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KEYNOTE SPEAKER

## CHILDREN'S DIGNITY IN MUSIC EDUCATION AND LOCAL COMMUNITY IN RECENT JAPAN

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### Issues and Discussion

In this short article, I will think about issues of music education in Japan from familiar issues. The issues seem to be domestic problems, but they are global matters, so they are not unrelated to Indonesia.

I emphasize we all now live in time of instability. There are occurring many military conflicts in various parts of the world and we don't know when the covid-pandemic will occur again.

But Japan, a small island nation in East Asia, is facing other domestic, but very serious problem. It is a rapid population decline. Many young people spend their lives unmarried, and even when they do marry, many wives have only one or two children. It is predicted that Japan's population will be two-thirds of its current size in 50 years.

The declining population is already causing various social problems. For example, many workplaces are experiencing a shortage of workers. To make up for this shortage, we

must accept many foreign workers especially from many Asian countries. In 2023, the number of foreign workers was two hundred five thousand, and by nationality, Vietnamese people account for a quarter of the total, followed by Chinese and Filipinos.

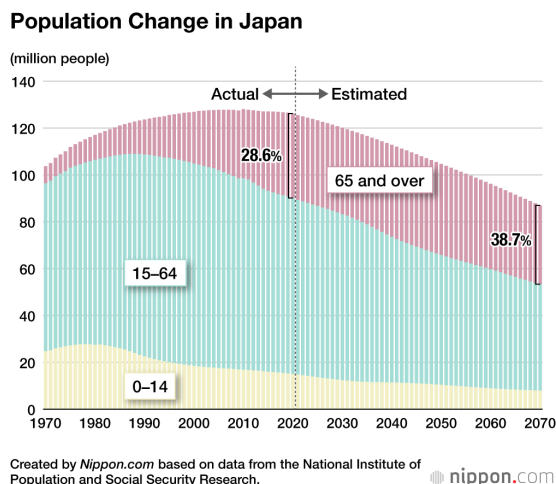


Figure 1. Japan’s Population Projected to Fall to 87 Million in 2070 | Nippon.com

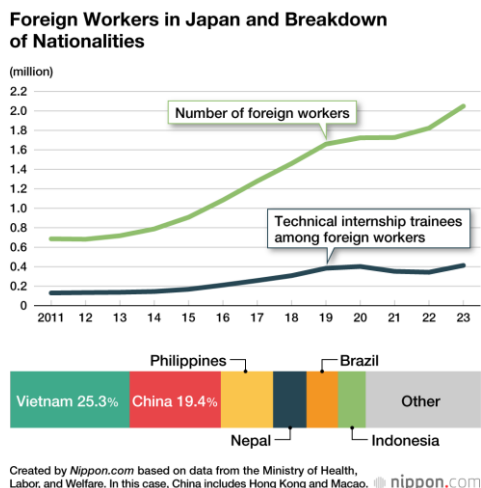


Figure 2. Record 2 Million Foreign Workers in Japan as of 2023 | Nippon.com

At first, they may come alone, but they may get married and start a new family in Japan. At first they may come with their family to Japan. In any case, as a result, many children will come to Japan and many children will be born in Japan. What will happen? Children who have never studied Japanese are suddenly enrolled in Japanese public schools. And Children born in Japan are raised in families where their parents cannot speak Japanese well.

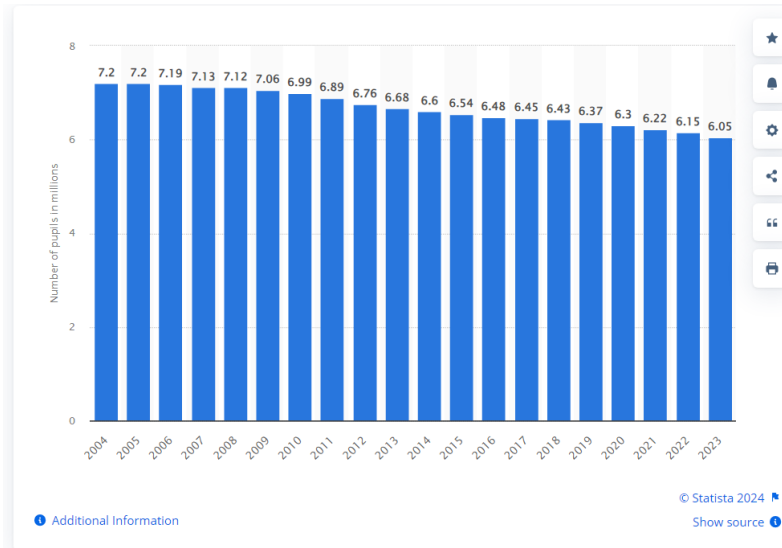


Figure 3. Japan: number of students in primary schools 2023 | Statista

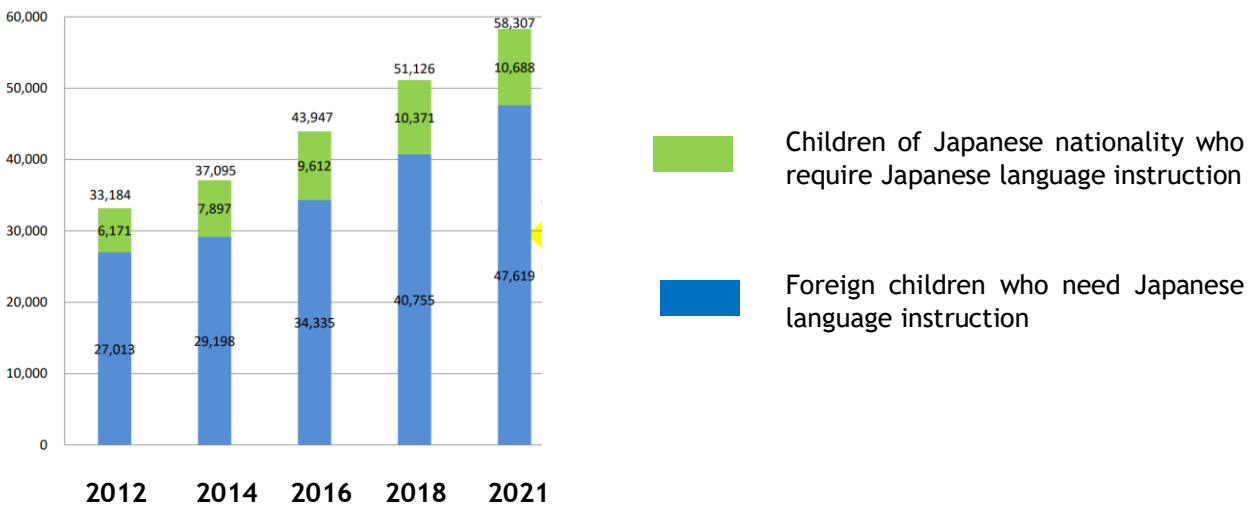


Figure 4. Changes in the number of students requiring Japanese language instruction (elementary school, junior high school, high school) from Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology [93855301\\_06.pdf](#)

Now, let's get to the point of my speech. Music is a human activity. It cannot escape the context of society. Therefore, musical activities are social acts. It has become necessary for people engaged in music to question whether their own musical activities are ethical activity or not against it? Even in the field of music education, music teachers should always ask such a question. Because Music has a great influence on the development of personal, psychological and social identity of children.

In particular, music teacher must consider the following questions. Is it ethical to teach foreign children to sing Japan's national anthem? And Is it necessary to consider the

language and culture of children's home countries and create opportunities for children to sing in their native languages in music classes? Children must deal with the dilemma between their native language and Japanese. In school they must to take Japanese classes and take communication with Japanese friend with Japanese language. But in their families they may speak native language with their parents. These difficult situations may be obstacle against their intellectual or psychological development of foreign children.

Obstructing the intellectual or psychological development of not only foreign children but also all children will be a violation of human rights and an insult to children's dignity. To seriously address this issue is the responsibility of not only the Japanese government promoting the acceptance of foreign workers, but also music teachers, who are responsible for the daily growth of foreign children in school. To solve these problems what can music teachers in public school do? This question is also political, therefore very difficult to answer easily because of Curriculum guidelines determined by the government.

But in the local community, positive trends are also emerging. Foreign children and Japanese children interact by musical activities by volunteer musicians. For example, in a workshop, foreign children learn to sing Japanese child songs, and Japanese children learn to sing Indonesian or Vietnamese child songs. Lastly, all children sing various song of different languages. Crowdfunding to support these activities is also now popular.

Now and in future, we must continue to aim for education that puts values on dignity of all children studying in Japan. To achieve this aim, what must we do from now on ? This is not only a problem for Japan, but also a problem for the countries of origin of the people working in Japan.



Two third-graders learn Japanese in the international class at Minami-Yoshida Elementary School in Yokohama on Oct. 19. (Yoshika Uematsu)

Figure 5. Foreign students have uneven access to Japanese classes | [The Asahi Shimbun: Breaking News, Japan News and Analysis](#)

## YOKOHAMA OFFERS 'INTERNATIONAL CLASS'



Stairs at Minami-Yoshida Elementary School in Yokohama show words in Japanese, Chinese and English on Oct. 19. (Yoshika Uematsu)

Figure 6. Foreign students have uneven access to Japanese classes | [The Asahi Shimbun: Breaking News, Japan News and Analysis](#)



Children playing the Japanese traditional instrument Koto at an international exchange program for children

Figure 7. Getting to know each other leads to a multicultural coexistence where foreign residents are not called 'foreigners' | [Sugoisuto](#)