalities are various, both Japanese and foreign children. (Participant #39)

When asked about role as a Japanese language support teachers, Participant #39 explains her concerns about her own abilities and credentials in being able to effectively help students in their learning and helping them attain their educational goals:

"I think that role of the support teacher is to help the student be able to understand enough Japanese to be able to follow what is going on in class. However, since I am not the homeroom teacher I don't know in details what the exact learning outcomes for the student in that grade should be and therefore am not clear about what particular goals or aims the student should accomplish in terms of content in the subjects for their particular grade level. If the support teacher does not have experience in teaching at a public school, it is very difficult to provide support for the student if the support teacher doesn't know what is expected of the student in the classroom in terms of the

required level of learning and understanding according to each subject." (Participant #39)

Participant #39 voices her concerns about whether or not as a support teacher is really able to understand and determine the learning needs of the student she is working with. She is questioning her expertise as an educator who is responsible for not only providing support for the student but to also increase their levels in Japanese language not only to understand Japanese but to be able to help improve and enrich their learning abilities and performance at school.

Supporting EMC with a mother-tongue other than English

"Teaching and supporting EMC whose mother-tongue is a language other than English is the most challenging thing in my job". (Participant #30)

There is little information and learning support materials available in different languages other than English and Chinese. For example, there is little information and materials in Spanish available. (Participant #18)

There are more in-service teachers at public elementary schools in Japan with a sufficient level of English who can help support some EMC who can either communicate or are familiar with English and are able to be supported in this language. However, with increase of foreign children with mother-tongue other than English, it is proving more difficult

for learning and language support staff to access resources to help meet the growing need for support in minority languages.

Participant #37 explains:

If the child's mother tongue is English, it is not such a problem to support the student as we have teachers who can speak and understand English. However, if the child's mother tongue is a language other than English and the child (and parent) does not understand Japanese, it is very difficult to communicate with the child and their parents, so we rely on the interpreting supporters (university student volunteers dispatched by the city's international exchange foundation) for assistance. (Participant #37)

In many cases similar to the one above when the student's mother tongue is a minority language in which there is no volunteer translator available or accessible, it often happens that two volunteers are assigned to the student: one language supporters assist the child in the mother tongue and then translating into English; the other supporter translating from the English to Japanese, and then visa versa. In the event that the school or BoE cannot find anyone to assist the child in their mother-tongue, the volunteer supporter tries to communicate with the child in English, which may be a language not so familiar on accessible to the child.

We are having a very difficult time trying to find someone who can speak Arabic. We have tried to ask the Board of Education for help, they could not find anyone. We have a particular student who requires this mother tongue language support and the child needs help. The Japanese support teacher is currently trying to help the child in their broken English. (Participant #37)

When the participant was explaining about this particular student, it seemed that the child was in a lower grade of primary school and did not understand nor speak English so well. This means that even if the support teacher tried to communicate in English with the child, no effective communication could come out of their efforts, as the child could not even communicate or comprehend English. This exemplifies both the stigma and misconception that all foreign children can communicate English, regardless of age. In particular, it cannot be assumed nor expected that young children, who are still in the middle of developing their linguistic abilities and acquiring their mother-tongue.

MEMO: 2018. 12. 02

I was surprised that "School O" failed to find support or even at least access a network with an organization that would be able to offer support the child in their mother-tongue. I also wondered why the school did not pursue other venues to find information or actively reach out to international exchange agencies,

cultural groups or other educational institutions to search for language support. After the interview, I offered to share my network with the participant in order for them to access a grassroots organization who could offer her some interpreting support for the child. Had I not volunteered to offer my assistance in accessing language support for this student, I wonder if whether or not the school would have remained inactive to find someone.

Concerns about official and unofficial duties of support volunteer

In regards to the duties of volunteer interpreter and mother-tongue language supporter, the participants who shared their experiences with me talked about the duties they are expected to fulfill, boundaries that they cannot help to cross and the unknown needs of the ethnic minority families.

Participant #2 explains below her frustrations about where to draw the line regarding the duties of support volunteer:

Though we are told strictly to not get too involved with the students and their families (don't exchange personal information, don't support them too much, etc.). There are some times when the students and their families desperately require more help than just language, and us volunteers are at a loss as to what to do to help them. Our hands are tied and we are told not to help them by the city, but they need our help. (Participant #2)

Though establishing clearer guidelines about the roles and responsibilities of the support volunteers may help to streamline their duties to make it clearer for the volunteer to understand, it may on the other hand disable the support the volunteers can actually offer those individuals who are crying out for help and have no other lifeline to access.

Preparing and supporting students to enter secondary education

When asked what were the challenges of teaching students in IC, Participant #30 responded:

In the higher grades such as grades 4, 5 and 6, the level of the study content in these grades becomes more difficult, in particular, Kanji (Chinese character writing). The level of study becomes more difficult for students in these grades. For students who will soon return to their home countries, it is not that important for them to achieve well in the classes. However, for those children who plan to go onto junior high school in Japan, advancing to the next academic level is very difficult. (Participant #30)

Language support teachers supporting children at the primary school level may be able to help these children with their studies while in the younger grades. However, it may be questioned as to how confident the teachers are in being able to support EMC students in the latter half of their primary school education in preparing them for advancing to the next level of education in Japan. They might

not have the expertise or knowhow to help some foreign children, who have different educational needs than mainstream Japanese children in helping them study for entrance examinations for junior high school. For many of these teachers, they are at a loss about how to help these students with their future education, with no one to guide them or direct them to help or assistance.

The Disconnect: EMC, parents, support staff and school

Scholars, educators and families have frequently indicated that communication between parents, schools and teachers is one of the most important ingredients required for the academic success of children. (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins & Weiss 2006, cited by Cherng, 2014: 21). Parental communication with teachers, who are typically the school faculty most familiar with the child, can help parents better track the academic progress of their children. Moreover, teachers can also better understand emotional developments at home that may shape how the child is learning in the classroom (von Salisch, 2001, cited by Cherng, 2014: 22).

Communication between school and BoE

Participant #2 has been a volunteer interpreter and mother-tongue language supporter for several years in City M. This participant seen the changes in policy and systems of learning support throughout the years, and shares personal thoughts about why EMC are still not receiving the support they need

at schools.

One of the reasons why some EMC are not receiving the support that they need is that their schools are not providing the services. The school must make an official request to the BoE to access these services. If the school does not show any concern or make the effort to make a request for the child, then the child is unable to get access to these support services. (Participant #2)

The participant feels that the reason is due to the disconnect of the different parties responsible for providing the support:

“...some teachers may see it as “more work for them to do”, especially those who are already overworked” or it may be seen as a “burden” for the school to request such services from the BoE. There are more public schools out there who are making the efforts to request the services needed for their students, but there are still many families who do not know that such language support services are provided by City M because their schools do not provide any information. BoE is waiting for the requests from schools. (Participant #2)

When asked the reasons why schools are not so active to request support for students, the participant replies that it may be related to the teachers overwhelming workload at the schools. It is important to note here that in Japan teachers do not select the schools in

which they teach; rather they are assigned by their prefectural Board of Education (Kansai Society for Educational Administration, 1999). Moreover, teachers are rotated regular basis, usually every 6-7 years. The situation is more extreme for principals, who serve for only 3 years a school. It is argued that the rotation policy offers educators an opportunity to work in a variety of settings and to grow professionally. However, in reality, this policy does not ensure the continuation and clear transmission of knowledge, expertise and know how in interacting and supporting ethnic minority children with their learning at schools.

Communication between support teacher and the school

Participant #39 talks about documentation writing and maintaining communication with the teachers at the school:

Support teachers are given specific instructions by the Board of Education of fill out reports to document the activities at the end of each session with a student. We have to write down in the limited space that is provided on the form of the report what we did in the session, what the student did and the teacher's observations of the student. This form is then supposed to be read and checked by both the homeroom teacher and the head teacher responsible. Once they read the report, they can then have a better understanding of the student, know to how to deal with the student and better support them in their learning. I then try to meet and talk with both

the student and homeroom teacher to maintain good communication with both parties. Once the student has increased their language proficiency enough to be able to follow the class lesson, I try to follow up with the homeroom and head teacher to ask what things I can do with them in to increase the student's confidence in their learning in the classroom. However, since the homeroom teachers are so busy, I don't bother to ask them too much. (Participant #39)

While there are systems in place for report documentation about the activities of learning support with the child, as for the exchange of information, as well as direct communication with the homeroom teacher or leadership team of the school, there are problems with how communication is transmitted.

Disconnect between support volunteers and BoE

When talking with the support volunteers, they expressed their frustration with communicating with the BoE regarding matters such as their roles, duties, responsibilities and transportation payment. All of the support volunteers felt a communication gap between them and the BoE who dispatches them to schools.

"The BoE has no idea what the volunteers experience or what they are asked help with from the families and children, because they are not there at the schools talking with these people. The City and BoE need to talk to

both the schools and the EMC parents and have some sort of information exchange in order to figure out what measures to take and what to do to help these children and their families. The BoE tells the volunteers “you don’t have to do that much” or “you don’t have to provide that much support”, but if volunteers do not do these things, nothing will be solved for these children or families.” (Participant #2)

The supporter above expresses her frustration being a long-time support volunteer for the city, mainly because the roles of the job are not clearly defined. Though there are limits and restrictions about what a supporter volunteer can and cannot do, they feel that there is an upspoken duties that they are expected to fulfill. In addition, with such a small ethnic minority community with limited resources and support network, volunteers also may feel that they have a humanitarian duty to do more than expected by the BoE for the sake of the child and his/her family’s social and mental wellbeing.

Disconnect between school and EMC parent

As the worries and concerns that Japanese families are very different than ethnic minority families; concerns, insecurities, aims and hopes for the future, so it is difficult for homeroom teachers to provide learning support needed. (Participant #18)

Participant #18 argues that parents

don’t have enough awareness of the type of Japanese language support their children require. She also claims that there is not enough support provided for families in the local communities and at the municipal level.

...I’m having myself speak up for many EMC parents and communicate with the BoE or City on their behalf because they do not feel comfortable speaking to their child’s teachers due to language barriers, They feel that they do not have a voice in their child’s education at the public school. (Participant #2)

Reliance on interpreting services provided by the Board of Education and international centers in City M do help break down the language barriers between parent and school. However, it cannot be seen as an all-end solution to narrowing the communication gap between EMC parent and school. Senior leadership at schools must implement more of a sustainable, self-reliant solution for schools to be able to foster communication with EMC parents and support them to be active in their child’s learning.

Review and revision of current language learning support system in City Demographics

Despite increasing numbers of EMC throughout the prefecture and city, the numbers are scattered throughout each region, with only a few areas where groups of ethnic minorities tend to reside in one area. Therefore, it is especially

difficult for the public schools to justify the establishment of a Japanese language support classroom. Unlike Osaka and Tokyo, where there are a number of ethnic minority communities, and thus more obvious to understand the need for a classroom, looking at the current demographics and numbers in City M are not substantial enough to convince more progressive action.

“I think that there are a limited number of Japanese language support volunteers for two reasons; one being that the schools in which they are needed are spread all throughout the prefecture so it is very difficult to travel to these schools that are so far away and difficult to access by public transportation. (Participant #5)

When asked what they thought was needed to improve the provision and practice of Japanese language support at public schools all participants who are focused on within this particular chapter (Participants #1, 2, 18, 41, 30, 35, 38, 39, 41) suggested the following:

1) *Increase the number of hours for Japanese language support and the number of Japanese language support teachers at schools. (All participants)*

2) *Create a system where there is at least one teacher with expertise in Japanese language support and understand the various learning needs of EMC. (Participant #2, 18, 39)*

3) *Increase the number of teachers at public school who can speak either a mother-tongue of the students or at least a second language. (Participants #2, 18, 39)*

4) *Increase the budget in order to be able to provide support not only for the child, but also for their families. (Participant #2, 18)*

5) *The Board of Education must make clearer, more attainable guidelines for the roles of language support volunteers. (Participant #1, 2, 18, 39)*

6) *Increase the amount of financial support for the support volunteers. (Participant #1, 2, 41)*

7) *There should also be opportunities for language support volunteers to discuss together their experiences and chances for information exchange in order to open dialogue, share concerns, etc. (Participant #1, 2, 39, 41)*

Participant #35 is one of the head educators at a primary school with over a 140-year history in the city, a school that existed during the Meiji period. The participant voiced the need for the creation of system of Japanese learning support which each school can use effectively and sufficiently when numbers of students increase in the near future.

“For example, when there is an increase of EMC, schools should be able to receive the support and permission to set up a Japanese language class or special Japanese language classroom. They (BoE) should increase the number of teachers who are specialized in Japanese language support to be dispatched at schools. If there are more teachers who can be dispatched at the schools, more EMC can receive the proper type of support which they need, as well as have the sufficient amount of time to

receive this help. The amount of hours for providing this support to students will then increase and we therefore will be able to provide more quality support.” (Participant #35)

Training for pre-service and in-service teachers

In preparing for an influx of an ethnic minorities in the city, schools and local communities need understand about ethnic diversity and be know how to co-exist in a society with diverse individuals. The most basic but vital tool is learning how to interact and communicate effectively. In order to promote and encourage more effective communication between the providers and receivers of language support at schools, 1) awareness, 2) understanding and 3) knowledge are key factors.. Namely, pre-service and in-service teachers, need to learn intercultural awareness and attain skills in intercultural communication competency.

Participant #39 mentions about the stereotype some Japanese teachers have about foreign students at the school and their linguistic identities:

There is only a few children who I work with whose mother tongue is English. Recently I work with children whose mother tongues are languages such as Tagalog, Chinese, Vietnamese and Indonesian. When I tell people that I teach Japanese to foreign children, they ask me if I teach them in English. School teachers also have this stereotype that all foreigners can speak and understand English.

(Participant #39)

What participant #39 is describing is the school communities lack of awareness and knowledge about linguistic diversity of the foreign children at the school. If teachers are not being made aware of the linguistic backgrounds of the EMC, there will be little chance of the school community (fellow students, school staff and management, local community, etc.) being able to have a deeper understanding of both the language and learning needs of the children.

When foreign children come to enroll at the school, the first thing teachers think that they needed to do to prepare is download Google Translate application on their phones or that they have learn about the culture of that child. However, I think first of all they need to learn how to use simplified, clear and easy-to-understand Japanese so that it will be easier for the child to understand and communicate.... There are so many schools that don't understand this and speak too fast, try to speak English to the child (which may not even understand it). It means a lot to the young child to be spoken in Japanese and feel included and cared for, and in turn, affects their motivation to learn and communicate in Japanese. (Participant #39)

There is a desperate need for schools to at least learn about intercultural awareness in the school, learning how to be better aware of cultural, linguistic diversity, interaction and communication

skills.

The first participant who I interviewed for this research project explained it quite simply when asked what they thought to be the most fundamental thing to be done in order to promote better learning support for ethnic minority children.

As for support, I think that the easiest and most fundamental thing the country, the city needs to is first of all educate school children and school community that that it is okay to be different, and that everyone does not have to be the same: not all Japanese need to be the same, and there are many different Japanese in Japan. Diversity education is needed to be taught at schools for children, school teachers and parents. (Participant #1)

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According to the comments of the representatives of governmental organizations and NGO's I interviewed, information on the topic of intercultural education and/or training on how to teach JSL to students is included in curriculums for pre-service teachers and in-service teachers who are renewing their teaching licenses. However, the actual depth of the content, as well as how much they are trained in this issue is limited and at times unclear.

To what extent knowledge and skills in intercultural education, intercultural communication diversity education will be implemented in teacher training curriculums is yet to be seen. For

example, there are opinions among language support teachers that it would be beneficial for homeroom teachers in particular to be made to attend the training sessions on providing Japanese language support.

We (language support teachers) have about 6 training sessions per year. I always tell the organizers that the training sessions should make it a rule for it be mandatory for homeroom teachers who have no idea what to do when a foreign child suddenly enrolls in the school and is put in their care in the classroom. However, the organizers don't consider making such a rule as it seems difficult to apply. (Participant #41)

However, according to the discussions with both Board of Education officials and public school managers, in order to decrease the workload overload of teaching staff and frequency of teacher meetings, the number of workshops and faculty development sessions have been decreased substantially. This across-the-board decision to cut the number and frequency of training opportunities is making it difficult to enforce any type of mandatory training sessions for in-service teachers.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the overlapping themes expressed by language support teachers employed by the BoE and public schools who are providing learning support for ethnic minority children. While they are making efforts to provide language support by

using the resources made available to them by the Ministry of Education and the Board of Education, tight budgets, limited teaching resources, time restrictions and prohibitions are challenging their efforts. As for the lack of skills and expertise in understanding the learning needs of the EMC, as well as interaction and communication skills of the school teachers and students, it would seem that school leadership must make efforts to create opportunities for school community (namely in-service educators) to learn about intercultural awareness and understanding. Boards of Education need to encourage the schools' senior leadership team to be more aware of their responsibilities in reviewing, implementing and reforming policies for learning support, their staff, students and local communities can be better prepared and equipped for the future enrollment of ethnic minority students. It would be in each school's best interest to become more self-sufficient as a public educational institution in making active efforts to educate their staff and students but also in the teachers in diversity education, which the school can continue to share and pass down knowledge to future generations of teachers and students to come. It should be the schools' responsibility to invest not only in the learning support for EMC, but also to invest in their teachers in terms of professional development to equip them with the expertise and know how. School leadership needs to make a solid commitment towards equipping their teachers and support staff with the knowhow. It is only then that teachers

can fully support EMC not only in order to reach their linguistic goals at school, but to equip them with the skills that will help them excel above and beyond the classroom.

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