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| Author(s) | 崎, アン ミチ |
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Osaka University

Abstract of Thesis

Name (崎 ミチ・アン Michi Ann Saki)

Title

Stakeholders' experiences and perceptions of the provision and practice of language support for ethnic minority school children in Japan
 「日本における外国にルーツをもつ子どもに対する学習支援の課題とは
 ~学習支援のステークホルダーの視線から~」

Abstract of Thesis

This study examines experiences and perceptions concerning the provision of Japanese language support for ethnic minority school children between the ages of 6 and 12 enrolled in public elementary schools in a city located the Kansai region of Japan (hereinafter referred to as "City M"). One-on-one interviews of 40 to 60 minutes in length were conducted with a total of 43 participants, consisting of ethnic minority families, representatives of municipal and prefectural international associations, boards of education, public elementary school principals, Japanese language support teachers, and learning support volunteers from governmental and non-governmental support organizations. Adopting a grounded theory approach, this study generates theories emerging from the collected data in order interpret the personal voices, observations, and perspectives of stakeholders: the local actors responsible for the education of ethnic minority children requiring Japanese language learning support in City M. The aim of the study is to understand and explain the reasons behind current trends and challenges regarding the accessibility, implementation, provision, and practice of language learning support for ethnic minority school children. The theories generated involve concepts of policy implementation, procedure, and practice, as well as resistance to educational change. The author hopes that the findings from this research will increase awareness of current issues faced by practitioners supporting ethnic minority children in their learning. The author also hopes to provide insight into what obstacles need to be overcome in order to provide adequate, sufficient, and sustainable educational support for children from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds within the mainstream Japanese education system.

論文審査の結果の要旨及び担当者

| 氏 名 (崎 ミチ・アン) | | | |
|--|-----|-----|------------|
| | (職) | 氏 | 名 |
| 論文審査担当者 | 主 査 | 教 授 | 山本 ベバリー・アン |
| | 副 査 | 教 授 | 志水 宏吉 |
| | 副 査 | 教 授 | 園山 大祐 |
| <p>論文審査の結果の要旨</p> <p>Title: Stakeholders' experiences and perceptions of the provision and practice of language support for ethnic minority school children in Japan</p> <p>Since at least the early 1990s, Japanese public schools have experienced a growing number of children for whom Japanese is a second language (JSL). The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has been developing curriculum materials to support Japanese second language learners since 2001 and many prefectural boards of education have created additional support structures. The aim of this study was to generate data to better understand the current situation of second language Japanese learners and to clarify the support mechanisms, formal and informal, that were in operation around these children. It is hoped that the results will provide important insights to improve current provision where short fallings have been identified.</p> <p>A qualitative, case study research design was adopted focusing on the support structures in one city in the Kansai region. The methodological approach was that of grounded theory. In order to be able to study the issue in depth, the language support of ethnic minority children needing JSL support at elementary school level were the chosen targets. The first part of the study sought to understand the formal policy structure at national and local levels that support JSL learners in the City. Next a literature review was conducted and a pilot study to identify the main stakeholder involved in JSL support at this level, both formal and informal. Chapters three and the first part of chapter five of the thesis outline the policy support structures at national and prefectural levels respectively, as well as identifying the key stakeholders in this support (see figures 2 and 4.</p> <p>Having identified multiple stakeholders, the main empirical part of the research collected data through semi structured interviews from these key support actors. Interviews were conducted with 4 administrators and officials from the City Board of Education and International Cooperation Organizations, 9 JSL school principals, teachers and volunteer interpreters working in elementary schools, 11 volunteer Japanese teachers working in grass roots organizations, 17 parents of children needing JSL support. Finally, two ethnic minority children were also interviewed making a total of 43 stakeholder interviews.</p> | | | |

A thematic analysis of the results of these interviews are presented in chapter 5 through to 7. These make the backbone of the thesis and offer a clear picture of what support structures exist an insightful picture of the perceived problems with local provision of JSL support at elementary school level.

In particular, the research identified four key themes that ran through the narratives of stakeholders: deficiency, disconnect, lack of sustainability and disparity. Overall, it was found that despite greater attention being paid to JSL support for ethnic minority children and great strides in formulation of policy, at the classroom level there were many issues outstanding. Many spoke of insufficient budgets and know how, an overburdening of grassroots volunteers who clearly work very hard, but with little recognition of their important service, and a lack of communication between the school and parents. There was a large disparity between provision in different schools in the city, a lack of connection between the different levels of support and frequently a disconnect with the families. From this it was concluded that the system lacked key features to make it sustainable. Chapter nine offers an overview and interpretation of the results.

While it was felt that there were some weaknesses in the way that the findings chapters were brought together and interpreted in Chapter Nine, the three examiners concurred that overall this thesis makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the ecosystem surrounding JSL support of young ethnic minority children. Clearly, further research would be needed to judge the generalizability of these results, but the Committee felt that the research design is sufficient to be applied and expanded to look at the situation in other prefectures and at upper levels of schooling.