

Educational Support for Foreign Children in Areas with few Foreign Residents

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In Japan, the immigration law was revised in 2019 in an attempt to solve the problem of a declining population and serious labor shortage by reviewing and expanding the policy of accepting foreign residents. It is called the *Revised Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Law*. In connection with this, a new classification was created, known as *Specified Technical Skills*, to make it easier to accept a large pool of immigrant labor. The establishment of the specified technical skills category allowed for a wide range of work, including unskilled laborers. As a result, the number of foreign laborers has increased rapidly. A record 2,933,137 foreign residents were recorded in 2019.

Along with the increase, the number of foreign families that will accompany them and live permanently in Japan is expected to increase. As a result, the number of foreign students in elementary and junior high schools reached 93,133 in Japan, the highest number ever. Generally, areas with many foreign residents are well served by international schools for example, Tokyo, Nagoya, and Osaka. However, in areas with few foreign residents, such as Matsuyama City in Ehime Prefecture, where we live, there are usually no choices but to attend Japanese schools. Clearly then, there are regional disparities in the education of elementary school students in Matsuyama City, in an area with relatively few foreign residents. Many foreign children and parents living in Japan are facing a big problem in that they can not understand Japanese.

How can foreign children receive an appropriate education in the area with few foreign residents?

There are some effective methods to solve the problem. I will tell you three methods that I consider particularly important. First, the use of ICT is effective. If school documents are not paper-based but provided via email or websites, it would be easier to use AI translation, etc., and it would also be easier to use certain platforms, such as that provided by MEXT, which can be used freely as a template for multilingual school documents created by local governments nationwide. This has been made available to support parents in dealing with not being able to understand school letters. Second, making use of simple Japanese is also effective. Access to assistance for foreign residents is not easy for them, as there is little support information written in foreign languages. It is advisable to apply simple Japanese to school information, enrollment documents, and school letters, as they are complicated. Finally, coordination between government, schools, and agencies is also effective. Currently, there does not appear to be enough data because of protecting personal information, so policymakers do not know how to provide specific support. With official data, it would be easier for the government, schools, and related

organizations to share information and collaborate with foreign parents and their children.

It is expected that more and more foreign children will be coming to Japan in the future. It is important for each of us to be aware of the importance of accepting differences and creating an inclusive society.