

## **Strangers in a Strange Land: The Impact of Foreign Workers in Japan**

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### **Abstract**

Over the past 30 years, Japan has increased foreign labor to offset demographic and labor market changes within the country. Related issues of aging society and labor shortage have led to recent changes to foreign labor policies. In April 2019, Japanese laws changed to increase the number of foreign workers. However, Japanese society seems to have been slow to adapt and accept foreign workers and their families. This study seeks to answer the following questions: to what extent Japanese people accept or reject foreign workers in Japan and what are Japanese people's understanding of the education of foreign workers' children in Japan. We conducted a survey of 69 people ages 18 and up who received compulsory education in Japan. While there was a general acceptance of Foreign workers presence and impact on the economy and community, respondents recognized the government's role in helping integrate foreign workers and their children into society was lacking. The general awareness of foreign workers' children's issues was low due to low numbers of students.

### **Introduction**

Since 1990, the Japanese government has been trying to increase the number of foreign workers and replenish the labor shortage in order to deal with Japan's declining birthrate and aging society. The foreign labor policy has also been changed several times, but Japanese law has been greatly improved in April 2019 to increase the number of foreign workers. However, there are many problems in accepting national workers and their families, and there are still some unsolved issues. In addition, the problems of educating children and supporting teachers of foreign workers are becoming more prominent.

### **1. Significance of Study**

The reason for this research project comes from the fact that when we went abroad, we had the opportunity to make friends with foreign workers and their children. Nowadays, Japan has a labor shortage in an aging society. So we wanted to know more about their acceptance policies, the current state of education, and how Japanese people perceive foreign workers and their children.

## 2. Research Questions

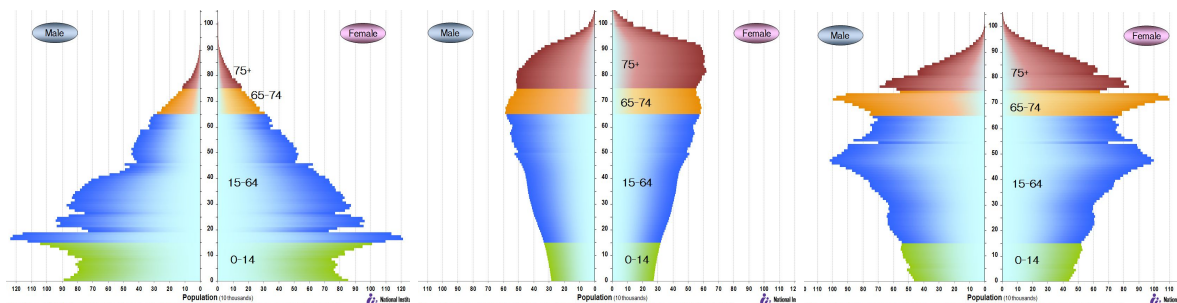
1. To what extent do Japanese people accept or reject foreign workers in Japan?
2. What are Japanese people's understanding of the education of foreign workers' children in Japan?

## 3. Research Background

### 3.1. Need for Foreign Workers in Japan

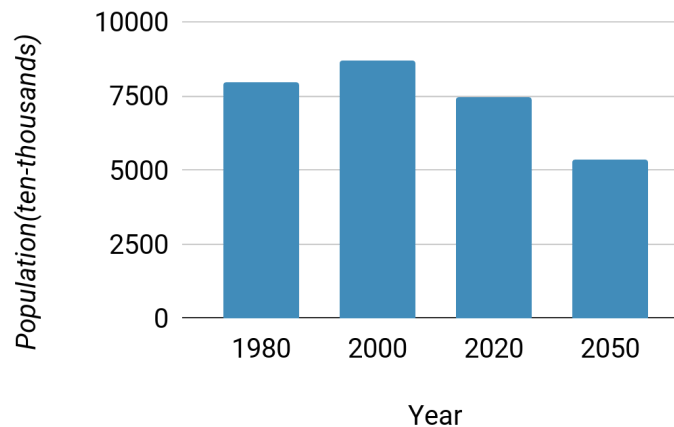
According to Figure 1, Japanese society has become an aging society. Currently, the number of people aged 40 and over is increasing, and we believe that the birth rate will continue to decline by 2065 (Kōsei Rōdōshō, 2018).

Figure 1



On the other hand, Table 1 shows the working-age population in Japan, estimated from 1980 to 2050. As shown in the table, it is estimated that by 2050, the labor force will have fallen by about 40%, and Japan will have a labor shortage. In other words, the number of young people working will decrease, and older people will continue to work after extending retirement (Kōsei Rōdōshō, 2018).

Table 1- Japanese Working Age Population (15-64)



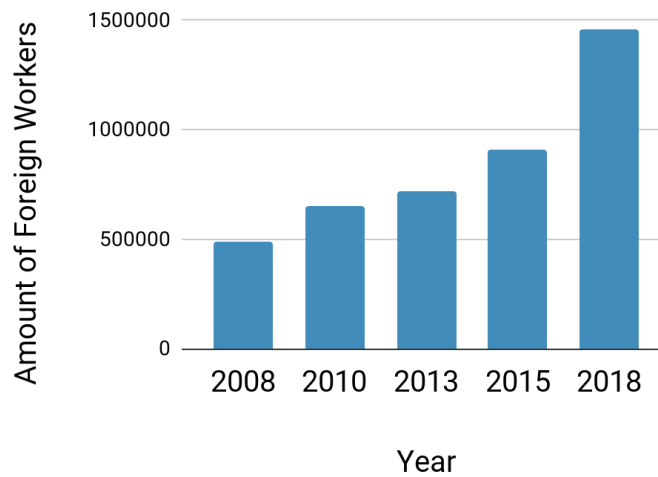
Therefore, in order to maintain the pension system, Japan currently seeks to increase the number of young people and women working as Abenomics raises wages and improves childcare facilities. It is also investing in technology and increasing the number of foreign workers to respond to this aging society (Abella, 2012; Ganellie & Miake, 2015; Koshal, 2008).

As a result of amending work visas in Japan to increase the number of foreign workers, many highly skilled workers are now able to work in Japan. As a result, foreign workers are expected to increase by 23.3% over the next five years (De, 2018; Weiner & Chapman, 2009; Nyuukokukanri, 2019 ).

### 3.2. Statistics of Foreign Workers

As shown in Table 2, the total national labor force population has increased by 200% from 2008 to 2018 (Kōsei Rōdōshō, 2018).

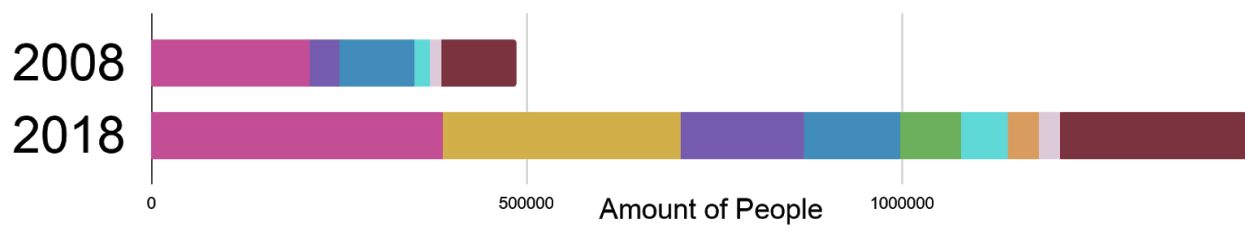
Table 2- Total Number of Foreign Workers



However, it is difficult for labor needs and reality to match. In other words, it is expected that the required number of immigrants will fall significantly below the required labor force (Koshal, 2008; Kōsei Rōdōshō, 2018).

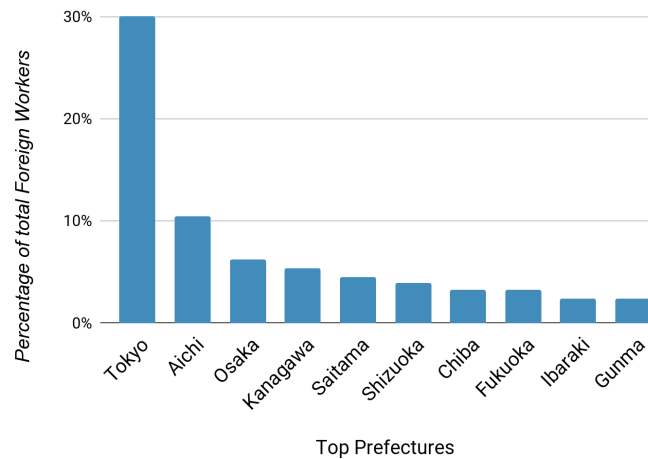
Comparing the country of origin of foreign workers who worked in Japan in 2008 with the 2018 statistics, the number of foreign workers increased by 300% (Table 3). By country, the number of Chinese, Filipinos, and Koreans is doubling, and the number of workers from Vietnam, Nepal, and Indonesia is increasing rapidly ( Kōsei Rōdōshō, 2018).

Table 3- Foreign Workers' Country of Origin



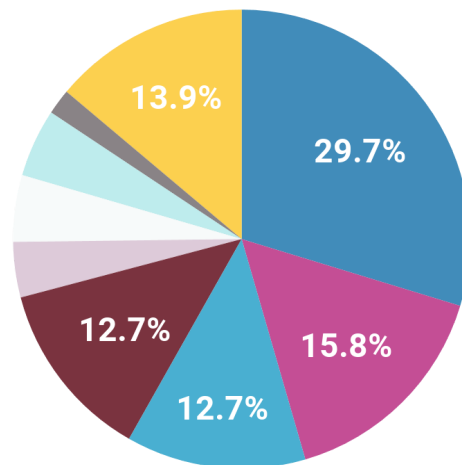
Looking at the prefectures with foreign workers (Table 4), 30% of foreign workers live in Tokyo, followed by Aichi prefecture with 10%. In other cases, 6% to 2% of foreign workers live and there are foreigners in all prefectures ( Kōsei Rōdōshō, 2018).

Table 4- Prefectures with Most Foreign Workers



Looking at the industries in which foreign workers are employed (Table 5), about 75% of foreign workers are employed in jobs that do not require much specialized knowledge, such as manufacturing, service industry, retail industry, and food service industry. There are not many foreign workers who are engaged in work requiring specialized knowledge such as education and medicine (Kōsei Rōdōshō, 2018).

Table 5- Industries Foreign Workers are Employed



### 3.3. Issues Faced by Foreign Workers

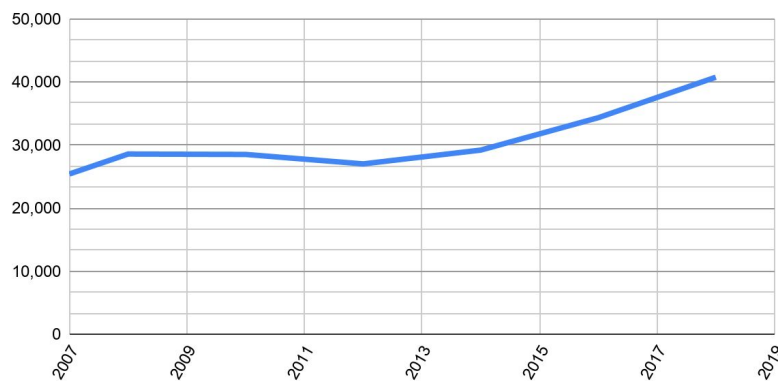
Foreign workers face various problems. This is because it is difficult to be accepted by the collective culture of Japan, the Japanese language is difficult, and language barriers easily occur. In addition, there are many problems facing foreign workers because Japan has a history

of not accepting foreigners historically (Douglass & Roberts, 2006; Graburn, Ertl & Tierny, 2008; Shipper, 2008; Green, 2017; Liu- Farrer, G., 2009).

### 3.4. Education of Foreign Workers' Children

Regarding the education of children of foreign workers, it is not mandatory for foreign children to attend school in Japan, and the exact number of children of foreign workers receiving compulsory education is unknown. As shown in Table 6, the declaration of the number of foreign children from schools raises the government's awareness of the need and support for the education of children of foreign workers (Kanno, 2008; 文部科学省, 2018).

Table 6- Schools' Self-Reported Foreign Children on the Rise



The curriculum of Japanese as a second language exists because of the limited support for teachers on the education of children of foreign workers, but the amount schools that are practicing it is small due to lack of budget. Furthermore, prefectural boards of education and schools rely on teachers for professional development, since there is not enough financial support to provide professional development or the number of professionals who can teach professional development. As a result, teachers suffer from limited support and resources.(Kanno, 2008; Motohashi, 2011)

In a 2008 study by Kanno, she conducted a survey at four schools that accepted the children of foreign workers as students. It was known that each school has a difference in funding source and children attending school. Looking at the example of the school, Sugino Public Elementary School has both workers and children permanently living in Japan, so there is a loss of the native language, but it is necessary to focus on living as a Japanese citizen.

However, in the case of Midori Public Elementary School, the idea for education between parents and teachers is how bilingual education is necessary for the children of short-term workers to maintain their native language and live in Japan. They have problems such as parent-teacher conflicts . (table 7)

Table 7

Name of School	Type	Populations served	Limitations	Successes
Zhonghua Chinese Ethnic School	Private, Non-Government funded	Chinese residents	Only caters to one demographic	Prepares bilingual & bicultural children
Hal International School	Private, Government funded	Western & Japanese middle-class	Parents' demands	Mirrors western education systems
Sugino Public Elementary School	Public, Government funded	Chinese and Southeast Asian families (blue-collar workers intending to stay in Japan)	Loss of native language	Vision of long-term contributing citizen
Midori Public Elementary School	Public, Government funded	South American children (migrant workers intend to return to home country)	Parent-Teacher ideological conflict	Teachers sensitive to children's' native languages, have bilingual assistant

In the case of private schools, only certain schools receive government funding, and the education response varies depending on the ethnicity of the child. In other words, the purpose of

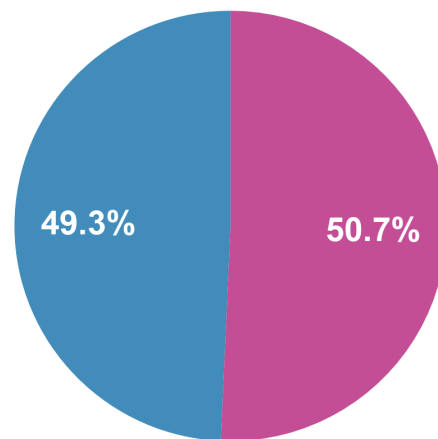
education is different depending on whether the school children stay for a long term or a short term (Kanno, 2008).

#### 4. Research Method

##### 4.1. Participants

In this study 69 people, who received compulsory education in Japan, participated. There were 35 respondents that were 18-30 years old and 34 that were 31+. (*figure 2*)

Figure 2- Age



##### 4.2. Survey Method

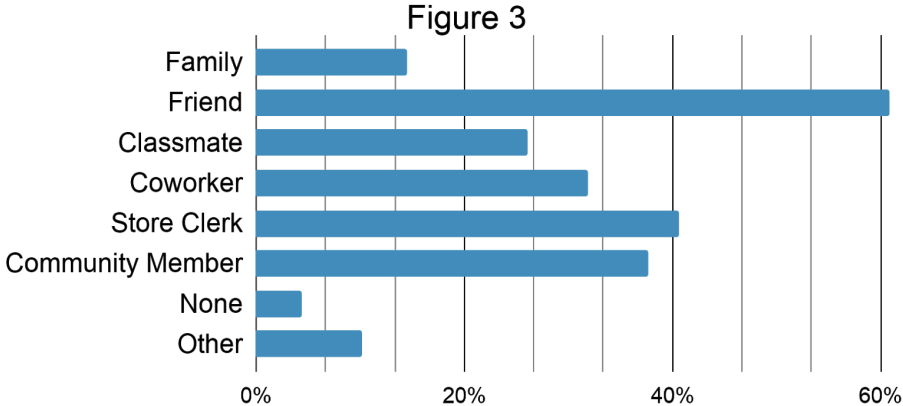
A survey was created in Japanese and the results were collected through Google Form.

#### 5. Survey Findings

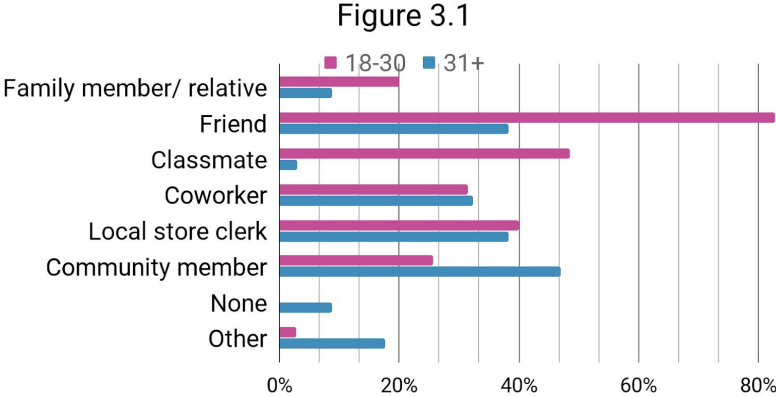
5.1. Research Question 1: To what extent do Japanese people accept or reject foreign workers in Japan?

To answer this research question, we asked several questions. First, in regards to the question “Who are the foreigners around you?” over 60% of respondents said they have friends who are foreigners. (*figure 3*)

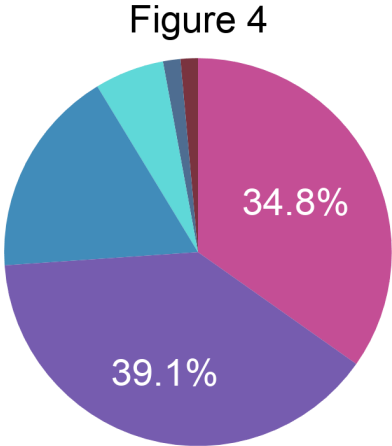




Looking at the previous question by age, 18-30 year olds tended to have closer relationships with foreigners, such as friends, family and classmates than 31+ respondents. (figure 3.1)

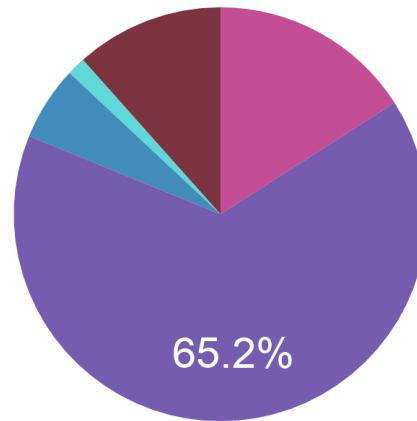


When we asked the question “How much do you think Japan currently needs foreign labor?” over 90% of respondents think that there is some need for foreign labor in Japan. (figure 4)



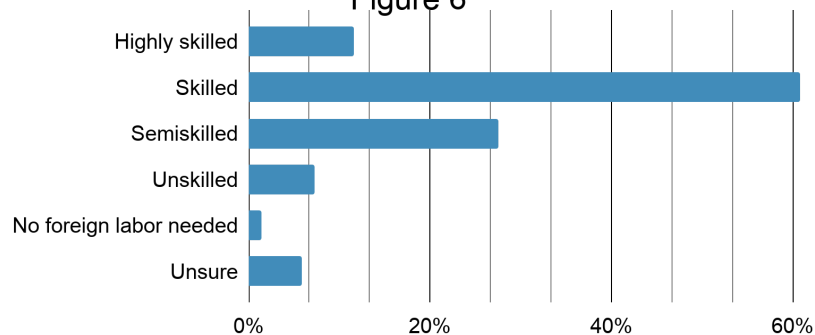
In regards to the question “How much do you believe foreign workers impact the current economy?” over 80% of respondents think that foreign workers have a positive impact on the current economy. (figures 5)

Figure 5

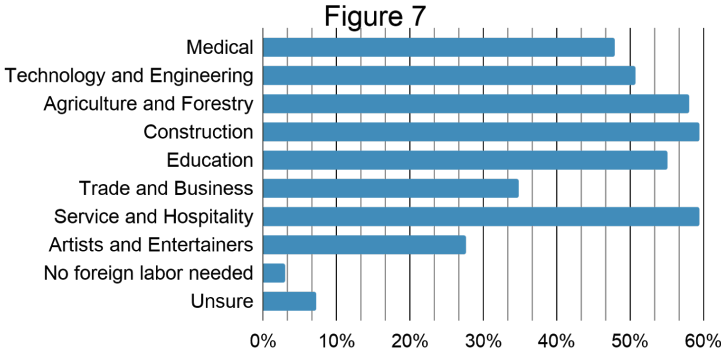


In regards to the question “In your opinion, what level of skill should foreign workers have in order to work in Japan?” respondents identified the need for foreign workers to have some level of skill in their fields, while only 7% identified unskilled labor as acceptable. (figure 6)

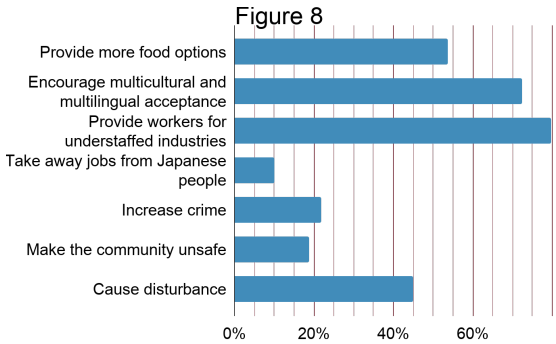
Figure 6



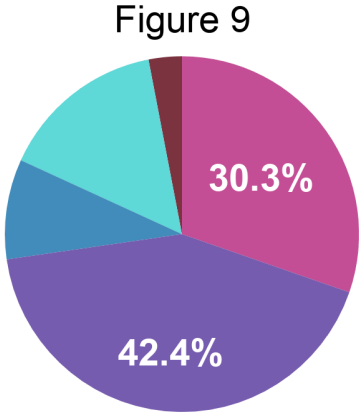
In regards to the question “In your opinion, what industries need foreign labor in Japan?” almost every respondent identified the need for foreign labor in at least one industry, with nearly 60% answered farming, construction, and service industries. (figure 7)



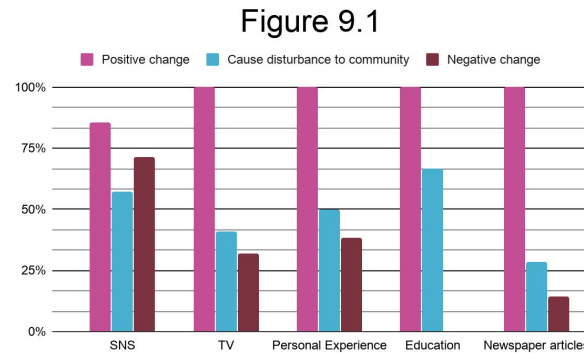
When we asked the question “In what ways do foreign workers change the community?” almost 80% of respondents chose at least one positive answer reflecting the changes that foreign workers create in the community. 42% are also concerned with disturbances to the community. (figure 8)



In regards to the question “What source of information MOST reflects your opinion on foreign workers?” over 40% of respondents said TV news reflects their opinion on foreigners, followed by personal experiences with foreigners at 30%. (figure 9)



When looking at changes to the community by source of opinions we can see that while positive changes were high among all, social media seems to have a high influence on negative changes. (figure 9.1)



## 5.2. Research Question 1 Summary of Findings

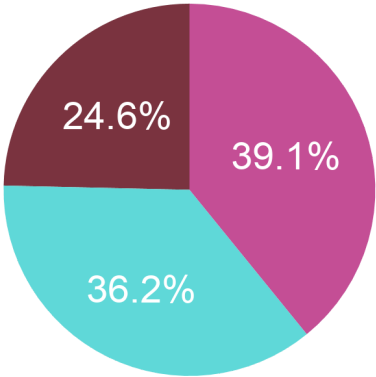
There was an overall positive response towards foreign workers in Japan. Not only do most respondents think that there is a need for foreign labor, almost all think that the foreigners have a positive impact on the economy and the community. Majority of respondents think that the foreign workers must have a certain level of skill to work in Japan and recognize in-demand industries. Respondents' opinions tended to be reflected most in TV news as well as their personal experience with foreigners, with whom a majority of the respondents have some sort of connection with.

## 5.3. Research Question 2: What are Japanese people's understanding of the education of foreign workers' children in Japan?

To answer this research question, we asked several questions. First, when we asked the question "What kind of area did you live in up until high school?" there is an almost even dispersion of where respondents lived during the time they attended compulsory education.

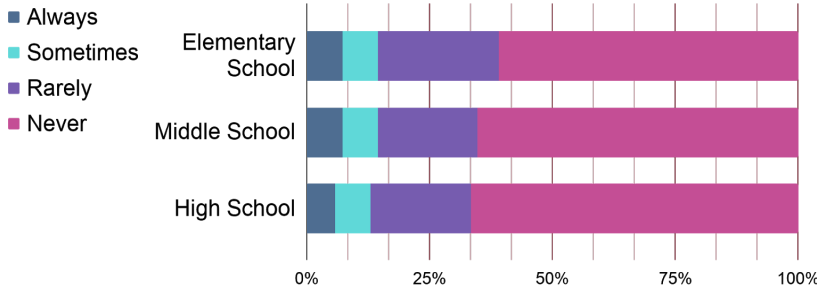
(figure 10)

Figure 10



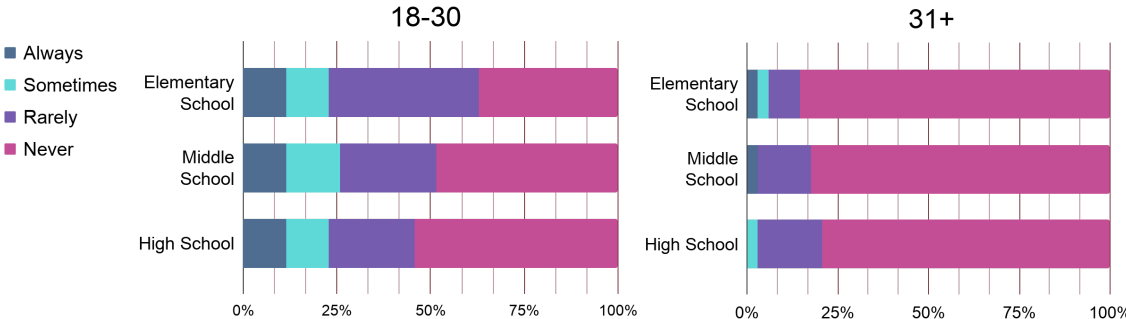
We asked “How often did you have children of foreign workers in your classes” and a majority of respondents said they never have children of foreign workers in their classes. (figure 11)

Figure 11



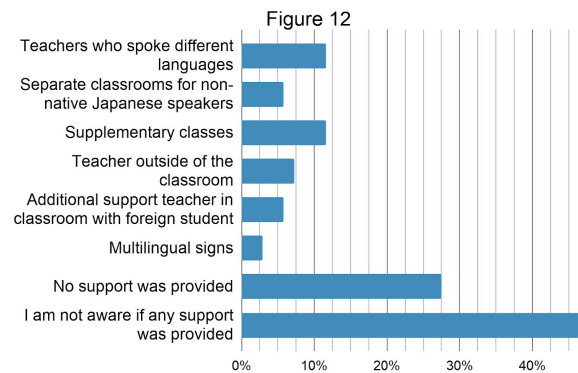
Looking at the previous question by age, 18-30 year old participants saw children of foreign workers more often in school. We can also see the amount of foreign children in classes decreased over time. (figure 11.1)

Figure11.1



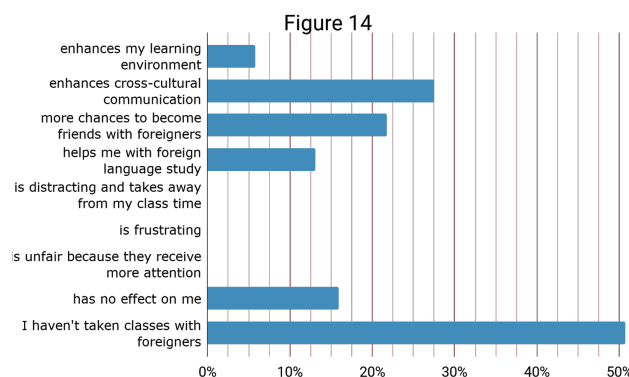
For the question “What kind of accommodations for children of foreign workers were available at your schools?” 75% of respondents said there were none or they were not aware if

there were any accommodations. However, all accommodations were seen but infrequent. (*figure 12*)

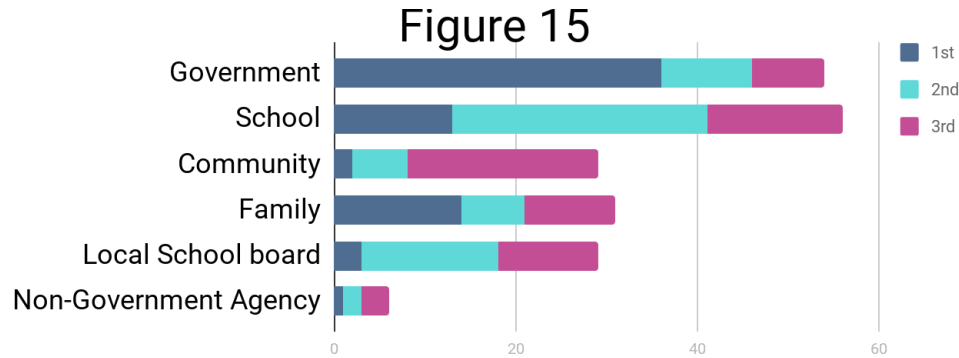


In regards to the question “How effective do you think those accommodations [referring to the previous question] are in helping foreign workers’ children?” no accommodations were provided in many respondents’ schools, so 70% chose not applicable. Of those who did see accommodations, half answered they were effective. (*figure 13*)

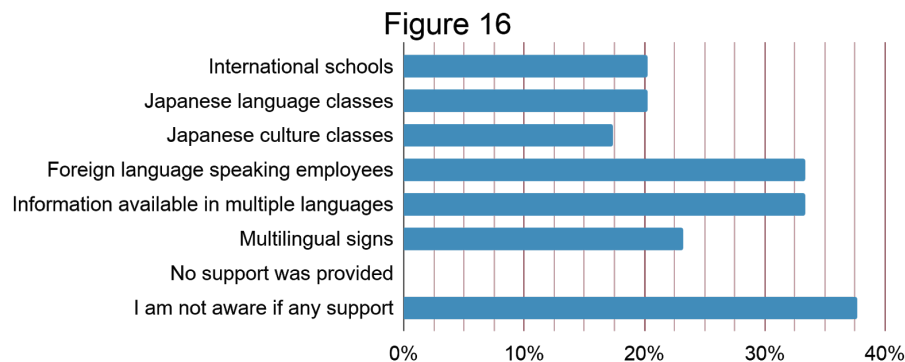
When asked to complete the sentence “Taking classes with foreigners...” most of the respondents who have taken classes with foreigners answered positively to how foreigners affect their learning environment. (*figure 14*)



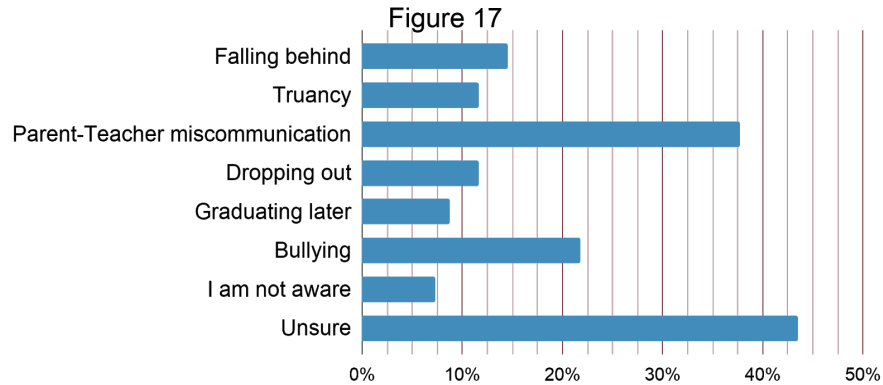
In regards to “Rank the top three institutions most responsible for the education of foreign workers' children,” more respondents ranked school as having high level of responsibility, however, government was picked as the #1 institution responsible. (figure 15)



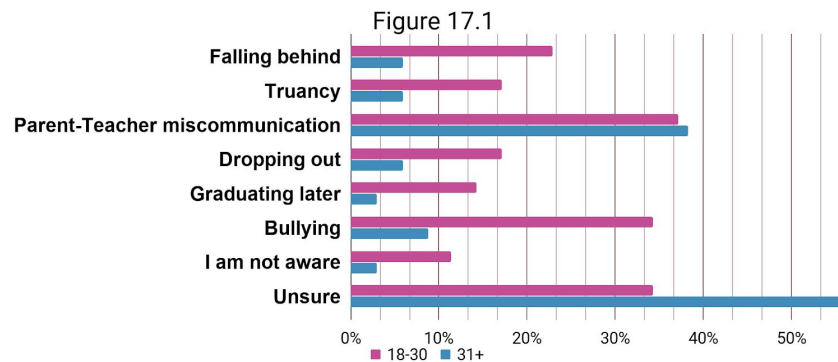
In regards to the question “What kind of support for foreign workers and their children was available in your community?” although nearly 40% of respondents were unaware of any support, 60% answered there was at least one type of support in their community. (figure 16)



In regards to the question “Please choose all the occurrences that apply to children of foreign workers at school.” over 50% of respondents answered that they are not aware or unsure of the issues. Of those who were aware of the issues, 70% were concerned with parent-teacher communication. (figure 17)



Looking at the previous question by age, 18-30 year olds showed more awareness of the issues than 31+ respondents. (figure 17.1)



#### 5.4. Research Question 2 Summary of Findings

Majority of respondents did not have the children in their class, however, those who did, tended to be younger and answered positively to ways the children affected their learning environment. The lack of foreign workers' children may have led to the lack of accommodations in the classroom that the respondents reported. However, of those who did see those accommodations, over half thought they were effective. Respondents did choose school as the institution that holds the second most responsibility in educating foreign workers and their children, however, in their community, which came in third, is where they saw more accommodations for them.

## 6. Conclusion

While there was a general acceptance of Foreign workers presence and impact on the economy and community, respondents recognized the government's role in helping integrate



foreign workers and their children into society was lacking. Social media seems to have a role in spreading the negative image of foreign workers in Japan. The influx of foreign workers' children in schools in recent years seems to have influenced younger respondents' acceptance foreign workers and awareness of the issues they face. Many respondents attributed the lack of support for foreigners to their low population in their comments.

## **7. Limitations of Study and Future Studies**

The limitation of study was that since the sample size of respondents was so small, the results do not represent all opinions. In the future we would like to further investigate the negative influence of social media on the foreigners' image, conduct a more in-depth interview of a wide range of respondents, and compare Japanese and American perception towards the education of foreign workers' children.

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