



Multicultural Education in Building a Society of Coexistence in Japan: The Case of Okayama Prefecture

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ABSTRACT: This article examines how multicultural education has been institutionalized within Japan's policy of multicultural coexistence and identifies the achievements and implementation gaps revealed by the case of Okayama Prefecture. It considers whether current policy has moved beyond compensatory Japanese-language support toward an inclusive educational framework that treats linguistic and cultural diversity as a structural feature of schooling. The study uses qualitative document analysis and an illustrative case-study design. The source base comprises national legislation and policy guidance, official statistics, administrative plans and reports issued by Okayama Prefecture and its Board of Education, and relevant academic studies. Documents were analyzed across four dimensions: access to and continuity of education; integration of Japanese-language and subject learning; recognition of identity, home language, and intercultural relationships; and institutional capacity, coordination, resources, and evaluation. Japan's policy framework has gradually expanded from an adaptation-oriented model centered on Japanese-language acquisition to one that also addresses school enrollment, academic participation, career progression, home languages and cultures, teacher capacity, and multi-actor coordination. Okayama reflects this transition through prefectural education planning, community Japanese-language provision, and a coordination mechanism for community language education. Nevertheless, implementation remains constrained by an unclear relationship between community provision and school-based support, uneven local capacity and reliance on volunteers, and evaluation focused mainly on inputs and activities rather than participation, attainment, and educational trajectories. The next stage of multicultural education in Japan requires a whole-school and multi-level governance approach. Japanese-language support should be integrated with subject learning, transition and career guidance, family communication, and measures to ensure equitable provision across municipalities. Evaluation should also shift toward educational participation and longer-term outcomes.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past three decades, the growth and diversification of Japan's foreign-resident population have altered the social conditions in which schools operate. The revised Basic Policy for the Comprehensive and Effective Promotion of Japanese-Language Education reports that Japan had approximately 3.77 million foreign residents at the end of 2024, representing 3.04% of the total population, while the number of foreign workers reached 2.30 million in October of the same year. Approximately 69,000 students in educational institutions required Japanese-language instruction, including both foreign nationals and Japanese nationals living in multilingual environments (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology [MEXT], 2025a). Linguistic and

cultural diversity can therefore no longer be treated as an exceptional condition limited to a small number of metropolitan or industrial areas. It has become an enduring feature of the national education system.

In Japan, the term *tabunka kyosei*, translated here as multicultural coexistence, generally refers to people of different nationalities and ethnic backgrounds recognizing one another, developing relationships on an equal footing, and living together as members of a local community. In education, this approach extends beyond teaching Japanese to foreign children. It concerns access to schooling, the ability to learn academic subjects through the language of instruction, recognition of home languages and cultural backgrounds, school-family communication, prevention of discrimination, and opportunities to progress to upper-secondary and vocational education. When multicultural education is reduced to remedial Japanese-language instruction, responsibility for adaptation is placed almost entirely on learners, while curricula, school organization, and teacher capacity remain largely unchanged.

Previous research has identified several difficulties experienced by children with foreign roots in Japan: uncertain access to schooling, the gap between everyday conversational proficiency and academic language, unstable support systems, limited career guidance, and the risk that language-related difficulties may be misinterpreted as special educational needs (Fujikawa, 2023; Miyajima, 2014). In Okayama, Yamane (2013) demonstrated the need to integrate Japanese-language and subject-matter support and drew attention to uneven resources across localities. These issues warrant renewed examination because the national policy framework was revised in 2025 while Okayama has recently strengthened prefectural coordination of Japanese-language education. This article addresses two research questions. First, how has multicultural education been institutionalized within Japan's policy of multicultural coexistence? Second, what achievements and implementation gaps are revealed by the case of Okayama Prefecture? The article subsequently proposes directions for moving from a compensatory support model toward an inclusive school model in which linguistic and cultural diversity is recognized as a structural feature of education.

II. METHOD

2.1. Conceptual framework: From multicultural coexistence to multicultural education

Multicultural coexistence can be examined at three levels. At the normative level, it affirms equal dignity and participation among socially and culturally different groups. At the policy level, it includes institutional arrangements for communication, daily life, education, and civic participation. At the level of practice, coexistence is produced in concrete spaces such as schools, workplaces, and local communities. This distinction prevents an analysis from treating statements about respect for diversity as evidence of effective implementation.

For the purposes of this study, multicultural education is defined as the transformation of educational access, content, pedagogy, relationships, and governance so that differences in language, nationality, and cultural background do not produce exclusion. The analytical framework contains four dimensions: (1) access to and continuity of education; (2) language support integrated with subject learning; (3) recognition of identity, home language, and intercultural relationships; and (4) institutional capacity, including teachers, coordination, resources, and evaluation. This framework is broader than the provision of Japanese classes because students may communicate effectively in daily situations while still experiencing difficulty with textbooks, academic writing, examinations, and career decisions.

UNESCO (2006) distinguishes learning about other cultures in order to promote acceptance from intercultural education oriented toward interaction, dialogue, and equality. This distinction is relevant to Japan. International exchange activities and cultural presentations can increase awareness, but they do not by themselves remove institutional barriers faced by students with foreign roots.

2.2. Research design, sources, and analytical procedure

The study employs qualitative document analysis combined with an illustrative case-study design. Sources were selected when they met three criteria: identifiable publication by an authoritative institution; direct relevance to Japanese-language education, children with foreign roots, or multicultural coexistence; and continued policy relevance or explanatory value. National materials include the 2019 Act on Promotion of Japanese-Language Education, the revised 2025 Basic Policy, guidance on school enrollment and monitoring of foreign children, and surveys published by MEXT. Local materials include Okayama's Fourth Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education for fiscal years 2025-2028, the prefecture's FY2026 internationalization policy, foreign-resident statistics, documents of the Prefectural Council for Comprehensive Coordination of Community Japanese-Language Education, and lists of community Japanese classes. Academic studies were used for interpretation and comparison.

The analysis proceeded in four stages. First, the objectives and target groups of each document were identified. Second, provisions were coded according to the four analytical dimensions. Third, responsibilities assigned to national government, prefectural and municipal authorities, schools, employers, and civil-society organizations were compared. Finally, discrepancies between policy commitments and implementation mechanisms were examined. The study does not use survey, interview, or observational data. Its findings therefore concern the structure and logic of publicly available policy rather than learners' satisfaction or lived experience. be used.

III. RESULTS

3.1. Multicultural education in Japan's national policy

3.1.1. *Expansion from language assistance to educational opportunity*

Initial policy responses to foreign children developed largely around the need for Japanese-language assistance after the revised Immigration Control Act took effect in 1990. This approach identified an urgent need but tended to construct children primarily through a language-deficit lens. From the late 2010s, the scope of policy widened. The 2019 Act on Promotion of Japanese-Language Education clarified the responsibilities of the national and local governments and explicitly linked Japanese-language education to the realization of a vibrant society that respects cultural diversity (MEXT, 2019).

The 2025 revision of the Basic Policy represents a significant development. In addition to expanding opportunities to learn Japanese, it addresses school enrollment, reception systems, integrated Japanese and subject teaching, everyday-life and career guidance, digital technologies, teacher development, Japanese-language assistants, home-language support staff, and coordinators. It also recognizes the importance of children's home languages and cultures, parental understanding, and children's own views (MEXT, 2025a). Learners are thus increasingly framed not only as individuals who lack Japanese proficiency but also as rights-bearing participants with linguistic and cultural resources.

Securing access to schooling remains fundamental. Based on the 2023 national survey, the 2025 Basic Policy reported that approximately 8,600 foreign children might not be attending school or had an unconfirmed enrollment status. MEXT guidance requires local authorities to coordinate residence data, provide multilingual information, issue school-enrollment notices, and follow up on children whose status is unknown (MEXT, 2020). This represents a meaningful shift from expecting families to navigate the system independently toward a more proactive responsibility on the part of public authorities.

3.1.2. *Structural limitations*

Despite the broader policy framework, three structural problems remain. First, the educational rights and obligations of foreign children are not administered in exactly the same manner as those of Japanese nationals, making access partly dependent on the initiative and capacity of each municipality. Second, students who need support are both concentrated in some areas and widely dispersed in others. Areas with few students may struggle to maintain specialist teachers, interpreters, and home-language support staff, while high-concentration areas may face demand that exceeds available capacity. Third, Japanese-language assistance can become detached from the mainstream curriculum. Assessment based primarily on everyday communication may fail to identify difficulties in reading textbooks, producing academic writing, or preparing for transition examinations.

The policy objective of enabling Japanese and foreign children to learn and understand one another also requires translation into whole-school reform. Multicultural education cannot be confined to special support for foreign students or occasional cultural-exchange lessons. Subject teachers, homeroom teachers, school leaders, counselors, parents, and community partners must participate. Schools also need to examine assessment practices, family communication, discrimination, and educational and career guidance. The institution, rather than only the learner, must therefore become an object of change.

3.1.3. *Japanese language, academic participation, and educational progression*

The distinction between conversational Japanese and the language required for academic learning is central to the policy problem. A student may appear verbally fluent in playground interaction or routine classroom exchanges while remaining unable to follow extended explanations, interpret abstract vocabulary, read information-dense textbooks, or produce written arguments. Such students can become institutionally invisible because their needs are less immediately apparent than those of recent arrivals. A language-support system based only on initial survival communication may therefore withdraw assistance before the learner can participate fully in the curriculum. Multicultural education requires assessment that is longitudinal, connected to classroom tasks, and interpreted jointly by language specialists and subject teachers.

Japan's JSL curriculum was developed to connect initial Japanese-language learning with subject learning. Its underlying rationale is that students should not be required to complete language acquisition before gaining access to intellectually meaningful content. Language develops through participation in subject activity, while subject knowledge becomes accessible through deliberate linguistic scaffolding. This principle challenges a sequential model in which the student is first removed for language remediation and later expected to rejoin an unchanged mainstream class. Effective implementation requires subject teachers to make learning goals, key vocabulary, discourse patterns, and assessment criteria explicit, while allowing students to demonstrate understanding through multiple modes.

The special curriculum for Japanese-language instruction provides a formal mechanism for instruction outside the registered class during part of the school timetable. Its purpose is to enable students to conduct school life and engage in learning through Japanese (MEXT, 2025c). Formal recognition is valuable because it allows individual plans, scheduled teaching, and institutional accountability. At the same time, withdrawal instruction presents a recurring dilemma. It can provide focused support, but excessive separation may reduce access to subject content and peer relationships. Decisions about timing, frequency, and return to the mainstream class should therefore be based on educational purposes rather than administrative convenience.

Progression becomes especially consequential at the transition to upper-secondary school. Entrance examinations, information about school types, application procedures, and financial assistance demand advanced literacy and detailed parental understanding of the

system. National data continue to show substantial disparities. The 2023 survey reported that the upper-secondary dropout rate among students requiring Japanese instruction was 8.5%, compared with 1.1% for all upper-secondary students (MEXT, 2024). These figures should not be interpreted as an individual-language deficit. They indicate the cumulative effect of late arrival, interrupted schooling, restricted access to guidance, economic conditions, and institutional practices that assume Japanese-speaking parents familiar with the education system.

Career support is consequently part of multicultural education rather than an optional service added at the end of compulsory schooling. Guidance must begin before transition decisions become urgent and should include multilingual explanations for families, realistic information about academic and vocational routes, recognition of prior learning, and opportunities to meet adults with similar migration backgrounds. Without such support, apparently neutral choice procedures can reproduce inequality: students select from the options they can understand and imagine, not necessarily those that match their abilities or aspirations.

3.1.4. Multi-level governance and the distribution of responsibility

The governance of multicultural education in Japan combines national direction with extensive local discretion. The national government establishes legislation, curriculum arrangements, staffing standards, subsidies, assessment tools, and policy guidance. Prefectures oversee upper-secondary education, support municipal boards of education, organize professional development, and can coordinate resources across municipal boundaries. Municipalities manage compulsory schools and are often the first public authorities to identify families through residence registration. Schools conduct assessment, instruction, pastoral support, and communication with parents. International associations, universities, nonprofit organizations, and volunteers frequently supply interpretation, tutoring, cultural mediation, and community classes.

This distribution permits locally responsive action, but it also produces territorial inequality. A municipality with experienced coordinators and established partnerships may build a coherent pathway from enrollment to career guidance. A neighboring municipality with only one or two eligible students may lack specialist staff and depend on a classroom teacher's individual effort. From an equity perspective, low incidence does not mean low need. In dispersed regions, the cost per learner may be higher because support requires travel, remote provision, shared personnel, or coordination across authorities. Prefectural intervention is therefore essential for pooling expertise and preventing a child's postal address from determining the quality of support.

The role of civil society is similarly ambivalent. Volunteers can provide flexible, relational, and culturally responsive support. They may also create trusted spaces that differ from formal classrooms and help families navigate unfamiliar institutions. Yet voluntary activity cannot substitute for the state's obligation to secure educational access and quality. When essential services depend on unpaid labor, provision can fluctuate with recruitment, personal availability, and project funding. A sustainable model should preserve the strengths of community participation while defining which functions require qualified, remunerated personnel and public accountability.

Coordination is not merely the exchange of information. It requires agreed referral routes, definitions of need, decision-making authority, and feedback mechanisms. For example, a community teacher may notice that a child can converse but cannot read school notices; a homeroom teacher may identify repeated absence; and a consultation center may know that the family is facing housing or employment instability. Unless roles and confidentiality procedures are clear, each organization holds a fragment of the problem. A coordinated system must transform fragmented observations into appropriate support without creating excessive surveillance of foreign families.

3.2. Okayama as an illustrative case

3.2.1. Demographic context and educational demand

Okayama is useful for examining implementation outside Japan's largest metropolitan centers. At the end of 2025, the prefecture had 41,840 foreign residents, an increase of 2,954 from the previous year and the highest figure recorded to date. Vietnamese nationals formed the largest group, at 12,819 people or 30.6%, followed by Chinese nationals at 17.4% and Indonesians at 11.3%. By residence status, technical interns accounted for 24%; specified skilled workers and permanent residents each represented approximately 15%; international students accounted for 12%; and dependent family members for 6% (Okayama Prefecture, 2026a). This composition indicates that educational demand cannot be understood solely as a temporary consequence of labor migration. Family settlement generates long-term needs in children's education, school-parent communication, and transitions between educational stages.

The distribution of foreign residents across urban and low-density areas creates a dual challenge: developing specialist capacity while maintaining access where learners are few and geographically dispersed. Research in Okayama previously documented the need for Japanese-language and subject support across school levels and showed that models dependent on individual teachers or short-term university projects cannot easily guarantee continuity (Yamane, 2013).

3.2.2. Policy structure and support networks

Okayama's Fourth Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education covers fiscal years 2025-2028 and includes support for diverse educational needs among its principal policy directions (Okayama Prefectural Board of Education, 2025). Positioning diversity within the mainstream education plan is important because it can connect support for children with foreign roots to educational

quality, teacher development, and system-wide coordination rather than treating it solely as an international-affairs or welfare activity.

At community level, the prefecture publishes multilingual information on Japanese classes offered free of charge or at low cost, including a Vietnamese-language version. The list updated in March 2026 provides entry points for learners and illustrates the substantial role played by municipalities, international associations, and volunteers (Okayama Prefecture, 2026b). In May 2024, the prefecture also established the Council for Comprehensive Coordination of Community Japanese-Language Education. Its remit includes formulating and implementing policies suited to local conditions and developing a coordinated prefectural system (Okayama Prefecture, 2026c). This is an institutional move from isolated activities toward network governance.

The FY2026 internationalization policy continues to connect the reception of foreign residents with language and daily-life support (Okayama Prefecture, 2026d). Together with the foreign-resident consultation center, Easy Japanese information, and multilingual service maps, these measures create an initial access infrastructure. Most of these arrangements, however, belong to the domains of internationalization and community language education. Their connection to children's formal schooling - including academic-language assessment, subject support, parental communication, and career guidance - needs to be made more explicit through cross-sector procedures and shared indicators.

Table 1: National policy directions and publicly documented implementation in Okayama

No.	Dimension	National direction	Evidence in Okayama	Remaining gap
1	Educational access	Enrollment tracking, multilingual information, and data coordination	Multilingual information, consultation, and foreign-resident support	Limited public reporting on the educational trajectories of children with foreign roots
2	Language and subject learning	Integrated Japanese and subject teaching, individual plans, and ICT	Community Japanese-class network and prefectural coordination	Insufficiently defined connection between community classes and school-based support
3	Recognition of diversity	Respect for home languages, cultures, and children's views	Multilingual information, Easy Japanese, and exchange activities	Risk of prioritizing adaptation without embedding diversity in curriculum and school culture
4	Institutional capacity	Teachers, assistants, home-language staff, coordinators, and inter-agency cooperation	Prefectural education planning and a Japanese-language coordination council	Dependence on local resources and weak long-term outcome indicators

3.2.3. From a support network to inclusive school capacity

Okayama demonstrates three achievements. First, the prefecture has recognized Japanese-language education as an issue requiring system-level coordination rather than relying entirely on the initiative of individual organizations. Second, service information has been made available in multiple languages, including Vietnamese, which corresponds to the prefecture's largest foreign-national population. Third, diverse educational needs have entered the prefecture's overall education plan, creating an institutional basis for connecting multicultural coexistence with school policy.

Nevertheless, the existence of community Japanese classes should not be equated with a complete system of multicultural education. Community provision largely serves foreign residents in general, whereas school-age children require a different structure of expertise, scheduling, and accountability. They must learn Japanese, learn academic content through Japanese, and build social relationships at school at the same time. Support quality must therefore be assessed through progress in academic language, classroom participation, subject attainment, transition rates, career pathways, and sense of belonging, rather than only through the number of classes, sessions, or participants.

Resource sustainability is another concern. When support depends heavily on volunteers or short-term projects, localities may struggle to maintain services in dispersed areas, accumulate professional expertise, or ensure continuity when students move between schools and educational stages. A prefectural coordination model can address this problem only if it includes secure multi-year funding, clearly defined professional roles, and appropriate procedures for transferring support information while protecting personal data.

3.2.4. Policy coherence and implementation risks in Okayama

Okayama's current arrangements are best understood as an emerging support ecology rather than a single integrated system. The prefectural education plan, internationalization policy, consultation services, community classes, municipal education boards, and

school-level practices each address part of the issue. Their coexistence is an institutional asset because no single organization can meet the full range of linguistic, educational, welfare, and legal needs. The principal analytical question is whether families can move between these components through predictable pathways or must assemble support by themselves. Publicly available documents describe numerous services but provide less evidence about referral, follow-up, and the continuity of support across institutional boundaries.

The demographic prominence of Vietnamese residents illustrates why general multilingualism must be combined with responsive language priorities. Vietnamese information can lower immediate barriers for a large group in the prefecture. Nevertheless, an effective policy cannot assume that nationality determines a uniform language profile or educational need. Vietnamese residents include technical interns, specified skilled workers, students, permanent residents, spouses, and dependent children. Children may have arrived recently, may have been born in Japan, or may use different languages with different family members. Needs assessment should therefore begin with individual linguistic repertoires and educational histories rather than nationality alone.

A second risk concerns the relationship between adult-focused regional Japanese education and children's schooling. Community classes can benefit parents by improving access to school notices, consultations, health services, and local networks. This indirectly supports children. However, community instructors may not be prepared to teach curriculum-specific academic language, and class schedules may not fit school-age learners. Conversely, schools may lack knowledge about community resources that could support parents. The prefectural coordination council could bridge this divide by mapping functions, establishing referral protocols, and developing joint professional learning without collapsing distinct forms of provision into one program.

A third issue is the position of Okayama City. As a designated city, it possesses administrative responsibilities and resources that differ from those of smaller municipalities, while the prefecture must address the entire territory. A prefectural analysis should therefore avoid treating initiatives in the capital city as representative of all municipalities. The policy challenge is to establish a minimum support entitlement across the prefecture while allowing cities and towns to adapt delivery to local conditions. Shared online resources, itinerant specialists, regional hubs, and prefecture-wide professional development may be particularly relevant to municipalities with small numbers of students.

Finally, the rapid growth of the foreign population creates pressure for policy to remain anticipatory. The number of foreign residents in Okayama rose from 24,146 in 2016 to 41,840 in 2025, while Vietnamese residents became the largest national group (Okayama Prefecture, 2026a). School systems cannot wait until large numbers of children appear in a particular school before developing procedures. Enrollment guidance, initial assessment, interpretation arrangements, individual planning, and anti-discrimination protocols should be prepared in advance. Institutional readiness is especially important in schools with little prior experience, where the first newly arrived learner might otherwise become an improvised test case.

IV. DISCUSSION

4.1. An incomplete policy transition

The analysis identifies movement along two axes. The first is a shift from reacting after a student enters school toward proactively securing enrollment and monitoring educational continuity. The second is a shift from Japanese-language instruction as compensatory support toward a more comprehensive model involving subject learning, daily-life and career guidance, home language, and family coordination. However, discursive change has occurred more quickly than structural implementation. Responsibility remains divided among education, international affairs, welfare, residence administration, schools, employers, and civil-society organizations.

The concept of coexistence also contains an inherent tension. Japanese proficiency is a practical condition for learning, obtaining services, and participating in society. Yet if proficiency becomes a prerequisite for being recognized as a full member of the community, policy may reproduce an assimilationist logic. The appropriate response is not to reduce Japanese-language support, but to combine it with environmental accommodation: Easy Japanese, multilingual communication, recognition of home languages as educational resources, and preparation of all students to participate in a diverse society.

4.2. Policy implications

First, prefectures should develop a "one support record across multiple stages" mechanism. Language assessments, subject-learning needs, and support plans should be transferred securely from primary to lower-secondary and upper-secondary education. This would reduce repeated assessment and discontinuity when students change schools or municipalities.

Second, community Japanese-language education and language-plus-subject support in schools should be distinguished but systematically connected. A prefectural coordination body can establish referral standards, provide professional development, share materials, and offer remote assistance to localities with small numbers of learners.

Third, teacher development should move beyond general information about foreign cultures. It should cultivate concrete professional competence: distinguishing language-related difficulty from special educational needs; designing linguistically scaffolded subject teaching; conducting fair assessment; working with interpreters and parents; responding to prejudice; and providing educational and career guidance in multilingual contexts.

Fourth, evaluation systems should include outcome indicators. In addition to counting classes and participants, authorities should monitor enrollment, attendance, academic Japanese, subject attainment, transitions, dropout, access to guidance, and belonging. Data should be disaggregated by educational stage, locality, and type of support need while avoiding stigmatization and protecting individual identities.

Fifth, multicultural education should address all students. Migration, multilingualism, human rights, and intercultural communication should be incorporated into subject teaching and school activities instead of being confined to cultural festivals. Coexistence becomes reciprocal when students with foreign roots participate as co-constructors of knowledge rather than serving merely as representatives of a supposedly fixed national culture.

4.3. From equality of access to substantive educational inclusion

A distinction must be made between formal access, supported participation, and substantive educational inclusion. Formal access exists when a child can enroll. Supported participation requires the language, curricular, social, and material assistance necessary to attend and engage in lessons. Substantive inclusion exists when the student can develop capabilities, progress through the system, exercise meaningful choices, and be recognized as a legitimate member of the school community. Policy can succeed at the first level while failing at the second or third. Enrollment figures alone are consequently insufficient for evaluating multicultural education.

This distinction also changes how achievement gaps should be interpreted. Lower attainment among students with foreign roots may reflect language exposure, but it can also result from interrupted schooling, poverty, restricted curriculum access, teacher expectations, or assessment instruments that measure Japanese proficiency and subject understanding simultaneously. Treating every disparity as a language problem obscures institutional causes. Conversely, ignoring language demands in the name of equal treatment leaves learners to compete under conditions that are formally identical but substantively unequal. Equity requires differentiated support directed toward common educational rights.

Recognition is equally important. Home languages are often discussed as matters of identity or family attachment, but they are also cognitive, educational, and social resources. Maintaining literacy in a home language can support family communication, conceptual development, and future employment. Schools are not necessarily able to provide full bilingual education for every language, especially in dispersed contexts. They can nevertheless signal recognition by allowing multilingual resources, valuing prior knowledge, helping families maintain language learning, and avoiding messages that Japanese use requires the abandonment of other languages.

Belonging should be treated as an educational outcome because it affects attendance, participation, help-seeking, and aspiration. Students may receive Japanese instruction and still experience isolation, stereotyping, or pressure to conceal aspects of their background. Anti-bullying policies therefore need to recognize nationality, language, accent, name, religion, and migration status as possible grounds of exclusion. Peer education should move beyond generalized tolerance and equip students to respond to unequal treatment in everyday interaction. School leaders must also create channels through which students can report concerns without fear of being defined as problematic.

The term “children with foreign roots” is useful because nationality alone does not capture the target population. Some Japanese nationals require Japanese-language instruction, while some foreign nationals are fully proficient. Children from international marriages, returnee children, naturalized families, refugees, and long-settled ethnic minorities may have distinct experiences. At the same time, the term should not become an administrative label applied indefinitely. Support categories need periodic review, and students should not be compelled to display cultural difference or speak for an entire national group.

4.4. A practical framework for prefectural implementation

The findings suggest a practical cycle for prefectural implementation. The first stage is identification and access: residence-registration offices, education boards, and schools provide multilingual enrollment guidance and identify children whose educational status is uncertain. The second is multidimensional assessment: educators consider conversational and academic Japanese, prior schooling, subject knowledge, literacy in other languages, social participation, and family circumstances. The third is an individual support plan that identifies responsibilities, review dates, mainstream curriculum access, and communication arrangements with the family.

The fourth stage is coordinated delivery. Japanese-language specialists, subject teachers, homeroom teachers, support staff, and external organizations should work from shared educational goals. Coordination time must be recognized as work rather than treated as voluntary preparation. The fifth stage is transition planning. Information and support should follow the student when moving between schools, municipalities, or educational levels, subject to consent and data protection. The sixth stage is outcome review at both student and system levels. Review should ask not only whether support was delivered, but whether the student gained access to learning, relationships, qualifications, and realistic future choices.

For Okayama, the prefectural level is well positioned to define minimum procedures, develop shared assessment and planning templates, maintain a roster of interpreters and specialists, support remote consultation, and analyze regional inequalities. Municipalities and schools would retain responsibility for adapting practice to local learners. Universities could contribute

professional development and evaluation, while community organizations could provide relational support and family access. Such a model would clarify responsibilities without eliminating local initiative.

Implementation also requires a realistic view of teacher workload. Adding multicultural responsibilities without time, training, or specialist support may produce superficial compliance and professional frustration. Policy design should therefore specify which tasks belong to classroom teachers and which require coordinators, language specialists, counselors, or interpreters. Short, practice-based professional development linked to actual cases is likely to be more useful than one-time lectures on national cultures. School leadership is decisive because timetable allocation, information sharing, and collaboration depend on organizational decisions.

Outcome evaluation must remain proportionate and ethically responsible. Small numbers in some municipalities create a risk that detailed public data will identify individual students. Prefectural reporting can aggregate sensitive indicators while using confidential case review for service improvement. Quantitative indicators should be combined with structured feedback from students and families, but participation must be voluntary and separated from immigration control or eligibility decisions. The aim is to make the education system accountable, not to intensify monitoring of already vulnerable families.

4.5. Analytical contribution and wider relevance

The principal analytical contribution of this study is to separate language provision from multicultural education while explaining their necessary relationship. Japanese-language education is indispensable, but it becomes part of multicultural education only when it expands learners' access to knowledge, relationships, institutional participation, and future choices. A class may be linguistically effective yet institutionally marginal if it removes students from important subjects or isolates them from peers. Conversely, an inclusive classroom may remain inaccessible if teachers do not make its language demands visible. The four-dimensional framework used in this article connects these concerns by examining access, language and subject learning, recognition, and institutional capacity together.

The Okayama case also adds to discussion of "dispersed" or low-incidence contexts. National debate often concentrates on municipalities with long histories of large migrant communities. These locations generate important practices, but they do not represent every local setting. In prefectures where students are unevenly distributed, policy must work across distance and small numbers. The relevant question is not whether each school can employ a complete specialist team, but how a prefecture can guarantee timely access to expertise through shared appointments, regional hubs, digital consultation, and coordinated professional learning. This perspective treats scale and geography as questions of educational equity.

A further contribution concerns the relationship between multicultural coexistence and inclusion. The language of coexistence can encourage mutual recognition and local participation, yet it may remain politically comfortable because it does not necessarily ask how power, resources, or institutional norms are distributed. Schools can celebrate diversity while continuing to define the Japanese monolingual student as the unmarked norm. An inclusion-oriented interpretation therefore asks who must change, whose knowledge counts, which language practices are legitimate, and who bears the cost of communication. These questions move analysis from interpersonal harmony to institutional responsibility.

The findings have relevance beyond Okayama and Japan, although direct policy transfer should be avoided. Education systems experiencing new or rapidly changing migration frequently develop support through local projects before establishing national standards. This can encourage innovation but also produce uneven entitlement. The Japanese experience suggests that legislation, curriculum mechanisms, local coordination, and community participation must develop together. It also shows that demographic growth alone does not create institutional readiness. Systems need advance procedures for enrollment, assessment, family communication, curriculum access, safeguarding, and transition even when the number of learners at an individual school remains small.

For countries considering lessons from Japan, the most transferable principle is not a particular administrative program but the alignment of responsibilities. National authorities should define rights, standards, funding mechanisms, and data safeguards. Intermediate authorities should pool specialist resources and reduce territorial inequality. Schools should integrate language and subject learning and create conditions for belonging. Community organizations should complement public provision through trust, access, and social connection. Families and students should participate in decisions rather than being positioned only as recipients. When these responsibilities are aligned, multicultural education becomes part of educational quality rather than a peripheral response to migration.

V. CONCLUSION

This article has examined the institutionalization of multicultural education within Japan's multicultural coexistence policy and used Okayama as an illustrative case. Regarding the first research question, national policy has gradually expanded beyond supplementary Japanese-language teaching to encompass access to education, subject learning, career support, respect for home languages and cultures, teacher development, and cross-sector coordination. This represents movement from one-way adaptation toward inclusion, although the transition remains incomplete.

Regarding the second question, Okayama has established several important foundations: diverse educational needs appear in the

prefectural education plan; multilingual information and community Japanese-language classes are maintained; and a prefectural coordination mechanism has been created. The principal gaps concern the connection between community education and school-based support, the stability of professional resources, and long-term evaluation of educational outcomes for children with foreign roots.

The next stage of multicultural education in Japan therefore requires more than adding services for foreign residents. It requires strengthening the adaptive capacity of the education system itself through changes in curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, professional roles, and school-family-community relationships. Because the present study relies on public documents, it cannot determine how policy is experienced in individual schools. Future research may use interviews, observations, and educational data to test the relationship between policy design, implementation, and student outcomes.

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VII. DISCLOSURE

The author reports no conflicts of interest in this work.

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