

The Contradiction Between “Being and Seeming” Reinforces Low Academic Performance

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This research deals with educational provision for Brazilian students in Japan and the trend towards educational interaction among students. The cases of Japan are considered as the development of treatment for the Brazilian students is not different from the treatment given to the Japanese students, although there are obvious differences in the implementation and acceptance of integration among them. The current research presents an analysis of a survey of opinions about Brazilian students' behavior enrolled in public Japanese schools in Hamamatsu City, Japan. It was conducted through written questionnaires distributed to Japanese teachers of Brazilian students with both sexes, who are attending public Japanese elementary and junior high schools. The information collected offers data to outline an experimental project for a mental health support program which could help those students to improve their mental health, attitudes, and consequently, their educational skills. In addition, it provides the implementation of strategies to promote home-school cooperation, helping teachers and parents in the current education.

Keywords: Brazilian students, Brazilian children, Japanese language

Introduction

Hamamatsu, “浜松”, is an international cultural city located in the Western Shizuoka Prefecture. According to the 2008 census, the city's estimated population is 824,057. A total of 33,332 foreign residents from 80 different countries are living in Hamamatsu City.

Most of the foreign residents in Hamamatsu are from Brazil. They are Brazilians of Japanese descent who migrated to Japan as contractual workers for economic reasons. Many of them from different parts of Brazil, especially those with lower educational levels, are recruited by employment agencies in conjunction with some factories, which bring them to work in Japan.

This group of people is called “dekasegi”, represented by the original Japanese word “出稼ぎ”, which means “working away from home”.

Although they are Brazilians of Japanese descent, only a few of them are able to speak Japanese fluently. They usually speak Portuguese, are culturally Brazilians and are treated as foreigners.

Despite of the fact that the employment agencies bring only Japanese descendants, it does not mean that they are going to feel comfortable living in Japan, and a high rate among these workers moves back and forth between Japan and Brazil within years. Consequently, the children face difficulties concerning their academic lives, for instance, the constant moving from one country to another, frequent internal migrations and parents

often submitting school transfer request.

Frequently, parents do not know what they should do for their children’s education. They intend to return to Brazil after a short time working in Japan, but this rarely happens. Many families are still moving back and forth between Japan and Brazil for many years, and their children keep moving from one school to another, sometimes from a Japanese school to a Brazilian school.

Although the parents keep a positive perspective about of their children’s education, they do not know if they should enroll their children in a Japanese school or in a Brazilian school.

One of the most important questions that many parents who live in Japan encounter is whether they are going to enroll their children. If they choose to enroll their children in a Japanese school, then they have to admit that they are not going to be able to communicate with teachers and other staffs. On the other hand, if they enroll their children in a Brazilian school, they will assume that, probably, it will not be simple to find an appropriate school with qualified teachers. Also, the student will be faced with the challenge of being in a multi-level classroom.

In addition, parents already know that some children who returned to Brazil had to face serious difficulties concerning the process of adjustment to the Brazilian educational system and prejudice, because they are not able to speak Portuguese correctly, and so forth.

Educational System

According to the National Law of Education, school education is composed of childhood, primary, secondary and higher education in Brazil and in Japan.

The National Law of Education sets forth, in a more detail, the aims and principles of education in accordance with the spirit of the Constitution that established the specific national principles of education: equal opportunity, compulsory education, co-education, public education, social education, prohibition of partisan political education or sectarian religious education in the public schools and prohibition of improper control of education.

The Federal Government, through the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture, regulates the education system in both countries.

The structure of the educational system, in its principal elements, is summarized below in Figure 2.

It is the 6-3-3-4 system, which means six years in elementary school, three years in junior high school, three years in high school and four years in higher education.

Contrary to the Japanese educational system, the Brazilian educational system has free educational expenses and grades without examination. On the other hand, there is an entrance examination for attending higher education where the competitiveness in public universities is very high.

Nowadays, in Hamamatsu City, there are 117 public elementary schools and 52 public junior high schools within them, 61 public elementary schools with 646 Brazilian students enrolled and 38 public junior high schools with 286 Brazilian students enrolled. A total of 932 Brazilian students are enrolled in public elementary and junior high schools. Most of these schools hire part-time interpreters to assist the students. Their assistance has become very useful despite of the hired interpreters not belonging to the educational profession.

The Brazilian students attend classes in accordance with their ages and together with the Japanese students, although there are obvious differences in the implementation and acceptance of integration among them.

The Brazilian students have the same scholastic programs as well. Their Japanese language skill level is

not considered beforehand.

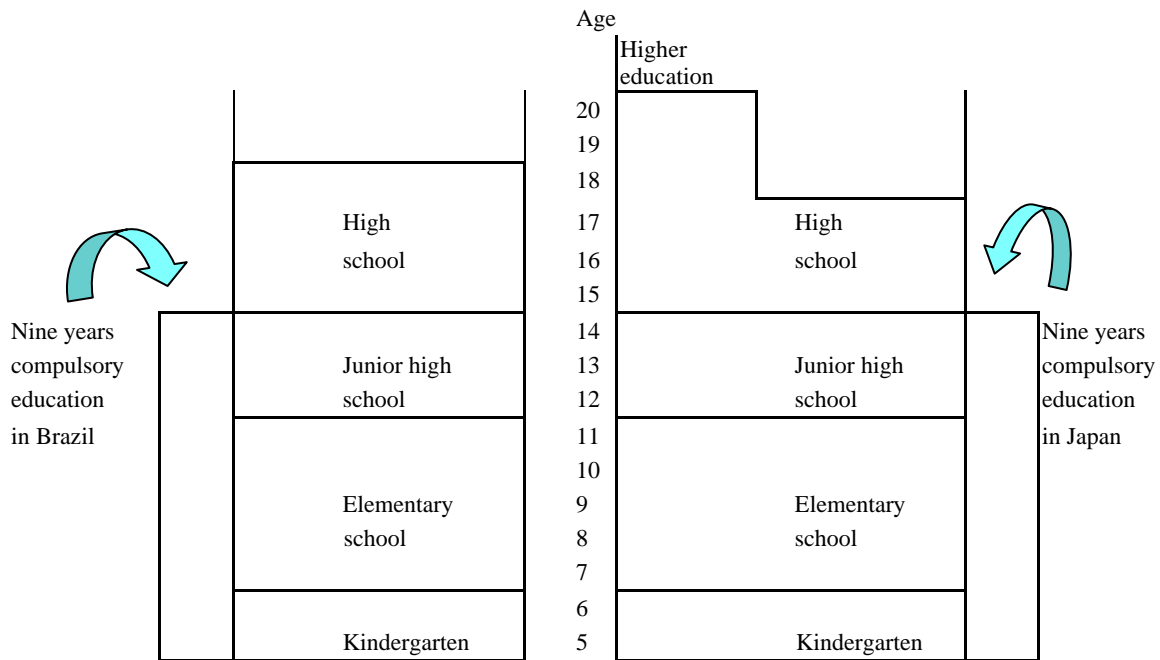


Figure 2. Educational system.

On the other hand, the schools make an effort to encourage the parents to help enrich the learning opportunities for their children. Schools provide reports to parents and inform them of their children’s progress, even though most of them cannot read the Japanese language. There are teachers-parents meetings each quadrimester, where parents are encouraged to do much of the talking, while the teacher listens to what the parents have to say on a variety of issues.

In addition, teachers can gain valuable information about a child’s home environment and family dynamics and set a positive tone in home-school communications.

The Purpose and Main Research Questions

The current research was performed under written official permission from the Board of Education in Hamamatsu City. This study presents an analysis of a survey of opinions about Brazilian students’ behavior enrolled in 99 public Japanese schools in Hamamatsu City, Japan. It was conducted through written questionnaires distributed to Japanese teachers of Brazilian students with both sexes, who are attending public Japanese elementary and junior high schools. These questionnaires were written in the Japanese language and were completely anonymous, and no names or other information were requested.

The samples were formed of Japanese teachers who had been teaching to Brazilian elementary and junior high school students enrolled in public Japanese schools located in Hamamatsu City in the scholastic year of 2010.

The information collected offers data to outline an experimental project for a psychological support program which could help those students to improve their attitudes and educational skills.

In addition, it provides the implementation of the strategies to promote home-school cooperation, assisting

teachers and parents in the current education.

Summary of Results

Firstly, the Board of Education sent a written official letter to the 99 public schools in Hamamatsu City in order to inform the schools' principals and ask for their collaboration in distributing the questionnaires and in data gathering.

After that, following the schools' list provided from the Board of Education, which contained the elementary and junior high schools students' numbers, copies of the questionnaire were sent to these schools.

In Hamamatsu, there are 61 public elementary schools with 646 Brazilian students enrolled and 38 public junior high schools with 286 Brazilian students enrolled. A total of 932 Brazilian students were enrolled in 99 public ordinary schools.

The next step involved collecting the answered questionnaires in person by using our volunteer group.

A total of 829 questionnaires (89%) were answered (575 questionnaires by elementary schools and 254 questionnaires by junior high schools). Within these questionnaires, a total of 97 schools (98%) participated (i.e., 37 elementary schools and 60 junior high schools).

Most teachers have been teaching to Brazilian students at school between one and three years, and do not have knowledge about the Portuguese language, although they considered that it was important to learn more about the Portuguese language and the Brazilian culture.

The first question concerning the students' behavior appointed that the teachers faced some difficulties (66% elementary schools and 70% junior high schools).

In these cases, the issues appointed among elementary school teachers were as follows: 72% Japanese language, 50% attention and concentration deficit, 28% aggression among students, 26% emotional disturbance, 22% hyperactivity, 18% apathy, 11% aggression toward teachers and 9% others.

Table 1

Other Topics Mentioned By Elementary and Junior High School Teachers Concerning the Students' Behavior

Content
Do not understand cultural differences
Learning disabilities
12 suspected cases of mental retardation
Self-mutilation
Burglary
Extreme parental disinterest
High rates of school absences
Moral and ethical absence values
Scholastic apathy
Selfishness
Obesity
Difficulty of giving pardon
Difficulty of making friends
Get off the school without permission
Difficulties of performing daily activities and daily practical activities

Among the junior high school teachers, the topics that have been appointed were: 70% Japanese language, 54% attention and concentration deficit, 30% aggression among students, 26% emotional disturbance, 24% hyperactivity, 20% apathy, 17% other reasons and 16% aggression towards teachers. Table 1 shows other topics mentioned by the teachers concerning the students' behavior.

With regard to the students’ academic performance, the results showed that the elementary and junior high school teachers, respectively, considered learning difficulties (71% and 66%), emotional reasons (21% and 24%) and also other reasons (8% and 10%, as presented in Table 2).

Table 2

Other Reasons Mentioned by the Teachers

Learning difficulties	Emotional reasons	Non-specific reasons
Low Japanese language skill level; do not understand cultural differences and Japanese habits; Students with little or no previous education; Misuse of school materials; Missing assignment and homework; Low math skills; Learning disabilities; 12 cases of suspicion of mental retardation.	Lack of future perspective; The constant moving from one country to another; Extreme parental disinterest; Self-mutilation; Clingy behavior.	Moving back and forth between Japanese and Brazilian school; Video gameaholic; Pretend do not be able to understand Japanese language; High rates of school absences; Disrupted marriages and repeated divorces; Lack of parents authority; Go to Brazil on vacation for long period; Wearing an extravagant style.

Both elementary and junior high school teachers agreed that the most difficult subject at school is the Japanese language. Consequently, the subjects that are related with reading skills (e.g., social studies and science) make comprehension difficult.

When the teachers were asked which items could be necessary in order to improve the students’ academic performance, they respectively agreed that the students should study together with Japanese students, and participate in all activities at school with the collaboration of an interpreter. In addition, the students’ parents, even those who could not speak Japanese, should be more participative. This includes learning more deeply about the Japanese culture, language and habits in order to transmit the knowledge and ethical values to their children, and also facilitating the communication between parents and teachers.

Regarding the possibility of the implementation of a psychological support program, 85% of the elementary school teachers and 90% of the junior high school teachers agreed it could be offered to the students and parents concurrently.

This program could provide three types of psychological therapies according to the needs respectively appointed by elementary and junior high school teachers: parenting counseling (78% and 73%), individual psychotherapy (16% and 19%) and psycho-pedagogical therapy (6% and 9%).

Discussion and Results

According to the obtained data, we can conclude that teachers and students have been facing difficulties at school.

However, 12 suspected cases of mental retardation among students without a psychological diagnosis were detected. In fact, their delays in the development of adaptive behaviors, such as self-help or self-care skills, have been interfered deeply with their scholastic routines.

Observing these results, we found not only suspected cases of mental retardation, but also significant rates of students with disturbance behavior, learning disabilities and hyperactivity, which need to be carefully addressed.

Much attention is required concerning the students’ low Japanese language skill levels as appointed by elementary and junior high school teachers, because we already know that the students’ low level of comprehension leads to low academic performance, in general, and thus, low self-motivation.

Although most of these schools have hired an interpreter, which appears very helpful, we have observed that their cooperation is only about translating the teachers' talk. Unfortunately, it does not include transmitting contents to them about the Japanese culture, values and ethics.

Following the obtained information from the teachers' answers, we could conclude that an implementation of a mental health support program conducted by psychiatrists, neurologists, as well as, clinical and educational psychologists is needed. These professionals could perform diagnostics for the students by observing them and taking their history with their parents in order to confirm their suspicion. If causalities are assumed to be known, the professionals could employ a range of techniques which are designed to improve the mental health and the behavior of the students and their families.

In cases wherein the diagnosis leads to classification of a student with special needs, the student is likely to benefit from the additional services, for instance, receiving different approaches to learning, attending special schools and being treated by different professionals, such as a psychiatrist, a neurologist or a speech therapist. In addition, parents' counseling will be necessary in such cases and Brazilian psychologists could do it in the parents' mother language. Probably, the parents will feel more comfortable and confident to talk and ask questions.

The students with disturbance behavior, learning disabilities and hyperactivity could join psychotherapy individually, or in groups after the psychological diagnosis is concluded.

Regarding the students' lack of future perspective, by using vocational guidance, the professionals could help the students identify their own talents, strengths and weaknesses, family expectations and requirements in order to sort out the personal relevance of the educational and vocational options available. In addition, they could also let them understand the work options that are available, the qualifications required, the means of gaining entry, the life of the worker and the rewards of the jobs by preparing them to become more employable by presenting the available education and training options as well as the requirements for admission and success and by selecting an appropriate field of study.

For the parents and interpreters, monthly meetings are necessary in order to explain the importance of parents' participation in the learning process, in the Japanese culture and in the Japanese educational system, as the results show us that both parents and interpreters do not have this information. In such cases, as an interpreter replacement, the NPO Kyoiku Shien Kyokai which hires a new member as an interpreter could train beforehand this candidate following the instructions offered to the current interpreters.

On the other hand, to the Japanese teachers, other workers at school and Japanese students' parents could be provided a general meeting once every quadrimester. During these meetings, the Brazilian culture and habits could be discussed, with the objective of building a new horizon of thinking among them and providing mutual acceptance. These meetings could be scheduled in accordance with the schools' agenda.

With regard to the students' low Japanese language skill level, it is possible to implement Japanese language resource rooms that will offer students the opportunity to study outside their own classroom. It intends to serve as a supplementary option for language study, not only to improve the students' language skills, but also to facilitate their communication and comprehension in the classrooms.

Conclusions

It is necessary to affirm from this point that during the students' permanence in Japan, a mental health support program is needed in order to prepare these students for their return to Brazil.

We have to keep in mind that the parents are often moving back and forth between Japan and Brazil with their

children. If the students did not have any kind of mental health support before they returned to Brazil, probably they will feel more of an outsider than ever, someone who is not understood and someone who is confused about the cultural differences.

Students in these situations usually feel isolated, have difficulty in maintaining commitments and may avoid solving-problems up-front, as a result exhibiting encapsulated marginality. In fact, they want to fit into their “new culture”, but they were not prepared to adjust to this new environment and be a part of the class, school and society.

This mental health support program could be initially implemented as a pilot project. Every step from this support program aims to: improve the teaching-learning process in the cognitive, emotional, social and motor aspects; facilitate personal interaction through the individual or group interventions; prepare the students for their return to Brazil; and also collaborate in complementary multidisciplinary projects at schools.

We have to consider that credible studies have indicated that a positive social adaptability is evident, when the students are well adjusted and are involved in their scholastic routines and prosperous future perspective.

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