

最優秀賞

Education for Foreign Students

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Do you think that children can quickly learn the language of a country they just moved to? Based on my experience, I don't think so.

When I was five, my father's job brought my family to the US. At first, I couldn't understand or speak English. When I enrolled in a local school, the school board checked my English skills thoroughly. Based on the results, they chose the best school for me that provides the proper program. They also recommended me to join the ELL (English Language Learners) class there. At the ELL class, I studied English from a specialist of teaching foreign learners. Thanks to the ELL class, I mastered letters and phonics and I was able to join the standard class a year later without difficulties.

When I moved back to Japan in the fifth grade of elementary school, I faced another difficulty. I was a foreigner in my mother country, Japan. Having lived in the US for five years, my Japanese skills had not improved since I went abroad. Japanese was not my mother language at that time. I started to go to a regular school in Okayama, but I couldn't keep up with the class. I couldn't even understand what the teacher was saying. When I got home and started my Japanese homework, I couldn't read and understand the kanji and it took me hours to do the homework that would only take a few minutes to do for other students. My school didn't provide special support for students like me. My family was very supportive and helped me with my homework side by side. Thanks to the support, I was able to keep up with the class after a year.

Some people might think I mastered my second language easily. But I strongly deny this. I was able to learn two languages thanks to the ELL system and the big support from my family. If I didn't have either of them, I may not have had a mother language.

This is a real problem in Japan right now. The Japanese society is welcoming many foreign people and their families as immigrants. I wonder how these children learn Japanese in the normal class in Japan.

According to the Japanese Ministry, in 2014, there are 37,000 students that need Japanese guidance in public compulsory schools and high schools. The number is about 1.6 times higher than that in 2004. Eighteen percent of the students are not receiving any special support from their schools. I think these students need urgent support or a program at school to help them learn Japanese.

Recently, the government is starting a survey of the situation of foreign students, so I hope they will find solutions to this problem such as JSL (Japanese as a Second Language) which provides professional teachers. What we citizens need to do now is to stop believing the myth that children can learn the language easily.